

**Opening of the Second World Conference of Screenwriters  
(9 & 10 November 2012, Barcelone)**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS by CHRISTINA KALLAS  
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“Storytelling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”

Welcome - on behalf of the Federation of Screenwriters in Europe.

My name is Christina Kallas, and I’m a writer, a Greek who spends at the moment more time in my beloved New York than in my beloved Berlin. I write screenplays in English, in German and in Greek, I pay taxes in three countries and my son has three passports, soon a fourth one. So – I’m a world citizen and a world writer.

Perhaps that’s why, as a member of many years of the board of the German guild, and then as the FSE president since 2006, my vision and my activity have always been about getting our community out of the habit of thinking nationally. We have now organised three of these conferences – the European Conference of Screenwriters in 2006, which produced the Manifesto of the European Screenwriters, the First World Conference of Screenwriters in Athens in 2009, and now the Second World Conference - and all have been inspired by that vision.

A lot of work is involved each time we meet at that level, so may I thank our member FAGA, and especially fellow board member Marta Raventos and Juanjo Moscardo Rius, and IAWG for hosting this event together with the FSE, thank my colleagues on the steering committee, Susan Miller, Lance Weiler and Robert Taylor, thank Sarah Dearing, Amelie Clement and David Kavanagh for working with me and the steering committee, and of course my colleagues on the board of the FSE, Sven Baldvinnson, Stanislav Semerdjiev, and Robert Taylor, who have always been amazing shareholders of our common vision: to see the writers of the world unite.

Our first World Conference of Screenwriters took place in Athens just before the Greek economy collapsed - so I apologise to our Spanish colleagues (pause for laughter) in advance and I assure you it was not our doing.

We discovered in Athens, and in the developing working relationships between all of us since then, that, isolated though writers often are, and despite many practical and cultural differences, we have an extraordinary amount in common. That was empowering. I am confident that in this conference we will discover something even more empowering. We will realise we are not isolated any more, not from each other and most importantly not from our audiences, that the writing and creative processes are opening up and there are less and less rules, that the exceptions are in fact more than the rules, and that we are all slowly but surely becoming world writers. But, yes, we will also find that the legal and economic framework remains the same, it separates us and does not correspond to the new partly-existing, partly-emerging reality.

We are storytellers. And storytelling is not just carried by technology but shaped by it. There is no doubt that we are in the middle of dramatic and radical change regarding almost every aspect of our lives in general, and of our lives as writers.

The digitising of content – turning everything into an extraordinary binary flood – and the internet – making the binary flood available to everyone, everywhere, whenever they want – is not just a new model of distribution. It changes everything. Not just how we write but what we write.

The fundamental structures and archetypes of "story" have been evolving for some time now. We seem to be in the middle of a shift in storytelling, a change of the storytelling paradigm. We do not yet know where we are heading but we are starting to see the big picture. Nonlinear and multi-protagonist stories were only the beginning of narrative experimentation – and if we think of just one of their characteristics, their potential to overcome the hierarchical organization reflected in our classical storytelling's favoring of one character and his point of view over the rest... well, we may start seeing that this is not just about storytelling.

The "tools" of storytelling are changing too: for one thing more and more platforms are added to the equation, which allow for a new form of fractured and multi-perspectival narrative, while story becomes less of a text and more of an experience. This means that the story could be everywhere, across different screens and utilizing different technologies, and has the potential of creating a far more immersive experience. The sharing of stories and characters in transmedia or interactive storytelling, the first-person involvement of online gaming, is blurring the line even more, not just between story and play, but also between storyteller and audience, illusion and reality, fact and fiction.

What's more, no longer do audiences have to wait for movie studios or television networks to provide content. The do-it-yourself movement & ethos – once the special attributes of punk rock – is spreading to creativity in almost every field. Digital cinema and desktop moviemaking is perhaps a "correction" to the overblown, overbudgeted movies of the 1980s and the 1990s, perhaps more than that, as it also differs from the indie film

movement in its unruliness and its anti-art ethos and focuses on humanism, a personal connection, randomness and spontaneity.

What do we do with all this? It is easy to be fearful or condescending.

Stephen Johnson, in one of his most daring challenges to the way we think, invites us to imagine an alternate world identical to ours - save one small techno-historical change: video games were invented and popularized before books. In this parallel universe, kids have been playing games for centuries-and then these pagebound texts come along and suddenly they're all the rage. What would people have to say about this frenzy of reading? He goes on to name a few of the things they would possibly say:

1. Reading books chronically understimulates the senses. While gameplaying engages the child in a vivid, three-dimensional world filled with moving images and musical soundscapes, navigated and controlled with complex muscular movements, with books only a small portion of the brain, the one devoted to processing written language, is activated.
2. Books are tragically isolating. Games engage the young in complex social relationships with their peers, building and exploring worlds together, while books force the child to a quiet space, shut off from interaction with other children.
3. Books are downright discriminatory. The 10 million Americans who suffer from dyslexia-a condition that didn't even exist as a condition until printed text came along, stigmatizes its sufferers.
4. But perhaps the most dangerous property of these books is the fact that they follow a fixed linear path, they would say. You can't control their narratives in any fashion-you simply sit back and have the story dictated to you. If you have been raised on interactive narratives, you would wonder why would anyone want to embark on an adventure utterly choreographed by another person? This risks instilling a general passivity in our children, making them feel as though they're powerless to change their circumstances. Reading is not an active, participatory process; it's a submissive one.

A fun question which shows how futile any damnation of a new form is and would be. We are writers and we know that we can always make up a story which produces a different reality. Life is storytelling.

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We are creators. Creators are not afraid of change. We create change. We see the stories in the gaps of the human experience, in the human crises and triumphs of living in a changing world, in the many layers between our stories and our truth. But change has consequences and we are here to look at them, unafraid and determined to find a way to face them. One of our main questions in the next couple of days will be to ask "how can we continue to create for a living?"

Not a very long time ago, I was directed by a scholar friend towards a site which was called library.nu. It was a site where one could find an amazing amount of books, well known as well as never-heard-of books, uploaded and shared by anyone who could upload and share. I was under time pressure for a lecture so I broke my vow of chastity as a creator and downloaded a few pdfs. I looked for my own books and I could find one of them there and I was happy and angry at the same time. I remember how my anger subsided a month later, when one of my fans got in touch with me after downloading one of my books there and buying all the rest. On that one, I lost 2 dollars and earned ten – because that is what I get from each book after my publisher and my agent take their bit from the discounted price on Amazon.

A few months ago I was in a similar situation so I went online again, to break my vow for a second time. The site had been closed down. I googled it and discovered that the people who ran it had earned 1.8 million dollars out of advertising and a second level service for those who decided to subscribe to it.

I had mixed feelings, to say the least. As a writer I want the widest distribution possible. But I also have a strong dislike for the idea of someone else making money on the back of my work. Mind you, I already belong to the generation of creators who is not making money out of the widest distribution of her work anyway – I believe I have fifty buy-out contracts in my files, I have never signed anything else as a screenwriter or TV writer.

A mark of the new situation is the extent to which we have been forced to rely on personal experiences rather than reliable statistics. We all know the new band, signed by the record company, and then dropped when they only sell five thousand CDs, while sixty thousand are downloaded illegally; the film available illegally online before it has been released to the cinemas.

But of course we can't make policy based only on personal experience.

On the other hand what statistics are we to rely on? Google's and the ISPs, with their self-serving determination that the world's cultures, that our stories, are and will always be undifferentiated "content" as a carrier for advertising?

And by the way let's be clear that when some people speak of radical change as a result of the digital revolution and the internet what they mean is radical new opportunities to use our work to sell things. Did we really engage in reducing product integration, did we do all we could to avoid turning into copywriters, only to fall prey to what is today called branding but means more or less the same thing?

So what is the answer? I do not know. That is why we are here. To find out.

These are difficult times. These are exciting times. We are forced to change and that is what makes them so exciting. And, as always, the most difficult thing is to find out what we want. We want to survive, yes, to thrive, even. But we also want our creative freedom. We want to be able to create. To communicate with the world. To change the world. We want to

make the world a better place. Let us never forget that, that the reason why we became writers in the first place is because we want to make the world a better place.

I believe that the best stories we are telling, are those we write when we do not know the answers. And when we are brave enough to face all the questions, to get out of our comfort zone. So let us get out of our comfort zones together, let us see the big picture, let us go into every dark corner, and let us pose all the questions we can think of.

Perhaps we will not find all the answers right away. But if we find the right state of mind, I am confident that the answers will come. Let us all get into that state of mind which connects us all, which does not let us forget for one minute why we became writers in the first place, what this is all about. And let us then try to find out how we can keep doing what we do. From that point of view - nothing less.

Thank you.