



Carolin Otto's SPEECH
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This is all Bob's fault. And it happened in Paris, Bob said: Carolin, we want to go to Berlin. Can't you organize this? So I checked with Jan, and Jan checked with his board. And so a lot of people got involved in order to make this Worldconference of Screenwriters 04 happen in Berlin.

Honestly – If I had known what this would mean to my writer's life – I don't know if I had taken on this challenge. But now, seeing you all here and having experienced a lot of support working with great people, I know it was worth it and I'd like to welcome you here again in the name of FSE, IAWG and VDD. Let's make our conference a success!

By choosing the topics POWER and FREEDOM for this conference, the subjects are defined. This is going to be political. Writers shouldn't be surprised. Are you?
No.

POWER – in the eyes of writers – means first of all to have continuing influence on your script and the film it will become. In the beginning was the word.

The script is a construction plan, a dream and a financing tool. Words precede images and have to project the future film into the heads of producers, actors, directors and all others involved into the production process.

Which means there are as many visions of the film as readers of the script.

You can see where the problem will arise...

Whose vision is the binding one?

Film always is a collaborative work. But it should never be forgotten that the original vision is the writer's vision. His or her influence has to be assured - for the quality of the final product – the film.

But not only do we want the power to secure our vision, but we want to get paid for our work and the use of our rights. We want to make a living. The word showbusiness includes business.

To get this we have to ban together. We have to build guilds.

Copyright Law and Collective Bargaining are the tools to get what we want. No single writer can use these tools. And no agent can. But they are sharp instruments in the hands of our Guilds.

Writers guilds are the only way to get through to legislative bodies – on national and international levels. Lobbying on Copyright law.

Only the guilds can bargain better conditions. The next big challenge is to cope with the expanding use of our work online and find a way of fair remuneration.

Guilds are made of solidarity. I wish that membership in the European guilds should be obligatory like in the American guilds. Only then the power would be in the hands of the writers as a whole group. In Europe, writers decide if they want to become a member. That already is a sign of a political mind.

Writers – you not only have rights, you have duties!

With NETFLIX and other producing streaming services the landscape changed. “Creators” means writers. They are the ones addressed by these companies because the writers guarantee the uniqueness of the film. The Power to secure the writer’s vision seems granted. Blinded by that writers sign strange contracts.

Netflix’ writers contracts are a secret. They all include a strict nondisclosure paragraph. There is no transparency. There are no residuals, never, however often the films will be viewed. As the films are produced and shown all over the world, new rules have to be built. These rules can only be bargained by our guilds. Guilds must share their experiences at an international level.

And then, Guilds are made of human beings. So they are as well the platform to get in touch with writers and people from other countries. FSE. IAWG. Common interests bring us together, but the idea of solidarity makes us a family. The family of writers.

For me it is fantastic to hear about or even visit a foreign country with the eyes of a writer from this country. That is better than seeing it with a tourist guide. Because our profession makes us, in some way, understand each other more easily. Our situation has similarities, beyond the specific national situation. So by that we can get in touch and build bridges. (If you ever want to come to Munich, I’ll show you around – promised.)

Guilds do not serve just one group of writers. Most guilds don't have different departments – you are a screenwriter, if you are writing daily TV Shows, if you are writing a movie or if you are a showrunner of your own TV show. Guilds have to take that in account.

There always is a revolutionary high when single writers decide to fight for something, but then the boring part follows. Any process within the guild and it's members is hard work and eating a lot of volunteer writer's time. But this is – democracy. I will say this word again: democracy.

The arduousness of the lowlands – or is the correct expression “trouble”? Or is it “effort”? Or pain of the plain? Die Mühen der Ebene in German. I love that expression. It is slightly depressing and at the same time giving hope. The plain is going to end at the foot of a steep mountain...

Here is something about writing and giving speeches in a foreign language. As a writer. Somebody who knows, loves, uses, challenges language. I hate speaking pidgeon. I feel clumsy and amputated. Metaphores, images, playing with words, double meanings and jokes (that's the worst) don't work like they used to. Nothing is coming easy. Maybe I'm creating funny pictures in your mind although I'm being serious. Lack of control. Grr. Dilletant.

But that's the way we get in touch. So: long live pidgeon, which is the official language – in the family of non native English speakers. The ungroomed, wild, little sister of the English language.

Heinrich Blücher said about his wife Hannah Arendt: “ If you want to hear Hannah playing her Stradivarius, you got to hear her speaking German. Our English is just like playing the Beerfiddle.” I think this is a good comparison. But then Arendt began to write in English. Her books were first published in English and then in German. Arendt adapted to her new home, the US. She was able to. Other émigrés were not.

If writers leave their home countries because they have to, they will not be able to make a living with what their profession is. Their maternal language is the wrong language. They are deprived of what they learnt and love.

This brings me to the second topic of the conference: FREEDOM.

Since we met in Warsaw four years ago, in 2014, the world changed dramatically. I didn't have the imagination for all the unbelievable plot points that screwed up my naïve script of the world's near future.

Would anybody have believed that Great Britain voted for such a crazy thing like Brexit? The character I had in mind was a reasonable one. The one who would always try to find a thoughtful solution. The most democratic person I could think of.

And then, of course, the mean fool Trump becoming president. How the hell could that happen? I thought Obama was the beginning of the new age of brightness?

I was completely wrong. Some urban elitist bubble thing.

In Warsaw, two Turkish writers, members of the Guild SENDAR attended our meeting. SENDAR never was an official member of FSE, but they came regularly.

When we contacted them, we learnt, that the guild no longer exists. They were shut down by obscure tax debts suddenly put on them. We had a list of people who wanted to come, but finally nobody came.

The industry in Turkey is producing a lot – first of all soap operas, getting longer and longer for the same money. Very successful the Arab states. But the writers are deprived of their possibilities to fight for their rights.

Erdogan fights critical writers and puts them into jail. He doesn't care about freedom of art, freedom of press or just the expression of your personal opinion. Many Turkish intellectuals left Turkey and lots of them live in Berlin.

We miss our colleagues from Turkey at this meeting.

Just to name some more things, apparently less crazy but as severe in terms of writer's lives, and - most frightening - all happening in the European Union, who, as one of the founding conditions demands freedom of press and art. But: national governments don't care!

In 2015, on year after we've been there, the Pis Party took over power in Poland. Our neighbor. 150 km from here. Like in Britain their success was a consequence of low participation in the elections. (Let's mention again: democracy is hard work.) This right wing populist government began immediately with the demontage of justice and the free press. And the limitation of not only the journalistic, but the fictional productions of the public TV stations in Poland.

And, still in Europe, member of the European Union, Hungary slowly turned into an autocratic state, run by Victor Orban and his followers.

In 2011, The National Hungarian Film Fund was founded by a friend of Orban, Hollywood Veteran, Andy Vajna (involved in Rambo and Die Hard movies), who just recently bought the second biggest TV Channel in Hungary, TV2, that since that moment has become a close medial friend of the Fidesz-party. Apart from that he owns the monopol on Casinos in Hungary.

Now, our neighbor Austria, very close in Co-Production because we produce in the same language, experiences the immediate efforts of a right-wing-populist government to implement a new control level at the so called “red” public broadcaster ORF.

The cut down of the freedom of expression has reached the industry in the European Union, and thus our working lives.

I will not talk about the rest of us Europeans with populist governments – Front National, Sweden demokrats, right wing Denmark, Netherlands, you name it. Ciao bella Italia. And of course all the dictators in the world, that Donald Trump falls in love with, like Wladimir Putin or Kim Yong Il, or all the other guys he didn’t yet meet.

There is a wave of populist movements around the world.

Being here, in Berlin, being German, I want to talk about Germany. My country.

I am ashamed.

I don’t want this.

I am angry about all these rightwingpopulistfascistnazi people coming out of the shades and spreading physical and mental terror in the streets and poisoning the minds of people who claim to be afraid but in fact are very often only too lazy to really think.

And I’m angry at politicians who are adopting a populist opinion and way of talking instead of fighting these people.

I keep asking myself constantly: what can I do? Apart from demonstrating in the streets and writing letters to politicians.

We are writers. We invent the fictional narrative of societies. Our work is a powerful tool we have to use – even more in these times.

We are responsible.

It’s only together that we can move things.

We will have a right wing influence as well in the Public Broadcasters, as they can send delegees into the Broadcasting council.

Up to now the influence is more subtle here, said the former head of the first German TV station, when we were talking about this conference. But she didn’t go into details when I asked for it.

But I do have an idea.

If for example in a “Heimatserie” – which means beautiful German landscape and emotional familiystories – characters with dark skin or gay characters will be avoided in order not to loose nationalist viewers --- we are lost.

These are the invisible lines that don’t have a real name. But they exist.

The Power on our vision will be useless then.

If democracy is not being protected by us, we are going to lose our jobs. Unless you like writing nationalist fairytales.

Bringing you together in this conference makes me dream of a global voice of screenwriters.

It is the writers duty to speak up, when the freedom of expression is endangered.

Let's do so. We will be heard. For Power, Freedom and Democracy.

It's time. Be loud.

Get up!

Enjoy the conference.