

# PITCHING FOR DIRECTORS WORKSHOP

## INTRODUCTION

### Why pitching for directors?

In the past decades, I have attended a lot of different pitching training workshops. It was always very much worthwhile – it did make my pitching better and allow me to learn new skills. But I still noticed that many of the persons who teach pitching in fact never emotionally experience what we experience when we pitch our projects. There was something missing. What was missing was not about understanding skill or technique. It had to do with attitude.

As I was getting better at pitching my projects, getting praise and pitching awards, I was also witnessing many talented and charismatic colleagues with strong, inspiring projects who were able to talk about their projects with amazing energy over a coffee, but were suffering and staggering in their pitches. It was painful to watch them suffer, and it projected an annoyingly false image of who we are as artists to the film industry.

I wanted to understand what it is that makes them struggle. What was it that made me good at pitching? Again, I felt that it was not really about communication skills – all directors are good communicators, even if every director has different communication skills. It was about attitude.

## ATTITUDE

As directors (or, so often, writers/directors) we have a very intimate, personal relationship to our projects. For a director, every project is a humungous iceberg of different aspects. Some are obvious, above the surface, conscious; some are hidden, subconscious; and some are secret - we are reluctant to touch on them, we feel like we need to preserve their mystery – it is off this mystery that our creative core is nourished.

Therefore, we are very protective of our projects. It is so much easier to pitch someone else's project – even as a producer, who has a personal relationship with the project, but not as a deeply intimate one.

Quite often, a pitch is staged as if it were a performance. Most directors are not performers, but we work with performance and we are acutely aware of all the aspects of good or bad performance. For years, we have sharpened our sensibility towards performance. Which can make us painfully self-conscious. It is horrible to feel that you are being pushed to be acting out, to be false or pretending about something that you know so well, that you intimately care about.

But in fact, and that is the first and the most important recognition, a pitch is NOT a performance. It is creative dialogue. Most of us are very good at creative dialogue; it is our main tool when working with cast and crew: We can't act, but we know how to speak to actors. We can't write music, but we know how to guide composers. We can't set up light, but we know how to inspire DPs.

What makes creative dialogue easy for us – as opposed to performing – is that it allows us to be self-oblivious. Creative dialogue is not about impressing or entertaining the other. It is not about domination - it is about cooperation. It is not aiming at giving definite answers – but

rather at opening a common ground where to come together, to explore, to raise questions, and to experiment.

When we talk to our crews, we are not concentrating on how well we perform what we are trying to communicate. Our minds are focused on a common cause, a common effort. We are inviting them to join us and fill in with their own sensibility, craft, or skill.

Pitching falls into the same category of creative dialogue. The persons who are listening to our pitch are not there to be entertained, or impressed. They are in search for something to be part of, either by finding people to cooperate with, or creative endeavors to invest the funds they are responsible for. This is what they want and need. To be part of our project; a member of our crew.

Some of my actor friends tell me they are often frustrated about how casting makes them feel. I tell them how it is to be on the other side of the table. We are not there to judge. We are searching, we are listening, we are feeling in, looking for the right person, the right energy, the right partner to work with. We are participating in the effort to find that connection. We are wishing and hoping for every person to be the one. We want to fall in love.

## **STRUCTURE**

Film directors are very different from each other. This is what makes filmmaking individual and exciting. But I believe we all have one thing in common: We are good at recognizing patterns, regularities and irregularities in time and space and manipulating/rearranging them.

This is the second important recognition: working with complex, changing structures is our superpower - and that is exactly what we need to do when we are pitching.

If we are able to understand the pitch as a design of flexible structures, this takes our mind – and the pressure – off the performance. It brings space and time into mental moment of the pitch. We feel free to explore that time and space. Even a formal pitch on stage in front of a large audience is no longer a claustrophobic experience, where we feel squeezed into an uncomfortable, unfitting space-time.

Instead, we create, emanate and invite everyone into our own space-time, which is vast, calm, and full of possibilities. Remember The Matrix?

## **A CONTINUOUS PROCESS**

And there is a third important recognition, which might sound obvious, but I have realized again and again that it is not: Continuous preparation, research, rehearsal, reflexion, evaluation, and study, are essential to our profession. This also is true for pitching.

Although a pitch might seem like a singular event, it is in fact a continuous process, a developing relationship between you and your project, between you and your team, and between you and your potential comrades-in-arms from the industry. Each pitch allows you to rethink and develop these relationships further. Taking time for preparation and for the afterwork is crucial for this process.

As dialogue with the industry, pitching allows you not only to bring your project to attention, but also to define yourself, position yourself, to make your name. You have your individual,

well defined qualities, your own special voice. Pitching makes you recognizable as the charismatic artist that you are. Having a clue about who you are will attract the right people to you.

Pitching is also a team-building process for directors and producers. The shared experiences of pitching together in front of other people, but even more so the preparation and the evaluation of the pitch, allow you to synchronize, deepen and develop your partnership. It is a very much needed process to go through when working with a new producer, or working together on a new project! It often makes surprising things surface.

This process proves invaluable once you move into production, when there is less time and more pressure. It brings upon an intuitive understanding of each other - and of the way each one connects to certain aspects of the project, how we are in fact connected by certain aspects of the project. It is also a great way to find out what kind of dialogue/cooperation you can expect from your producer during production. It will be the first time we will jointly go through preparation, execution, and aftermath/evaluation for this particular project.

And finally, building a pitch and pitching a project is a valuable process of clarification for yourself as a director. It allows you to understand your project better, to examine its potential, its traps, the possibilities you have not yet thought about. To question and confirm the ways you want to go, and also the ways you don't want to go.

Pitching is a vital part of your own personal preparation. It is a process which continues when your film is in production: you will continue to use, further develop, and clarify the same ideas to communicate with the cast and crew. And this process continues even after the film is finished: You will be expanding, adjusting and complementing on those same thoughts in interviews with the press and in conversations with audiences.

Those creative conversations are not only an integral part of directing – they are directing. So why do directors so often complain about pitching? I never hear anyone say: Oh, I feel so humiliated and stressed out about having to rehearse with actors, to frame with my DP, to edit my film!

If we change our attitude towards understanding pitching as an integral part of the process of directing a film, if we bring in our superpower to work with complex, flexible structures, we can allow ourselves to enjoy pitching – we can start having fun!

*In the workshop, we will look at how to work with space/time/body in order to program ourselves to relax and enjoy, and how to use dialogue to design a flexible structure of a pitch.*