

**Jim Stark**

***The Creative Role of the Producer***

Potsdam/Germany, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2010

JIM STARK: I want to thank SOURCES 2 for having me here. I'm not going to be showing any movies. This is a little unusual, because, normally when I speak, it's about movies I've produced or a director I've worked with and I show some pieces. But this discussion is a little different.

During the past couple of years, I've become increasingly interested in the role of the producer in independent filmmaking. What is it that makes a good or bad producer of art films? A lot of filmmaking has to do with the role of the director – and we'll talk about that. After doing this for twenty-five years, though, it occurs to me that producers do play a very important role. There are things they do well; there are things they do poorly. There are many things they really need to do better. The more that we can do to discuss this openly and explore these issues, the better it's going to be for us, as individuals, and for all the films that we produce.

When I was preparing for this in New York last week, there was an article I saw in *The New York Times*. The article was talking about the release of a new Disney animated film, which opens this week in New York. It's called *Tangled*, a 3-D animated film retelling the German fairy tale, *Rapunzel*, the girl with the long hair, and her adventures. The gist of the article was that Disney is facing a kind of crisis because they've become very interested in selling merchandise based on princesses. There was the *Princess and the Frog*, and then a series of princess movies before that. They make billions of dollars selling princess dresses and other merchandise to little girls, who apparently can't get enough of this stuff.

At the same time, as the article suggested, maybe this is not the best way to make movies. Maybe there is something missing with the Disney films; compared with the Pixar movies, for example, where you have *Toy Story* and *The Incredibles*, which have a very strong sense of character and stories that really resonate with audiences in a way that the Disney films haven't – particularly when you compare the newer Disney films with the traditional Disney movies. After all, Walt Disney modernised and popularised the film animation that we know today with *Steamboat Willie*, and then *Sleeping Beauty*, and, of course, *Fantasia*. Those films had a certain character. The *Times* article was saying, maybe these new Disney movies didn't have that, and that Disney really had to try to find something else. The *Times* quoted Neil Gabler. Not only did he write a terrific book on Disney, he also wrote a series of books about the traditional Hollywood studio system and the movies they made. Gabler said today's crisis at Disney reflected the need to find a specific sensibility for their movies.

So, what does that have to do with us – individual small producers – making small art films?

It's very hard to run a small film office these days. With the decline in foreign sales, difficulty in getting into cinemas, staying in cinemas, selling TV rights – worrying about just keeping your doors open. There is this huge pressure on producers to focus exclusively on money.

What I would argue is this: Whether you are in Germany or in the United States, it is important to think about more than just the financial concerns. In the States, there is a pressure to make movies based on "packaging." You get an A-list star (better yet, get three A-list stars) – even for a small movie – and then you'll get some money for your film. It doesn't matter how good the movie is. It doesn't matter how good the script is, it doesn't matter who the director is. If you get those actors, you can get the money.

In Germany, you have similar pressures. Television wants a certain kind of movie. Certain funding sources want movies to be shot in a certain way, with particular actors under specific circumstances, for example. You can be the kind of producer who responds to those demands. I understand why you would because, as I said, the pressures are enormous. However, if you want to be a producer who, in the end, is satisfied with your product and what you've done – this *requires* that your films consistently reflect a certain sensibility. And this may mean that you have to be very creative in your financing in order to be able to find ways to finance films that fit your sensibility.

Now, what does it mean to maintain a certain sensibility if you are a producer of art films, the kinds

of films that all of us here are interested in making? Obviously, as a producer, you can impose your sensibility on a movie in a hundred different ways, down to the smallest detail. But the single most important decision lies in selecting the movie you are going to make. I talk to people about different ideas for movies all the time, between two and ten ideas each month. Of these films, I have to decide: Am I going to make this one? Am I going to make none of them....?

We don't have public funding in the United States, which means I have to run around and try to get private money. In addition, I have to try to get people to work for much less money than they would normally get paid. When I start on a film, it takes a minimum of three years – and often five years – from the first conversations to the finished product that gets released into theatres. With ancillary markets today, it goes on even longer. I'm still dealing with films I did ten and fifteen years ago. So, making a movie is a major commitment.

How do I decide which movie to make? In my opinion, it's very important to find a writer-director you can work with. I'll talk more about this later on, but I'm talking about someone whose talents you like, someone whom you respect, and someone with a sensibility that is similar to yours. It's equally important to have someone who respects you, and who doesn't see you merely as a person who writes checks. The two of you have to be able to sit down and have a conversation about what the story is, about the kind of movie you want to make, how you make it.... You really have to be able to talk about this, as equals.

It's been said before: Basically, this relationship is like a marriage. Like a marriage, it has its good times and it has its bad times. Also like a marriage, you have to be very careful about the partner you're committing to. If you commit to the wrong person, it's going to be hell.

For me, it also means finding a story that is meaningful to me, personally. It should be a story I respond to, something that I understand. It should be a story that enlightens me and entertains me in a some way. Typically, with me, that means it's a story that takes you on a journey of self-discovery. The story can be based on a book or an article, something that somebody told me, a simple idea or, of course, something that a writer or director brought to me. But, through the story, I should be both entertained and, in a way, changed. Those are the kind of projects that I'm looking for.

To me, it's the modern-day equivalent of sitting around the campfire, with somebody telling the story. Others are engaged. I tell it in such a way that you understand it, and you want to hear more about what's going to happen next. At the end of the story, you feel like what you've heard was worth the time. And, somehow, it has changed you. You may call it a 'saga' of someone's 'trial and adventures,' or whatever you want. Most importantly, it is something the audience responds to – and you have to respond to it yourself, as an audience member.

Now, just because I respond to a story doesn't mean that other people will. But those are the movies I want to make. On the other hand, just because I *don't* respond to a story doesn't mean that no one will be interested in that story. There are certain films that are right for me to do – they fit my sensibility – and, then, there are certain films that are *not* right for me to do. They may be right for someone else to do, for another person with a different sensibility to produce.

In talking to writers and writer-directors, one thing I've found is this: Sometimes they are much less interested in the audience than I am. They have 'something to say,' and they don't care whether you are interested in that or not. They think their message is important – it 'has to be said' – and they want to make *that* movie, whether or not there's an audience for it, or disregarding how big or small that audience is. Maybe there are producers for these people, but I'm not very interested in working with them. They might have psychological issues they're trying to work out (with the film), or, sometimes, they have a political agenda. But, whatever it is, it really isn't something for me.

Personally, I don't tend to do political films. I don't do films that deal with pressing social issues. I tend to think such issues are better-served with documentaries than with fiction films. What I tend to do are road movies, 'shaggy-dog' movies, 'stupid' stories, 'stupid' comedies. I don't know how many of you have seen my films. (This is where it would be good to have a couple of movies to show you.) But, there was a film I co-produced recently. I didn't really have that much to do with it creatively, but it's a first film by a Serbian director called Darko Lungulov, called *Here and There* (<http://www.imdb.com/video/imdb/vi2673542169/>). The film was about a 50-something American jazz musician who is down on his luck. He needs money. A young Serbian guy comes and says, "I'll give you \$5,000 if you go to Belgrade, marry my girlfriend and bring her back with you, so she can be a legal immigrant here with me."

The musician gets to Belgrade and the young girl picks him up at the airport with her brother. Her

brother is a taxi driver and he obviously doesn't like Americans. He opens the door, puts our guy in this rickety taxi. They run through downtown Belgrade, past a military building that is still standing, but still shows severe damage from the war. The taxi driver turns to the jazz musician and says (cynically), "So, Mr. American. Welcome to Serbia: Country in transition...."

To me that's funny. Maybe you have to see the movie, but that is the kind of humour I enjoy. Or, the kind in *Cold Fever*, a film where a Japanese guy goes across Iceland during the winter (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109028/>). He's sets off in this rickety car, going through huge amounts of snow and glacial ice. As he passes, the camera pans down to a sign that says: "Does Anybody Know You're Travelling This Way?"

That kind of thing, this dead-pan humour, is part of my sensibility, and if you see my films, you will see that most of them are like that – and that's no accident. These are the kind of films that I respond to, the kind of films that certain audiences respond to, and the kind I know how to make and promote.

Aside from making these decisions about the project – who the director is, what the story is going to be – the script is another way you can be creatively involved in the production. In Hollywood, it is routine for producers and studio executives to have their fingerprints all over a script. Scripts, in fact, are often done by committee. You will see notes – usually contradictory or nonsensical – coming from everyone. This is the basis for the Hollywood cliché of 'development hell,' which is an actual reality there.

So, what does it mean if you want to be involved in the script of an art film or a writer-director film? It goes back to your relationship with the director. Again, you have to choose carefully, and find someone who can be a partner. In that partnership with a writer-director, you have to be able to speak honestly together. You both have to agree on the story. You both like the story. But does this script work with the story that you want to do? Are there parts that *don't* work well? Does it work as well as it might work? Is there some bad dialog or unnecessary exposition? Excessive length? Are there artificial moments or ill-timed plot twists? All of this can undermine an otherwise good story.

Ideally, you have a situation where the producer and the writer-director are able to sit down together and have an honest conversation about the script. If your director is not open to that kind of conversation, I would say that you have the wrong director. Together, you can fix a lot of these problems and insure they don't get in the way of the story that you want to tell.

Increasingly, I've been drawn into creating scripts. I started with this Icelandic movie, *Cold Fever*. I went to Reykjavik in 1989 for a film festival. For those of you who haven't been there, the airport is about 40 miles outside of Reykjavik. You take a bus into the city and, as you go in, you see the most amazing landscape you'll ever see. It looks like the moon. Before this trip – this is 1989 – I'd never seen this country in the movies. There hadn't really been a widely distributed Icelandic film, at that point. Being a guy who likes to do road movies, I thought, "This is a perfect place to do a road movie." Here, you can have a billion dollars' worth of 'free production design.'

I had just finished making a film with Jim Jarmusch, *Mystery Train*, (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097940/>) which I was showing at the festival. One section in "Mystery Train" is in Japanese, featuring a young actor, Masatoshi Nagase, who has become quite well-known since then – he's really gone 'big-time' in Japan. But, at that time, he was just starting his career, and I really liked the guy. I wanted to make another movie with him. So, somehow, these two ideas got mixed-up in my head: What if the Japanese guy came to Iceland? I just thought it was funny.

When I got into Reykjavik, I met all the directors at the festival. (At that time, there were only twelve of them; there are a lot more now.) I told them I was interested in making this road movie. Most of them were interested, I think, in working with an American. They were all these serious pipe-smoking guys. There was one guy, though, who was this tall Viking who drank too much. He had done this very low-budget road movie, called *Skyttarnar (White Whales)* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093985/>), a film about a guy who works on a fishing boat, comes in, to Reyjavik, for the weekend, gets drunk, robs a store, and gets shot to death in an empty swimming pool. When I saw this film, I thought, "That's my kind of director."

So Fridrik Þór Fridriksson and I started working on my idea for a film. We batted ideas back and forth, and, eventually, we came up with a script that took us a number of years to finance. In the mean time, he made another film, *Children of Nature*, (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0101526/>) which was nominated for an Oscar. Eventually, though, we made *Cold Fever*, and the film did pretty well.

My other experience in writing and making a film, was when I met Bent Hamer.

We had done *Cold Fever*, and I was at another festival where I met Bent, a Norwegian director who

had made the film *Eggs*, (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112934/>) a very nice, very small film about two old guys who had lived together in a house their whole lives – except one of the guys had gone on a wild weekend to Sweden. Forty years later, he gets a phone call from the son of the girl he'd been with on this one wild weekend. When the son moves in with the two old guys, everything changes.

I liked Bent. We liked each other, and we thought we could work together.

"You're a Norwegian," I said. "How would you like to make a film in the U.S. in English with American actors?"

"Yeah," he said.

"What do you want to do?"

"Well," he said, "there's this guy – Bukowski."

We both had read Charles Bukowski's novel, "Post Office." I called the Bukowski estate and they said, "Oh, this is great. We've been waiting for somebody like you to call." ... That's the first time anybody had ever said that to me. (*Audience laughter.*)

The estate's representative figured an independent filmmaker would be the right choice to do Bukowski, but *Post Office* was already sold to Taylor Hackford – it still is. They told us that another novel, *Factotum*, was available, though. So, we got *Factotum*.

Since Bent and I are both cheap, we decided to write the script ourselves. I don't think either one of us had done a book adaptation before, but we went ahead and adapted the story. It took us a number of years to get the money. It wasn't easy. In the end, though, we did it – and I think *Factotum* was a good film.

Those two experiences have encouraged me, not just to work with directors on their scripts but also to start developing the twenty or so ideas I've collected over the years – ideas that I think would be good for feature films.

But even if you're not a screenwriter yourself, I think it's important, as a creative producer, to make sure that the audience is engaged – and *stays* engaged – in the story.

We don't have time here to cover all the aspects of what a producer does and what could be creative and what could not be creative.

Obviously, being involved in the cut of the film is an important part of what a producer does. It doesn't mean sitting in the editing room every day, looking over the editor's or director's shoulder. If there's a cut to be looked at, however, it does mean giving your honest criticism, your honest view. Again, it means acting as a partner to the director – trying to figure out what doesn't work, what does work; trying to make creative suggestions about how the film could be improved.

It would be really nice if everybody had the chance to develop scripts the way you do here at SOURCES. It doesn't happen, especially in the United States. In the early 1990s, a friend took some of us on a private plane to Brazil, where we gave a conference on low-budget filmmaking. One of the participants was James Schamus who started – and is still the head of – Focus Features. James is well-known as the collaborator, as a screenwriter and producer of Ang Lee (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Eat Drink Man Woman*).

At the conference, James made the point that, in American independent low-budget filmmaking, a lot of the script development takes place in postproduction. It's unfortunate, but we run off and we make these movies, and there are problems that first appear in the editing room. At that point, the producer plays a very, very important role in saying, "This is a problem. We have to fix it." Maybe the producer offers suggestions, maybe not. But, otherwise, it is important to just be there, be supportive of the director and editor, encourage them in the right direction.

Personally – and this is a prejudice of mine – I always want my films to be as short as possible. I tell all my directors, when I start working with them: If we're going to make these kind of road movies, 'shaggy-dog', episodic films – which, let's face it, aren't really about anything – they should be as short as possible. My goal is to make them, as close as possible, to 80 minutes long, plus credits. I tell them this at the very beginning and, as we go through editing, I am always pressing to make the film shorter. As long as the audience is entertained, great: Let's entertain them and get them out of the theatre before they realise that nothing's really happening. (*Audience laughter.*)

Casting is a third area where you can become involved – and, really, you need to become involved in it. Today in the States, as I've said, there is huge pressure not just to get one star, but to get two stars or three stars. I believe it's the same with foreign sales – for people here, in Europe, doing international sales. It's very, very hard with a low-budget movie to get the stars. These people, the American stars, are all represented by agencies. Part of the agent's job is to keep people like you (producers) away from their clients. The only way you can get these people into your films is by using personal connections.

Even if we are only talking about minor stars, or actors at the beginning of their careers: If you want to be a creative producer, in my view, the more good actors you know personally, the better. The best move in casting is to cast someone you know; someone on whom you can rely to do good work, and not make a 'circus' of your movie – because some of these people can be a nightmare. If you have personal relationships with them, you can minimise potential problems. That makes it much easier to call these people on the phone, to get a personal commitment from them to do your movie without having to put a million dollars on the table as a 'pay or play' offer, up front.

Not every actor can do every part, so the more actors you know, the better. How do you meet actors? In general, actors like to meet producers (they are some of the few people who do, as far as I know.) because you are a potential employer. Film festivals are a perfect and easy way to meet actors. Over the years, I've met a number of really good actors at festivals. When we're casting, I try to contact them.

Now, of course, I'm not going to try to force any actor on a director. More often than not, however, I've found that directors are very grateful if I can offer them a really good actor whose work they might know, but whom they don't know, personally.

I'm not a big believer in auditions. I haven't had any luck with them. On the one hand, there are some fantastic actors who cannot audition. You put them in a room with no direction – no chance to really prepare for a part – and they freeze up. They can't do anything. On the other hand, you have some people who are professional auditioners. They're fantastic in an audition, then you put them on a set and they don't know what to do. So, my best advice – what I try to do, if I don't know the actors – is to look at their work on film. What I particularly look for are actors who've done a number of films, and even a number of *bad* movies. If an actor is really good in his or her part in a bad film, then you really have something. *(Audience laughter.)*

Fourth: The crew. Like actors, you cannot know enough good directors of photography (DPs), costume people, editors, and so on. The more films you do, the more crew people you'll know, and that's an incredibly valuable resource. Somebody who did a great job for you for one film can help you make your next film successful.

As a creative producer, you have to be very up-front and honest with your line producer, with your production manager, and with your director about the people that you know you want on the crew. Again, this should be an open exchange. They have the people whom they want. You have your people whom you know. Try to work it out, and see who is the best person to do the job in this particular film. Partly, it's a question of who's available and whom you can get at the best price.

The other thing, which I cannot emphasise enough, is attitude. Some crew people are team players, and they love to work with you. There are also some real jerks. For some reason, there are a number of these people – I tend to find them in the camera department – who hate producers. You really don't want people like that on your set. Their assumption is that the producer is somehow trying to rip them off, or cheat them somehow. This can affect the whole crew. It can be a problem.

I can go on giving examples of things that producers do, in the area of creative decision-making. I believe it's very important for producers to be involved in the sale of the film, for example – and I've been involved in developing the poster art, the EPK (Electronic Press Kit), the trailer, and that kind of thing. But I really want to talk about one area, which I think is *the* most important – perhaps the most difficult. It's an area that probably deserves its own seminar: the relationship between the producer and the director.

Some directors feel that producers shouldn't play any distinctive role. More precisely, they don't *want* them to play any role. They want you to write the check, and get out of their way. If they are well-known directors, they will find such producers, who will take them on. I won't do it, and I suggest you not do it either. If you do, your life will be hell. In such a situation, there is, effectively, no creative role for producers. More importantly: If you cannot agree with a director, up front, on ground rules about something like the budget, the director can – and will – bankrupt you.

So what should the relationship between a producer and a director be? I've talked about 'marriage,' I've talked about mutual respect.... Let me tell you this somewhat bizarre story: I was in Reykjavik, as I said, in 1989. Aside from Fridriksson, there were a bunch of weird people there: actor Jean Reno (*Ronin*, *DaVinci Code*), the famous German actor Bruno Ganz, and István Szabó, the famous Hungarian director and a real gentleman.

I had had raised money and sold an Eastern European production to Columbia Pictures (it was during the very brief period that David Putnam was working at Columbia, he had the idea he could make art movies at a major studio.) So the guy makes the movie, which was really not very good. We go to deliver the film to Columbia Pictures and my lawyer, who had negotiated the deal, was now, coincidentally, working for Columbia, and he calls me up.

"Jim," he said. "The film's not very good."

"Yeah, well..."

"We're giving it back to you," he said. "We don't want it."

So Columbia gave us back the movie, and let us keep the money. They decided they weren't going to waste any more money on it, because it would have cost them a fortune to release it, and they didn't want to be bothered with it.

I told Szabó the story, and he knew the director.

"You know," he said, "he just needs a good producer."

I was flabbergasted. It was the first time I'd heard a director say anything *nice* about producers.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"A good producer is like my brother," says Szabó. "If I say, 'This cup is black,' he tells me: 'Wait a minute. Turn around, leave the room, come back in, and look at it again. Because it is white!'"

In other words, a producer is someone with whom you can have an open and honest relationship – someone who can straighten you out, as the director, when you need straightening out.

Unfortunately I've met too many directors who say, 'The cup is black,' and expect the producer to tell them, 'You're absolutely right! That's the blackest cup I've ever seen!' ... I don't want to work with those people anymore.

From my point of view, it is extremely important to be honest, particularly about budget limitations. When you work with a director, you have to be able to say, "We can raise this amount of money, but cannot raise that amount of money." And, "If you absolutely need more, you'd better find somebody else, because I'm not going to bankrupt myself or make false representations to you about what I can finance, in terms of this film."

Again, the director must be someone who is open to your help – with script problems, with cutting, etc.

During production, the role of the producer – versus a line producer – is relatively limited. I believe you should try to set up the best crew, set up opportunities for the best cast, arrange the best financing you can – and, then, step out of the way and let the thing go. During production, you're only there for two reasons, in my view: One is to hold people's hand when they get nervous. Especially the stars, because they love to get their hands held by producers. (*Audience laughter.*) You can waste your time doing that, so the director doesn't have to waste his time. Second, you are there in case the roof falls in. This doesn't happen often, but sometimes it does. When everything falls apart, people are going to turn to you. You had better be prepared to be there with some answers.

Be honest with the director. Be honest and forceful about what makes the film better and what's hurting it. Later, when the film is finished, try to keep the director involved in decisions about promoting the movie, what festivals to take it to, and how it's going to be sold. Be as encouraging and as positive as you can, and work as hard as you can, because *nobody* cares about these movies the way you do.

Finishing the film is only part of the job. You have to get it 'out there' – get it seen, promoted, sold. We're talking about a commitment to the film that can extend, literally, for years. I've worked to get films into festivals, I've sold them, worked with sales agents. When necessary – when I couldn't do anything else – I've released films myself. There's the Icelandic film I told you about, *Cold Fever*. Not only did I arrange and pay for its release in the U.S. – where it was rather successful – I also organised it for England and France, the only time I ever did this in Europe. It was crazy, but I really wanted that film to get out. That's what I had to do to get the film out, so that's what I did. Obviously, directors appreciate it when you do that kind of work for a film.

I'll end with an anecdote about *Cold Fever*, which had come from my idea. It was playing at the Sundance Film Festival. They set aside tickets for the filmmakers, so I went to the filmmakers' desk to ask for the tickets for the screening.

"Could I please have the tickets for the screening?"

"Who are you?" they asked me.

"I'm the producer."

"This is the filmmakers's desk," they said. (*Audience laughter.*)

"Well, the film was my idea.... I wrote it."

"Are you the director?"

"No."

"Well, this is the filmmakers's desk." (*Audience laughter.*)

If that's not bad enough: Some years ago, I was sitting with a Sundance person. I had produced a film that won the festival's grand prize, and we were talking about their prizes and the other person pointed out that they gave prize money with their awards. This came as a surprise to me, because I hadn't known that actual money had been paid along with the grand prize we had won. In talking, the festival official told me they had paid the prize money to the director – who had neglected to tell me, at the time.

"What do you mean, you paid it to the director?" I asked.

"It was named 'best film'," he said. "That prize goes to the director."

"Do you have a prize for best cinematography?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"A prize for best screenplay?"

"Yes."

"You have a prize for best director?"

"Yes."

"So, where's the prize for the producer?" I asked.

The answer was that they didn't have one. To their credit, it's changed now – and they also give part of the prize money to the producer, I think. But it was that kind of episode that got me interested in the whole area of producing and the role of the producer in art films. One friend of mine, Stefan Uhrig, programs now for the Prague Film Festival. Stefan actually did a retrospective of my movies. I'm not trolling for more, here – I don't necessarily want them – but, it's common to have retrospectives for directors and, sometimes, for screenwriters, while retrospectives of producers' work are very rare – although I can tell you the names of at least ten producers and production companies that have done consistently interesting movies, with different directors, over a number of years. (Some of these companies are in Germany, I should add.) They deserve retrospectives as much as any director.

So that's been my 'rant' about producing. I hope you enjoyed it. (*Audience applause.*)

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: I recognise what you're saying about directors who want the producer to be, basically, an accountant for them-.

JIM STARK: Not all of them....

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: I know. But, it happens.... You've probably developed a kind of radar for those kinds of directors? Do you have certain questions you ask a new director, up front, to find out...?

JIM STARK: I haven't gotten that far, in thinking about it. I'm sure I could come up with some; but, if you sit down and talk with somebody, you're going to figure it out. You start talking about your budget, for example, and he says, "No, you don't understand. I'm going to need six hundred people for that shot! I need three HMI (lights) and four cranes.... And, no, two Red cameras are not enough. We need two Reds and a couple of 35s as well...." That's a clue that it's time to hit the road. The good thing about these guys is they're not very shy about telling you what they want. (*Audience laughter.*)

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: What do you think about directors who are also producers?

JIM STARK: I think it depends. I think there are some who could *use* a good producer. Then, there are people, like your past speaker here, Bent Hamer.

I think, by acclamation, Bent is considered one of the best producers in Norway. I think everybody recognises him as that, and other directors are always asking him to produce their films. He might do it but I think he spends a lot of his time, for good reason, cooking for and with his family. But he's a terrific producer.

Then, you have people like my friend Fridrik Fridriksson, whose company went bankrupt, perhaps because of mistakes Frederick made. He might even agree with that, at this point, but he's found a woman, Gudrun Edda Thorhannesdottir who is a very-very good producer, and I think that works better for him.

So, I think there are exceptions. In general, though, I think it's probably not a good idea. On the other hand, it also depends on who's around. You go to some countries and you might find there aren't any producers – or no experienced- or honest producers. So, under those circumstances, I guess you have no choice but to produce a film yourself. This is not the case in Germany, or France, or the United States.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: You have worked with some directors (more than once). Have you ever worked with a director on one film, as sort of a trial, and then decided to continue with that one? The question comes in relation to Peter Aalbaeck Jensen, of Zentropa....who has said you have to make three films (with a director) before you (really) know (him or her).

JIM STARK: Well, I would never contradict Peter Aalbaeck. (*Audience laughter.*) I think everybody has their own learning curve and experience. I'm sure Peter Aalbaeck would agree, as well. After one film, however, I think, you should have a pretty good idea about someone. Surely, after three films, you have an even better idea. But, after one film, the honeymoon is over and whatever 'warts' are there, you're going to know them after the first film. On the other hand, life is long; memory is short. You work with someone, and you might promise, "I'll never work with him again!" And, sometimes, you change your mind....

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: We have this discussion in Germany about made-for-TV movies. Whether they are appropriate only for certain subjects, or whether some things are only for TV, somehow. Does that discussion take place at all in the United States?

JIM STARK: Made-for-TV movies are produced, financed and made totally apart from independent films. None of the independent guys I know do made-for-TV movies. In that sense, it isn't an issue. In Germany, I think, the pool of producers is smaller. You have a closer relationship with television. Almost all producers here have some relationship with television, as far as I understand. Independent producers in the U.S. have no relationship with television. (TV networks) give us no money for our movies, and they don't even buy them when they're finished. The people who work for them work *only* for them, so it's a whole different group of people. There are some Hollywood people who do both; but, in the indy world, not at all.

This is another long discussion but, if I were younger, I think one of the interesting areas available now to an adventurous and creative produce is to produce stuff for the Internet. Webisodes.

Last week, *The New York Times*, for the first time, started a column reviewing webisodes. Just out of curiosity, I looked at some of these things. They were terrible. Really bad. I think it would be easy for an indy producer – or director – or writer, and so on – to make much better webisodes than those being made now.

The real issues on webisodes are not production issues. (They are only three- four- and five-minutes long, and it would be easy to figure out a way to do them quite cheaply.) The real issue is the quality of their scripts. It's more like writing for television, where you have a bunch of episodes scripted before you start shooting.

But someone will figure this out, and there will be indy producers who do that. Over the next five years, there will come a period where people are throwing money at projects in that area, so I think that would be a smart thing to do. If I were smarter, I would do it.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: Do you read (prospective) scripts yourself?

JIM STARK: Yes. The question I get asked all the time is “What is your company?” It’s me. There is no company, and people don’t seem to understand. They can’t quite grasp that fact. Part of the reason I’m still around after all these years is because it’s just me. During the past six months, three or four of the best-known New York independent companies – organizations that had done a number of films during the past fifteen years – have shut down their offices. They can’t afford to pay the rent.

My office is my desk, in my apartment. I don’t pay (office) rent. That’s part of the reason I get by. I don’t hire readers and, increasingly, I’m more interested in stuff that I’m writing myself or in writer-directors whom I already know. There’s not the matter of reading a script, so much as just talking with them: “What are you doing? What do we want to do?...”

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: (paraphrased) In America, how does a producer or a director like Jim Jarmusch get money for his films?

JIM STARK: Over the years, Jim Jarmusch has had a number of companies that have stepped forward for him. Most recently, it was Focus Features, but there have been other U.S. companies that provided money.

In the old days, when I was with him, we got money from German television. We had a German co-producer (usually Pandora), a French company (back then, it was Pyramid). A sales company – back then it was Christopher Sarretti Christa Saredi – which might put up some money for the film. JVC, from Japan. Basically, we’d get money from Europeans – just like the Icelanders get money outside of Iceland because there’s no money in Iceland.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: You can tell I’m from Iceland?

JIM STARK: I may not know much, but I can recognise an Icelandic accent. (*Audience laughter.*) Thank you very much for your time. (*Audience applause.*)