

# SOURCES 2

SCREENWRITING | DEVELOPMENT  
NETWORKING | TRAINING

Caterina d'Amico

Women in Film

Mentor –  
A Servant  
Of Two Masters



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# *CATERINA D'AMICO* *CONTENT*

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## **sources 2**

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# WELCOME

In this special edition, we present two lectures delivered by Caterina d'Amico, a true revolutionary thinker in the realm of cinema. Her knowledge and expertise as a long-time film producer, financier, and pedagogue run deep and wide. Her talk 2019 centres on the role of the mentor, a role that, unwittingly or not, Caterina has stepped into with grace and generosity over decades, guiding literally hundreds of young screenwriters and directors through their début projects. For many, that relationship continued well after film school ended.

For over twenty years, Caterina d'Amico was the Head of Studies at the National Film School in Italy. She says that, "My role there was that of a mediator: I would say a sort of conductor of a big orchestra, thinking of all the teachers and professors as the people who play the instruments. ... In that capacity I've been analysing and discussing, in depth, hundreds of projects." As well, Caterina also served as a consultant to the Italian Ministry of Culture, in order to select the projects that applied to the Film Fund, a job wherein she also analysed hundreds of professional scripts. Following that, she was the CEO of Rai Cinema, a company that finances and distributes Italian movies, where she closely followed the development and the making of each film that went into production.



In June 2019, we invited Caterina to be part of our workshop Sources 2 Projects & Process – Training Mentors held in Warsaw/Poland at the Wajda School and Studio where Caterina delivered her talk entitled, *Mentor – A Servant of Two Masters*, those masters being the art of cinema and the industry of the film business.

In speaking about the role or the idea of a mentor, Caterina asks, "Can there be rules for the art of filmmaking?" To answer this question, she delves into painting and sculpture, history and culture, literature and music, citing the muses that have influenced her own points of view, such as Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, wherein the artist discovers "the rules of harmony, even within the human body. And if something so complex like the human body can reveal a logic that is hidden in its proportions, and can be reduced to a mathematical formula, why cannot there be a similar logic, and a rule, in the shape of the 'living body' that is a story?" Why not, indeed?

In an invigorating 12-part lecture, Caterina talks about the mutual magnanimity that cements the mentor/mentee bond and shares her meticulous process when encountering a script for the very first time.

Fast forward to these current times where all of us together are encountering the reality of living and working amidst a global pandemic, where all of our interpersonal encounters – including our jobs as storytellers – have shifted to the virtual sphere. On occasion of our online Sources 2 Script Development Workshop in October 2020, we invited Caterina back to deliver a talk on *Women in Film*, a subject Caterina herself finds a bit generic or

yes, cautionary tale, for what is possible in a world where women still have so much with which to contend and endure just to realise a place at the table. When she circles back to the story of her mother, Suso, Caterina says, “While her husband [Caterina’s father] convalesced in a sanatorium sick with tuberculosis, Suso, on top of some six hundred letters to her husband, had written four films and won her first award. In a career that lasted sixty years, Suso had written more than 100 features.” As for her childhood impressions of Suso, she goes on: “I do not want to talk about the quality of her work; I want to tell you how she did it. From the very beginning she loved being a screenwriter because it was a profession that allowed her to make the most of her passion for literature and cinema, and of her curiosity for human beings (their thoughts, their stories, their emotions). Also, this profession could be done at home, so she could be constantly close to her children. Our living room was her working room, her ‘office.’”

This legacy of love for what one does whilst being a wife, mother, caretaker, breadwinner, mentor, and more, lives fully and vibrantly in Suso’s admiring daughter who has devoted her own career to paying that passion forward to new generations of storytellers.

Happy reading!

derivative and so, wonderful storyteller as she is in her own right, here she weaves a tale of three women – Italian actress Anna Magnani, director Lina Wertmüller, and Caterina’s own mother, writer Suso Cecchi d’Amico – all of whom are connected by deep friendships and all of whom have contributed to Caterina’s own ideas of leadership when one is the sole female working amidst a sea of men in power. It’s a deeply personal and distinctive take on how multivalent and profound are the talents and fortitude of women in the cinema sphere. Or any sphere. An actress, a director, and a screenwriter, respectively, the life stories of these three women serve as catalyst, inspiration and



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## CATERINA D'AMICO | CURRICULUM VITAE

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Born in Rome / Italy in 1948, daughter of music critic and historian Fedele d'Amico and screenwriter Suso Cecchi d'Amico, Caterina studied Philosophy at Rome's University and Social Sciences at University of East Anglia (GB).

Caterina started her career in 1971 at a radio programme broadcast by Rai. Since then she has been working as a freelancer, mostly in the field of performing arts.

From 1972 to 1976 she directed a Theatre Company producing sixteen plays in Rome; from 1974 to 1980 she worked at the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto (Italy) and Charleston (USA). Between 1974 and 1980 she worked as assistant director for twelve productions of plays and operas in Italy and USA.

She wrote and directed several TV programmes, including portraits of performing artists. She wrote articles and essays published in Italy and abroad, and several books, a.o. the comprehensive two-volume survey *Visconti – il mio teatro* which to date has been the most important study ever published on Visconti as a theatre director.

Since 1976 Caterina has conceived, realised and designed more than fifty exhibitions focusing on themes related to performing arts.

From 1988 to 1994 she held the position as General Delegate of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia (the Italian State Academy of Cinema and the Italian National Film Archives).

From 1990 to 1992 she was on the Board of CILECT (Centre International des Ecoles de Cinéma et de Télévision) being responsible for a project concerning a worldwide survey on Teaching Animation; from October 1993 to May 2000 she was the Co-ordinator of GEECT (Groupement Européen des Ecoles de Cinéma et de Télévision), an association that embodies sixty European film schools of national relevance.

Between 1996 and 2000 she collaborated with Martin Scorsese throughout the making of the documentary *My voyage to Italy* on the history of Italian Cinema.

From 1998 to 2002 she was Chairwoman of the Fondation Théâtre des Italiens, based in Rome and Paris. From February 1999 to July 2007 she was the Dean of Scuola Nazionale di Cinema of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. From May 2000 to November 2008 she was the President of CILECT.

From 2007 to 2010 she was CEO of Rai Cinema.

From 2011 to 2014 she was the Artistic Director of Rome's Casa del Cinema. From August 2013 to August 2016 she was the President of Accademia Nazionale d'Arte Drammatica Silvio d'Amico. From 2013 to 2018 she was again the Dean of Scuola Nazionale di Cinema of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia.

Caterina was a Sources 2 board member from 1997 to 2018.



# WOMEN IN FILM

5 OCTOBER 2020

CATERINA D'AMICO

LECTURE ON OCCASION OF THE SOURCES 2  
SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP ONLINE 2020

With the support of Film Fund Luxembourg  
and Creative Europe MEDIA

The given title of my talk is *Women in Film*. In addressing this topic, I have decided to ignore all numbers and statistics, and to skip all issues that have been overexplored in recent times. I preferred to approach this theme, so general and so vast, in a very personal way. I hope you will forgive me if I take the long road to it.

In the first years of our lives we all get an imprinting: from the environment, the family, the school. Clearly, the most powerful is the one that derives from the family, since the family contributes to the choice of the school and of the environment. Therefore let me tell you what kind of imprinting I got from my family.

When I was a child, I thought that all families were like mine. Even now it is difficult for me to imagine homes different from mine. To me, a home is a messy place, full of things, where walls are barely visible because they are covered with pictures, objects, and above all books. Even today, when I see a tidy house, with no library, one single painting hanging in the middle of a wall, I do not think that it is a home, but I take it for a hotel.

I had a happy childhood in a family that lived in love and harmony. I have grown in the belief that the world is populated by human beings that are all equally unique: all of them must be respected and considered for their individual value, which is independent of sex, wealth, class, and religion. I never even thought of race, so irrelevant it seemed to me. I believed that these principles were universally shared, that they were the fundamentals of the structure of the world, 'the rules of the game'.

Mind you, my father used to tell me that the world out there was quite different from what I had around me in my house. But I couldn't imagine anything different. Even if I totally trusted him, because my father was always right. Indeed he was always right, because my father – and now I say it as a grown up person – was an exceptionally

intelligent and wise man. But then I did not know it: simply as a child I believed that all fathers were intelligent and wise. Clearly, imprinting has the same effect, either on the perception of interior design or on human beings.

Anyway, now I am a grown up person. And I have understood that human beings are all unique also because they combine in a very personal way all those elements that in principle I thought should have been ignored. In real life they cannot be ignored, because they are prominent features. In other words, I am as I am also because I am a white, bourgeois woman. For now, let us concentrate on being a woman, and let us reason on the implications of this element. But before talking about women in film, let us talk a little about women at work.

I was born in 1948. In my family the women worked. To be clear: when I say that they worked, I mean that for the respective occupations they earned money that made them independent from their male relatives. If we take into consideration three generations, I had two grandmothers, three aunts, a mother and a sister. Out of seven women, only one (a grandmother born in 1885) never worked; she was a housewife who bore four children (one of which died in his childhood). She managed the house and was active in charitable organisations, but none of these occupations qualified as 'working'. All the others (including my other grandmother, born in 1882) always worked, and nobody ever thought that they may not have done so.

My mother and grandmother's work was somehow deemed artistic: my grandmother was a painter and a writer, my mother was a screenwriter. But I never thought of them as artists. I mean to say that I never thought that their works came out of an overwhelming necessity to express themselves. I believe that society, on top of buildings, food, means of transport, needs books, music, shows; and that all human beings must find a sense in

their own lives by contributing to collective life. So in my perception, as for generations my family had been active in the area of fine or performing arts, it was natural that all of us, men and women, would direct our skills towards those fields.

Many years later did I realise that my grandmother and my mother were in every respect pioneers.

I myself started working at the age of twenty-one, first at the radio, shortly after in theatre. In both areas the environment was full of women. Soon, I was twenty-eight and ventured into an independent project. I started to conceive and design biographical exhibitions. Suddenly the benevolence of the men with whom I was collaborating became distrustful. I understood then that as long as you are a subordinate everything is fine, but the moment they have to listen to you, or they have to follow your decisions, then you are in trouble. Then you have to fight in order to be respected, and it is sad to say that sometimes the fight becomes very basic, and you have to shout and to make scenes.

I realised that society is still male-oriented, because women are welcome in the world of work but only in a supporting role. Within a chosen career, it is very difficult for us to reach the top positions. Let's take the institutions where I have been active: at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, created in 1935 – half of the employees were women; but for over fifty years the Chairs, Managers and Board members were men.

At the first General Assembly of the International Association of Film and Television Schools, which I had joined, I was struck by the fact that among delegates from over 100 countries, the women present maybe numbered only four. I was elected to the Board of the association, and for at least ten years I was the only woman. I cannot tell you the complications when our meetings took place in the Middle East: to my great embarrassment I had dinner with the men, while all the other women of the house would dine in another room.

I started looking at our school with a new 'genre' consciousness. I noticed that in the audiovisual industry, the barrier was not only within each profession, but between the professions. As I said already, there is a hierarchy inside each profession, and women are prevented from reaching the top positions. But there is also a sort of hierarchy between the professions, and it was very difficult for a woman to enter those that are considered the top professions. We had many female students in the departments of art direction and editing and very, very few in writing and directing.

And, of course, we had hundreds of applications for the acting department. Actresses are always needed. If you tell a story with a female character, then you need a woman. Yes, but what kind of

a woman? And here we get to the first woman in my talk. An actress, a great one. Anna Magnani. She has been crucial in establishing the image of Italy in the hearts of millions of filmgoers. That was right after World War II, with the scene in *Open City* (see stills), a legendary movie directed by Roberto Rossellini in 1945, when the Allied Armies had just entered the city of Rome, but the war was still going on in the northern part of Italy. This movie has been analysed in books, and even narrated in a movie, which is not a documentary but a fiction film. In *Open City* there are dozens of beautiful stories to tell, but now I want to talk only about Magnani, and to tell you how and why she made it.

Anna was born in Rome in 1907. Father unknown, the young mother also vanishes, leaving her behind with a grandmother. It is not at all a poor family, certainly decent, petty bourgeois. It is a fact, though, that in years to come I never ever heard Anna talk about any of her relatives. This is the only picture of her childhood that I have found. [1]

You see her with two aunts, her mother's sisters, maybe. We see here a neat family, nothing is missing, only joy. Please notice the sadness in the face of the three girls. A deep melancholy that Anna carried inside all her life, a fundamental feature of her character – touchy, anxious, suspicious, always fearful of abandonment.

[1] Anna Magnani with her mother's sisters Dora and Italia, 1909





[2,3] Anna Magnani in *I milioni*, 1935

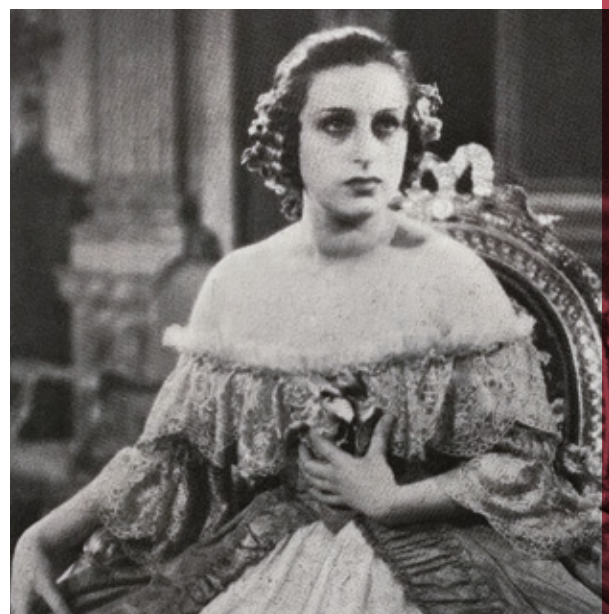
Like many girls of the bourgeoisie, Anna plays the piano, and as she seems very gifted for music she enters the Music Conservatory. In the Rome Conservatory, there was a course for acting for singers, and in the mid-1920s, they create a course of acting for actors (a big novelty, apparently the first proper acting school in our country). So Anna asks to change course. She is not handsome, at least her face does not correspond to the taste and fashion of the time; also her voice, deep and in tune, is unusual. But she is very bright and has a wonderful energy that her examiners notice and so they take her in. She is an excellent student, but leaves in the middle of the second year of study because she has the opportunity to join a major theatre company. She accepts the offer because she wants to earn her living alone and become independent. Three years of very small roles. It is hard to imagine such a powerful woman say lines like, "Dinner is served." day after day. And yet later, she would say that by doing it she had learned a lot, watching the other actors and listening to the mood of the audience. She decides to try another genre of theatre, and joins a less important company with a 'lighter' repertoire. You know, a woman that is not handsome cannot be a primadonna, but is allowed to be a comedian. Having discovered that she could sing, they offer her bigger and bigger roles, until she leaves this genre to become the star of a variety company. She also has her first important love affair and gets married. In 1935, she is twenty-eight and is happy, witty, overwhelming. [2, 3]

As you see, she doesn't make any effort to be seductive. She is not afraid to look ridiculous. In the meantime, she has ventured into the world of cinema, again in supporting roles. Her husband

Goffredo Alessandrini, a movie director, has warned her that cinema is even more merciless than theatre. Look how they try to form her to the current fashion. [4, 5, 6, 7]

To be fair, we have to say that in 1942, Luchino Visconti, who had admired her in Eugene O'Neill's *Anna Christie* – one of the few major characters she had played – offers her the lead in his first feature *Ossessione*, a film noir which will be the starting point of Italian Neorealism. Visconti is looking for an actress capable of great passion, but at the same time a real woman, far from the stereotypes proposed by the film industry. Anna is perfect.

[4] Anna Magnani in *La cieca di Sorrento*, 1934





[5] Anna Magnani  
in *Trenta secondi d'amore*, 1936



[6] Anna Magnani  
in *Teresa Venerdì*, 1941



[7] Anna Magnani  
in *La fuggitiva*, 1941

But just before the beginning of shooting, Anna tells Visconti that she is pregnant. Alessandrini has left her for another woman (something that will happen to Anna again and again), and she has started a love affair with Massimo Serato, a very handsome actor nearly ten years younger, who is the father of the baby. Visconti tells her that the shooting cannot be postponed, and obviously she cannot be pregnant in the movie. So Visconti finds another actress and Anna has a son, Luca, who will be the real love of her life.

As a single mother (her affair with Serato does not last), Anna carries on with her career as a variety star, in partnership with Totò. [8]

In Italy Totò is the top comedian of the twentieth century, the direct son and heir of *commedia dell'arte*. Even nowadays – fifty years after his death – he is the symbol of comedy. Traditionally, the woman in variety is beautiful and sexy, a pin-up. Magnani makes fun of pin-ups, but proves to be as seductive and desirable. Together with Totò, she finally attains celebrity.

At this point of her career Rossellini offers Anna the role of Pina in *Open City*. Rossellini does not choose her because she is good, rather he chooses her *also* because she is good, but most of all because she is popular. Rossellini's brilliant idea is to cast two comedians as the heroes of his most dramatic picture, actors that would bring warmth and lightness automatically to their characters. The audience would be bound to sympathise immediately with them, and the drama would be far more powerful and moving.

Just about to sign the contract, Magnani finds out that she is paid less than 10% of what Aldo Fabrizi, the male comedian, is making and becomes a fury.



[8]  
Anna Magnani  
and Totò, 1944



[9] *Open City - Roma città aperta*, 1945



[10] Anna Magnani in her living room, early 1970s

But ultimately she accepts because she is conquered by the character. Never mind that the part is rather small, and Pina dies halfway through the film. [9]

Of the whole film, an acclaimed masterpiece, the scene that everybody remembers is just this one. She wins her first award (for Best Supporting Actress) and becomes immortal.

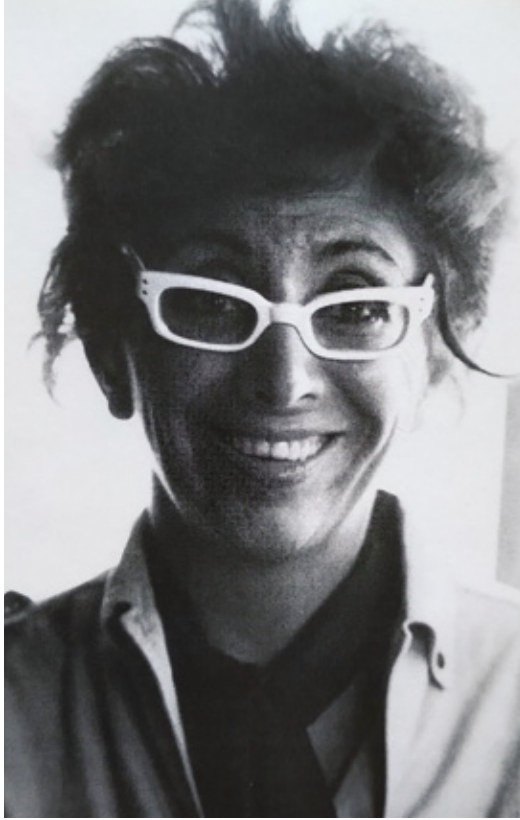
It is her moment. She is offered lots of movies. But she treats herself with a whole theatre season where she plays the lead in a number of plays and begins a stormy love affair with Rossellini. One year later Magnani is forty years old. She leaves the theatre and concentrates on cinema, where times have matured to tell stories of real people. Luigi Zampa offers her a role where the lower class woman that Anna has already portrayed in light comedies becomes more stronger. Magnani is so enthusiastic about it that she wants to develop the project together with the screenwriters. Among them there is a woman, Suso Cecchi d'Amico, who

becomes a great friend of Anna. Suso has made her début as a screenwriter only one year before, and has already written five very successful movie scripts. But we'll talk about her later. The movie they write together is *L'onorevole Angelina*, an excellent film, a lovely classic of Italian neorealism.

When a few years later Luchino Visconti proposes to Magnani a story written by Zavattini as a sort of pay-off for the missed opportunity of ten years earlier, Anna wants the screenplay to be written by Suso, because she trusts that Suso will write a suitable character, in which Anna will feel comfortable. This is *Bellissima*, another masterpiece. In America, where the film was released with great success, Anna meets Tennessee Williams, who also will become a great friend of hers.

The love affair with Rossellini lasts only four years, then – as it is known – he leaves her for Ingrid Bergman. And here Anna behaves like any woman would. The first move sounds rather clumsy: as Rossellini is making a picture with Bergman called *Stromboli*, Anna tries to rival it with a movie called *Volcano*. The second move is more proud: she accepts the starring role in the American feature *The Rose Tattoo* from the play that Tennessee Williams has written for her. With that, she wins an Academy Award, and settles the score with Bergman, who has already won one. She does not go to the ceremony. She does not fly, she does not fancy glamorous life. [10]

Every now and then she goes to a Roman nightclub pre-*dolce vita* because she likes to dance, but most



just for her, one a film written by Suso, Pasolini's *Mamma Roma*, and also the TV movies by Alfredo Giannetti. She dies in 1973 at the age of sixty-six. The first Italian to receive an Academy Award for Best Actress, she had partners like Marlon Brando and Federico Fellini, Burt Lancaster and Totò; she was directed by Rossellini and Cukor, Visconti, Renoir, Lumet and Pasolini. And yet, she did not score more than four or five greatly successful movies. What can we learn from her life, from her career? Her status of woman, the decision to be a single mother, the determination to assert her personality, have weighted on Magnani's career, in many ways limiting and suffocating it. If you want a full career, you must be more open, therefore you must accept the renouncement of certain things.

[11] Lina Wertmüller, midst 1960s

of the time she is at home, a beautiful flat in a baroque palace, with her son and a few friends made up of colleagues, writers and intellectuals. In the twenty years of life following her Oscar win and although the award brings her many international offers both for the stage and screen, Anna stars only in eight pictures, two plays and four TV movies. A rather small number of productions, compared with her early career. Why so few? What happened?

It happens that she does not like most of the proposals she gets because the characters are distant from that independent woman that Anna struggled to reveal under the masks, the make up, the constraints of her time, a woman that still is an embarrassment to society.

More rarely she rejects beautiful characters that she does not feel are appropriate for her. Only two examples: in 1959 producer Carlo Ponti offers her the leading role in *La Ciociara* to be directed by Vittorio De Sica with Sophia Loren who would play the part of her daughter. As in those days it was customary, both actresses (respectively fifty-seven and twenty-five years old) should be rejuvenated. Magnani turns down the offer and suggests to Ponti that to reach a more emotional effect, it is just Sophia that should play the mother, with a teenage girl.

In 1964, Franco Zeffirelli offers Anna a comeback to the stage with *Who Is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Anna has not acted on stage for many years, and is afraid. But more than that, she thinks that Martha is too American a character for her, and she fears that the audience would not believe her in this role. The same went for countless proposals. Anna tended to accept only roles that had been written

Here we get to the point I want to make. In all fields, but most of all in the field of performing arts, to be available and ready is a must. A relationship with this profession is overbearing, all-encompassing. Schedule is open: there exist no Sundays and holidays, not even free nights. A director that conceives and realises a movie often works at it for several years when his efforts – creative, emotional, practical, organisational – necessarily absorbs all his energies. On the other hand, life is made of many other things: love affairs, social relations, duties, frivolous occupations – things that all together weave the complex texture of every existence. I am convinced that many bright women have no intention whatsoever to renounce all this. Statistics tell us that at school, women perform better than men; their supremacy extends throughout university. But once they enter the professional world, women slow down. Now I am not sure that women slow down not because they don't make it, but because they decide that it is not worth it.

Then, why is it that men make it? I should think that it depends on a combination of factors. First of all because they are much more competitive, therefore blinded by the mirage of power; but also because a semblance of life is always provided around them by a woman – at times, by more than one woman. As Lina Wertmüller told me once, a film director *must* have a wife to keep away worries, do the house work, organise everyday social and family life, and to fill it all with love and affection.

[11]

Lina Wertmüller, our second woman. She is an overwhelming talent, a force of nature. Also Lina is a rebel. Born in Rome in 1928 into a bourgeois family, her father was a lawyer. She is a very small creature, not good looking, but bursting with energy. Since she was a child, she had a problem adjusting to any kind of discipline. She always boasted of having been expelled from eleven different schools. In 1946, she takes the admission test to the Academy of Dramatic Art, together with her bosom friend Flora Carabella. The friend makes it, gets the diploma, is an actress for some years and Marcello Mastroianni's wife for the rest of her life; Lina does not pass the test and falls back on a less prestigious school. At the same time, she dives into all kinds of show business, working frantically as writer, assistant, lyricist for the theatre, radio, television, even for a puppet theatre company.

She is the first woman in history to be nominated for an Academy Award as Best Director for 1977's *Pasqualino Settebellezze*; it was also nominated for Best Script and Best Foreign Film. After her, there will be only Jane Campion, Sofia Coppola and Kathryn Bigelow. Bigelow has been the only woman to win an Oscar for directing in 2010. Can you believe it? From 1929, after eighty-one years of men!? Last October, Lina was granted an Honorary Oscar. How did Lina achieve all this? As you heard in the clip, she mentions only two 'virtues', which are exquisitely feminine: patience and passion. To these, I would add an absolutely exceptional energy. I have worked with Lina for six years, running the Italian National Film School. The students lamented that she never showed up at school. On the other hand, she had long meetings with me to design the curricula. Well, no human being could



[12] Lina Wertmüller  
and Sophia Loren, 1990

In cinema she is a script girl, a runner, you name it; she is one of the hundred assistants to Fellini for *La Dolce Vita* and *8½*. Finally she makes her début as a director with a very good arthouse movie, and immediately after that, she directs a Spaghetti Western and two musicals. In Italy, the great success arrives when she is forty-four with *Mimi'* *Metallurgico Ferito nell'Onore*, the first of six pictures starring Giancarlo Giannini. She is the first woman director to enjoy a popular box office success with 'ambitious' films. Her movies inquire into the social roles of men and women, the conflict between North and South, middle class and working class, always with much irony, on the edge of the grotesque. Definitely a very brave author, with a very personal style. She's said that, "On the set, I am the boss. I shout, and I hit." In the span of a career that has lasted nearly fifty years, Lina has directed some 30 films and a TV series, written songs, novels, plays and screenplays, has recorded albums and has even dubbed a cartoon. She has become an icon. People recognise her in the street by her white eyeglasses. [12]

have accomplished all the lectures, labs and activities that she felt appropriate. You would need 40-hour days and 1000-day years. But she thought that all this was possible. Her work capacity was extremely high, so with her collaborators she was very demanding, practically insatiable.

But she was not frantic, accelerated. Not at all. And if when at work she was martial, at home she became soft as an odalisque. She loved her work, but she loved her husband much more. For him she could do – and did – everything. He was Enrico Job, art director, writer, artist. Lina had a very high opinion of him. She believed that he was much more worthy than she, both as a human being and as an artist. She did her best to please him in every possible way. They lived in beautiful houses designed and furnished by him, but it was she who looked after them with great care, filling them with friends to his liking. When nasty leukemia took him away in less than a fortnight, Lina practically went away with him. All of a sudden she lost her will to live; she lay on a couch and switched off the light.



[13] Suso Cecchi d'Amico and her husband Fedele d'Amico, 1946

My own mother also had a very high opinion of her husband. My mother, screenwriter Suso Cecchi d'Amico, is the third woman I want to talk about. Unlike the other two, who were very good friends of hers, my mother did not have a rebellious spirit. We could say that she always did only what she wanted, but with no clamor.

Suso too was born in Rome, in 1914. Her mother, as I told you earlier on, was a painter and a writer. Her father was a journalist and a writer, a critic of literature and art who was also interested in cinema. At the beginning of the twentieth century these professions did not pay, therefore my grandparents were far from well off. I could define them somehow as bohemians. As intellectuals though, they were very keen on providing a very good education for their children. My mother went to a French high school, she studied piano and spoke very good English, but she refused to go to university because she thought she should help to supporting the family. So after her diploma she looked for a job and entered the Ministry of Industry as a secretary in the Department of Foreign Trade. In 1938, at the age of twenty-four, she married my father, a music critic who worked at the radio, and while war was devastating the world, they had two children. [13]

At the end of the war, my father was hospitalized in a Swiss sanatorium because he had tuberculosis, and my mother was left alone with two children ages five and six. Her job had vanished, as had the Foreign Trade department, I suppose. She had to find a way to make a living for herself and for the children. She did translations and gave English and French lessons, until young producer Carlo Ponti asked her to write for the cinema so she ventured into screenwriting. She was cultivated, had read lots and lots of books, loved the movies, and was in desperate need of work. She really tried hard, she did her best. At the same time, while writing and

paying the bills, she took care of her children and wrote letters to my father, at least one per day, often two. They were long letters because she wanted to keep him company, to entertain him, to keep him in touch with the intellectual and social life of his country. They were beautiful letters that have been published a few years ago by my brother and sister. They portray a woman who is sound, witty, bright, but also frivolous and willing to have fun. After eighteen months my father came back from the sanatorium. My mother, on top of some six hundred letters to him, had written four films and won her first award. In a career that lasted sixty years, Suso has written more than 100 features, among which several are considered masterpieces of Italian cinema: *The Bicycle Thief* and *Miracle in Milan*, the first films by Antonioni and Rosi, plus many movies by Monicelli, and nearly all of Visconti's.

I do not want to talk about the quality of her work; I want to tell you how she did it. From the very beginning she loved being a screenwriter because it was a profession that allowed her to make the



[14] Suso Cecchi d'Amico and Franco Zeffirelli, 1954

most of her passion for literature and cinema, and of her curiosity for human beings (their thoughts, their stories, their emotions). Also, this profession could be done at home, so she could be constantly close to her children. Our living room was her working room, her 'office'. [14]



[15] Suso Cecchi d'Amico,  
early 1980s

She used to sit on the couch, her writing machine on her lap, and her co-writers, directors and screenwriters – all men – sitting all around her. In the summer the office moved to the house she rented for the holidays, a house that had to be a big villa, since she would host the people working with her. She used to say that she had been very lucky because she loved her profession and was very successful at it. Everybody wanted to work with her. According to me, it wasn't luck. To me, she was very much in demand because she was clever, but also because men who worked with her did not feel threatened by her. They did not perceive her as a competitor, they were not afraid of her. Consequently, when they accepted her suggestions they did not feel diminished. From her part, Suso's character was strong, determined, but at the same time flexible. She was always ready to listen. She was very straightforward, no one could intimidate her, but she had no ambition what so ever to assert herself. According to her, ultimately the film belongs to the director. The screenwriter must be loyal to the project, and should not pursue the goal of making his/her own picture. She said: "It is silly for a writer to impose his vision on the director. If the director resists the result is bound to be very bad. It is far better to offer the director a solution that is within his style". Whenever she was asked why she had never directed a movie, she said that she was incapable of doing it: "I know exactly how to shoot a film, but I am too obliging, and I would end up accepting too many compromises. If I needed ten horses for a scene and the producer told me we'd run out of money so I'd have to do with one, I would say, fine. And that is no good".

Once I asked her if it was true that she was paid less than her male colleagues. She said no: "I get paid the same, but I spend much more, because to work for me is very costly." She pointed out that to work from home meant to host a lot of people,

even for a comparatively long time; that a large, hospitable house needs a lot of care, and domestic help to look after it; that when we were kids we had a nanny – all tasks that her male colleagues could entrust to their wives. She had a husband instead, which is not quite the same thing. She did everything lightly – which does not mean superficially. Now that I think about it, she never gave us the impression that she was working. During her meetings, that – as I said – took place in our living room, the door stayed open, and we felt authorised to step in at any moment, interrupting the meeting to say or ask something, and eventually to chat with her and her friends. Also my father often worked at home. But the door to his study was kept shut because he "should not be disturbed". When my father had to deliver an article to his magazine (which meant every week), or the textbook for his university course, we could feel his tension and anxiety. I assume my mother also had deadlines to deliver her scripts, but we were never aware of it. She gave the impression that writing for her was a hobby rather than a commitment. [15]

She was always in a good mood, always ready to listen. I do not remember her raising her voice. I was stunned when several friends told me that they found her intimidating. For sure she was very much respected, even authoritative, but she was loved dearly by colleagues, friends, employees, students; she was adored by children, relatives, dogs and cats. People would confide in her, they would ask her advice, and even when she could not solve their problems they felt relieved, cheered up. In the community of Italian filmmakers she has represented an encouragement and a model for many women. If today in Italy there are many female screenwriters – and female directors too – I am sure that it is thanks to her. Many of them looked at her and thought, you see, it is possible. You can do it!



[16] Suso Cecchi d'Amico and Anna Magnani, 1956

After she died, an award was created named after her. Every year, the award goes to the best screenplay written for a movie that is centered on a beautiful female character. Unfortunately there are not many, and this is a fact I cannot accept. Suso used to say that cinema was poor in interesting female characters, while literature is very rich with them. All the actresses I know lament the same. In the past I thought that this shortage was due to film producers being all men. Nowadays things have changed radically and women have broken the ranks and penetrated all professions. Now women hold prominent responsibilities in the industry as producers, executives, broadcasters, decision makers. Yet female characters are still a minority, still conditioned by male imagery. Maybe these female producers are not aware of the fact that today audience for quality product is mostly composed of women who would be happy to see real women on the screen, not stereotypes – real women like those played by Anna Magnani. Maybe female writers and directors still have a hard time asserting their point of view, still struggle to be accepted in a male-dominated industry.

A possible goal could be this one – to tell stories by strengthening female characters in order to propose new cultural models. This could be better achieved by writing for a specific actress, as Suso wrote for Anna, to provide her the opportunity to express her potentials to their fullest. I strongly believe that the majority of actresses are like violins of which only one string is played. I do not fancy a 'feminist' cinema, inevitably limited in scope but rather a feminine cinema through which female directors, writers, and actresses would persuade men to pursue a real quality of life. [16]

I thank you for your attention, and I leave you with this image, so lively and joyful as it is, with the wish that you may never sacrifice anything important for the sake of your professional career.

**AUDIENCE** Thank you for your great talk. You were inspirational as you told these anecdotes about a director I know because I'm an Italian screenwriter and director but I didn't know that much about her and you made me curious to read more. You brought up a point that moved me because at this moment I feel angry about the situation of being a female working in the field of cinema. As you said, it's not that easy to be listened to or be considered equal to men but your talk was positive and I want to be positive for the future, because the future is ours.

I'm talking from my perspective; I live and work in Italy mainly. Now it's harder to write and produce a movie because cinemas are closing down and we find we have occasion to work more with various platforms like Netflix. They've come to Europe and are producing a lot so there are more opportunities that are opening. But in my experience, sometimes they might call me simply because I'm female and that's really frustrating. It's tough to say but it's the truth that sometimes they need a female writer or a female director so they open up the list and they call us. Maybe that's just temporary and we need to speak out more, really stick together, and keep doing what we are already doing. We want to be chosen for our talent firstly, but that doesn't often happen in Italy. Do you share my perception of this state of things?

**D'AMICO** Yes, I quite agree with you. The situation in our country is very dark and muddy and sad. Especially in the last two or three years, there's been a sort of frenzy in showing off about giving opportunities to women. I've always been against the quota because I saw it as a bit humiliating and the attitude is terrible. On the other hand, I think one should be selfish and practical and when you have an opportunity, jump on it. Don't think twice. Occasions sometimes arrive for the wrong reasons very often but this is not a good reason to refuse them. What is relevant is what you do with it. What is also relevant, is that these platforms very often want to impose a certain view or type of product. They can be extremely aggressive in asserting what they want you to do and they double-check you so it's risky. You should be careful and clever to get the opportunity without losing your soul. Your soul is what you want to say. My mother said that you have to find a way of saying something you believe in within the boundaries of what is offered to you. As a writer, remember that the films are not totally yours. My mother would tell me that a scene could have been written in a totally different way but the director wouldn't be able to direct it that way so it would have been silly to force him to do something that is not in his style; it's much better if she adjusts it and writes something she wasn't perfectly happy with, knowing the director will do it well – this is how she would explain it to me. You have to keep your style and integrity, but not to the point of refusing a proposal just because a proposal comes for the wrong reason.

**AUDIENCE** Thank you, Caterina. I just wanted to add something you just said to Anita because I'm the director working with Anita. I think as female screenwriters and directors we need to create a different system. Anita and I are collaborating in a strong way. I want Anita on the set with me. As females we are trying to change the production system in which we are working. How do you think about ways to change, or different approaches, to the system for women of this new generation?

**D'AMICO** The very first years I was running the film school in Italy, we would have meetings with foreign colleagues. We shared the same problem. We taught our students to be ambitious and tried to encourage them to make ambitious movies, relevant movies. Outside the school, however, the world worked very differently and once out in it, they would be offered a 'B' movie or a commercial sitcom or whatever. There was this constant conflict between the ambition of the authors and the conservative reactions of the producers. I had this dear American colleague who had a very funny nose, very thin, it looked like a knife. He said that in the film schools, we are also preparing the producers, so if we strengthened the producer course, then in the near future, people on either side will speak the same language! Not that they will pursue the same goal because producers are mostly more aware of the audience factor than the authors. An author tends to assert his point of view while the producer tends to see always the audience's point of view, wondering whether there will be someone interested in listening to the message in the bottle. The moment the two speak the same language, this communication can happen. It's similar to this fact of being a woman – what it means to be a woman. I tried to explain this in my talk, that we women often have a more complex viewpoint, have more complex considerations for various aspects of life that generally speaking a man might overlook.

Nowadays, we have so many female producers in Italy. I believe in making strong partnerships. First of all, we could find a way to make movies that cost less. We are more organised and far more rational than men. The other task is to figure out a wiser type of distribution model for movies. It's a very delicate moment as Anita was mentioning, with theatres closing down and the distribution changing lately from the theatre to the home market. No one knows what is going to happen. It is a fact that the great majority of the arthouse or more quality product in the audiovisual realm is made by women. Therefore, out there, there is a possible audience. You have to keep in mind that it's true that theatres are closing but it's also true that audiovisual products have never been so popular – never, in the history of mankind. We do have a lot of product. We've seen it during the lockdown. People have seen so much audiovisual product in the last six months like never before in history!

**AUDIENCE** I'd also like to add to the points just made by you, as well as those of Carlotta and Anita but ask specifically about the age of women when they really start making the work they want to make. Through the portraits of the women you chose to speak about, there was a point when that happened for them later in life as opposed to the notion in this industry that there is the very young, mostly male, artist in his 20s who makes these genius type of films.

**D'AMICO** And then vanishes very fast. [laughs]

**AUDIENCE** There are these very young women too and I find that really great. But I've also had the experience that women come into their power later in life. Maybe that is due to the fact that we're trying to explore more complex viewpoints. With age and experience, you can express that better because you understand more about life. Maybe you can talk a little bit about that because the industry expectation is to have these up-and-coming young artists, whereas women come into their own later.

**D'AMICO** You are expressing something that is terribly, terribly true. In my last few years at the film school, I was devastated by this notion because there was, indeed, great pressure from the industry for younger and younger and younger people. This is an awful thing for many reasons. First of all, young people get destroyed. They get all their talent squeezed out of them and then are thrown away. I mean it's really like a vampire! They want very fresh blood because they believe that there *may* be the fresh idea, something totally new, never mind if it's very raw or incomplete. Then he's dried up and so gets thrown away because tomorrow, he's old, and there's a fresh new young one. This concept is awful.

I had a major struggle in my school because the Board of Governors wanted to open courses to very young people. In the past, if you wanted to pursue a course in writing, directing, producing – the more conceptual courses – the minimum age was twenty, which meant that you couldn't get in right after having received your high school diploma. You needed to have at least two years of university or of life experience. We did have an entrance exam but the average student was around the age of twenty-three. The battle was over the Board wanting to lower the age to eighteen, which I was totally against. People who wanted to enter the writing or directing departments needed to have life experience or at least a cultural experience. How the hell else are they going to tell a story? What can you tell when you are just out of high school with the kind of high schools we have now? They are kids! It's not interesting. I lost, of course. The last year I was with the school, when I was glancing at the admissions applications, I noticed that the majority of applications for the directing

school came from kids who had digital experience. I thought, my god, do I want to see those movies? I don't think so.

I agree with you that women get there when they are older and it is because then they are wiser and it is precisely that they can elaborate more. Let's defend this!

**AUDIENCE** Do you think there is a way to change this notion?

**D'AMICO** It'll change when they get fed up. Can you name anything really relevant that you've seen by these young talents? Frankly, I can't. And it's not a matter of age; it's a matter of having a more or less mature viewpoint, having more interesting things to say. Cinema is not a video game; it's not a trick. There are also those type of products, fair enough. There's room for everybody, but this is not what we're talking about here, I believe.

**AUDIENCE** Women are wiser – I will take that with me. [laughs]

**AUDIENCE** Thank you – your talk was impressive. I'm thinking of a podcast I once heard with Reese Witherspoon, an actress I remembered from these light kind of love or comedic stories, nothing too deep. What was interesting is that she became a producer as well because she said she wanted different roles but no one was writing the kinds of roles she wanted. There's the show *Big Little Lies* with these strong female actresses that we all know. They put their own money into their own production companies to be able to write the roles for themselves. Do you think this can have a lasting impact so that we can dream bigger because there is an option to become that?

**D'AMICO** I never advise an author to become a producer of his or her own work. I think that that dialogue and partnership between the different roles is always very productive. Nowadays, it's very tiresome and difficult to be a producer but it can be done. It's a matter of taste and organisation. I also know actresses that are fed up with the roles that they are offered. They became film directors. The one that comes to mind is a very fine Italian actress called Valeria Golino; she also worked a lot in the States. The first film she directed was an excellent movie called *Miele*. She was lucky enough to have her husband as her producer and he's an actor also. As I said earlier, it is your colleagues and the alliances between the professions that make the difference. Given the fact that movies are very expensive to make. But it is possible.

**AUDIENCE** Thank you very much for this very interesting lecture, which was also very touching. I find myself many times in the same situation where I'm talking to producers about an idea or a script with a complex female character they're

interested in. But then during this conversation, they tend to tell me how I should write this complex female character in a way I perceive as arrogant, as if I was too stupid to write a complex female character. I was asking myself right now, what would your mother do in such a situation? You described her as very diplomatic so how would she deal with this power structure in order to find a solution to this problem?

**D'AMICO** It's a question of strategy. Often to pretend to be stupid is a very good way out, to pretend that you haven't understood very well and then go on and do it your way. There is also the advantage of creating an alliance with an actress who is able to say that she loves it and wants to do it because she loves it. Very often, the men in the middle want to flatten things because they don't understand it. They deal in fixed stereotypes and they want to stick to those. If you propose something more complex, they will refuse it on the grounds that it's too complicated or that the audience won't understand the character or will find her unpleasant or disturbing. The moment you make an alliance with an actress, it's a way to move forward.

Thank you so much – I wish you all good luck!

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# MENTOR – A SERVANT OF TWO MASTERS

03 JUNE 2019

CATERINA D'AMICO

LECTURE ON OCCASION OF SOURCES 2 PROJECTS & PROCESS –  
TRAINING MENTORS FOR EUROPEAN SCREENWRITERS | FILMMAKERS  
IN WARSAW, POLAND 2019.

With the support of the Polish Film Institute and Creative Europe MEDIA  
in cooperation with Wajda School and Studio.

**D'AMICO** When Marion Gompper asked me to come here to give this lecture I was quite puzzled. I wondered, why me? I know nothing about mentoring. [laughter] The invitation came because I asked Marion if I could come to listen to the mentors. She said: „But you’ve been mentoring people for thirty years!“ I didn’t know that. However, I thought back to my professional life and realized it was true.

For over twenty years, I’ve been the Head of Studies at the National Film School in Italy. I’ve never taught there. My role was that of a mediator: I would say a sort of conductor of a big orchestra, thinking of all the teachers and professors as the people who play the instruments. But it is a fact that nothing went into production until I had discussed the project. Therefore in that capacity I’ve been analyzing and discussing, in depth,

those days Rai Cinema received up to a thousand projects a year and supported financially about fifty: I had the responsibility to choose those fifty. More: I then followed closely the development and the making of each film that went into production.

After having verified that I have been mentoring people and projects for years, I had to rationalize how I have been doing it, in order to extract a method from the practice. As a result of this process, I have put on paper twelve points that I’d like to talk about. By the way, I’m sure I will be telling you things that you already know, but may be you have never thought of them in this kind of sequence and in this kind of connection.

## 1. MENTORS

I am a language freak. I always want to know what the root of a word is: where does it come from, what is the flavor it carries with it. So also here I like to start from the beginning. What does the word ‘mentor’ mean? Mentor is a character in *The Odyssey* and is Ulysses’ close friend. When he has to leave Ithaca for war, Ulysses calls his bosom friend Mentor and asks him to look after his son, Telemachus, to prepare him: one day Telemachus will be king. So we have a character that gives a name to a function which becomes a profession only many years later. In fact, the word ‘mentor’ associated with this profession comes up in the eighteenth century. I tried to find another example of this kind, another name of a character that has become a profession. I found one that is comparatively recent and is related to cinema: paparazzo. [laughter] Paparazzo is a character. And all over the world by now, it’s a profession. But let’s go back to our mentor. If we go by the roots of the word ‘mentor’, a mentor is not at all a teacher. Aristotle was a teacher. A mentor is someone who looks after a generational passage, a coming of age.



Caterina d'Amico  
presenting her lecture  
at Wajda School

hundreds of projects for over twenty years. In the meantime, for several years I was a consultant to the Italian Ministry of Culture, in order to select the projects that applied to the Film Fund; and also in that capacity I analyzed hundreds of professional scripts. Later I was CEO of Rai Cinema, a company that finances and distributes Italian movies. In

Mentor introduces Telemachus to his responsibilities to the traditions of the past, and in terms of his future responsibilities. Therefore, he should also help him realize what his own limits are as well as his strengths. In Italy we should be good at it, because our attitude towards formal teaching has always been peculiar. We are very suspicious of education. It's part of our national character, probably because we don't like rules. We don't have signs that say „Do not do this“. Instead, in Italy we have signs that say “It is very dangerous if



Louise Gough,  
Arash T. Riahi,  
Eric Collins

you do this“. [laughter] We know very well that if you tell someone not to do something, he will do it immediately. So we have to say it in another way. We never systematize; we're allergic to strict curricula, evaluation processes and all that. The only two great theoreticians of Education and Pedagogy that we had in Italy, Maria Montessori and don Lorenzo Milani, were both rather transgressive. As to the Arts, we stick to the old prejudice that rules suffocate creativity. We believe that Art cannot be taught. But indeed it can be learnt, as we say, 'a bottega'. A bottega is a shop, but also a workshop: a place where things, objects, artifacts are made and sold. The owner of the place, craftsman or artist as it may be, does not give lessons. He says, "Join me, look at me while I work and do the same". The master does not tell you the rules: you have to discover them by yourself.

Through the setup of the bottega, that dates back to the Middle Ages, an apprentice system developed. The apprentice could observe the artist and then find his own way to do the same thing, or something different and new. We have a history of bottega in all fields, not only in the arts, also in painting, architecture, sculpting, etcetera. This year marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Leonardo da Vinci. We have a huge exhibition in Florence to celebrate Andrea Verrocchio, the man who owned the bottega where Leonardo grew up. So we have this tradition of mentoring rather than teaching.

If we look at the world of cinema, how many mentors did we have? In Italian cinema, two stick in my mind and both of them had many 'children':

Luchino Visconti and Ermanno Olmi. Over the years each of them had built around himself a consistent team of collaborators: assistants, writers, DoPs, editors, even actors. In a way, a bottega. Everyone who got in touch with these directors has been marked by that experience, even when afterwards they did different things. This mark is recognizable in their approach to the profession that derives from the experience of working in the bottega of these masters. They absorbed the methods to which they were exposed, that became extremely rooted and therefore never forgotten. The people who were mentored by Visconti and Olmi didn't copy the masters: rather by learning a method, they found their own way.

Federico Fellini was never a mentor. He started his career as a writer for Roberto Rossellini, but did not take after him. When he started making his own movies, Fellini created his own style that is powerful and very recognizable. Although he was surrounded by hundreds of devoted apprentices, he did not produce many remarkable 'children'. The only one I can think of is Lina Wertmüller. From being his assistant for a long time, she grabbed all sorts of input from him. She then passed them on to her assistant of many years, Gianni Amelio. Can you imagine Amelio being mentored by Lina Wertmüller? But that was the case. Has he, in turn, become a mentor? No, but he's a wonderful teacher; even too wonderful. He has been teaching at the National Film School for many years, passionately instructing the students as to what to do and how to do it: and as the model he embodies is very powerful, the souls of the new filmmakers he is confronted with have a tough time blossoming. When he feels that they are doing something wrong, he grabs it from the hands of whoever is doing it and takes over. I have quarreled with him endlessly, begging him not to shoot the diploma films of his students. [laughter]

## 2. RULES

Before writing these notes, I called three or four graduates and asked them why, after graduating some fifteen years ago, they still send me their scripts to read and invite me to see first cuts? They told me that my opinion is very valuable for them. And yet I have never written a screenplay. Well, I did write one when I was about twelve, but I don't think that it counts. I was in love with Western movies. I had saved some money to buy a tiny 8mm camera and I wanted to make a Western movie: so I wrote a script. Thank God I lost it. I never directed a movie. Now that I think of it, I realize that this is the reason why I'm considered valuable: because I don't propose a model. They can't refer to anything I have done. I am not an antagonist or a rival. I am part of them, not something else. But although I cannot propose a world of mine – which obviously exists, but is not visible – I can propose certainties. Down deep, young people look for

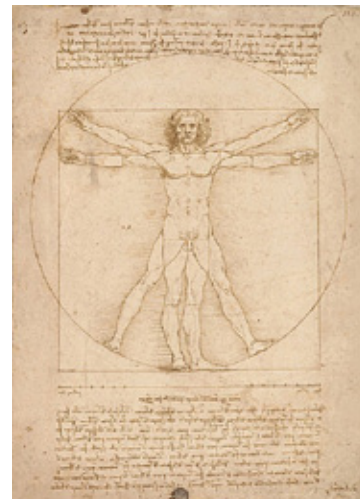
certainties; they ask how things are done. If you are a mentor, you must leave them with a feeling of certainty. To do so, you must achieve them yourself. So you have to answer this question: can there be rules for the art of filmmaking?

Twenty-five years ago I attended the Biennale of Architecture in Venice. There was a giant exhibition of Leon Battista Alberti, an Italian architect from the Renaissance, who was a great theoretician. In 1452 he wrote *De Re Aedificatoria – On the Art of Building*, a big ten-volume treatise that is still considered one of the most important essays ever produced on the subject. The exhibition was virtually about this book more than about his architectural work. I attended this exhibition with a friend of mine, who is a film director. By the way: we both loved it, and thought that the book provided a wonderful model for a film school. In the art

an impact on him. On display there was *L'Uomo vitruviano – The Vitruvian Man*, the famous sketch by Leonardo kept in Florence, in the Uffizi Gallery. I'm sure you all have seen it even if you don't know what it is: the man standing with legs and arms apart. This sketch has a note on the top, written by Leonardo himself, which says that Vitruvius states in his architectural work that the measures of man are distributed by nature in such a way that if a man spreads his legs apart and lifts his open arms just above the head, the navel becomes the centre of the figure: the triangle made by the legs spread apart has three equal sides, and the proportioned man is perfectly inscribed in two geometrical shapes, the circle and the square.



Before the workshop opening: Sources 2 mentors Eric Collins, Arash T. Riahi, Louise Gough, Paul Tyler



The Vitruvian Man - L'Uomo Vitruviano, Leonardo da Vinci, ca. 1490

of building we are confronted with a project that springs from the creativity of one person, but then is shared by people of many different professions. These many people must work together and interweave their own creativity into that same project, to make one single work that ultimately is presented to a much larger community, to be used and appreciated. Enthusiastically, we thought that this kind of orchestration had to be copied by the schools of cinema.

As in Chinese boxes, we found that Alberti in this treatise talks a lot about Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, a Roman architect friend of Emperor Augustus, who also wrote a book in ten volumes called *De architectura – On Architecture*, between 30 and 15 BC. We learned that the text of Vitruvius was in the personal libraries of Boccaccio and of Petrarch, and that the copy belonging to the latter, which contains many notes, is now in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. Do we take it that poets and writers studied that book? Could be. For sure, we know that Leonardo da Vinci studied it, through the mediation of Leon Battista Alberti. The exhibition explained that Leonardo, even though he did not consider himself a 'man of letters' – meaning that he didn't speak Latin – had read Vitruvius translated into Italian, and the book certainly made

Leonardo's sketch is fantastic. It represents the symbolic union between art and science, and tells that some very basic rules do exist and do apply also to art. By observing nature, Leonardo the scientist could detect ties between the things and relations between events. In a similar way, with the help of Vitruvius, Leonardo the artist discovered the rules of harmony, even within the human body. And if something so complex like the human body can reveal a logic that is hidden in its proportions, and can be reduced to a mathematical formula, why cannot there be a similar logic, and a rule, in the shape of the 'living body' that is a story?

### 3. THE TWO MASTERS

It can be argued that even the rules of science change upon new discoveries, that sometimes turn upside down things we've believed for centuries in physics, chemistry, mathematics and astronomy. One example for all, as we are now in Poland: the Copernican revolution. If this is true for science, it is even more true for the arts, because subjective feelings are much more prominent and styles change much more quickly. But certainly this is not the reason why filmmakers resist rules. They are suspicious of rules because they associate them with the world of industry, not to the world of art.

They believe that by ‘following the rules’ they will end up with a canned product that might be fine for television but not for the kind of cinema they want to make. They want to be free, pure artists.

But they are wrong, for two reasons:

1. If Leonardo da Vinci searched for the rules, why shouldn't we?
2. Film is art, but cinema is an industry, as Luigi Chiarini – an Italian theoretician – put it many years ago.

Every filmmaker has to keep this in mind and pay attention to both sides. And as a mentor, I have to keep in mind that I am a servant to two masters: cinema and film.



Sources 2 mentor  
Arash T. Riahi



Arash T. Riahi  
and work group:  
(l to r standing)  
Anne Riitta Ciccone,  
Dirk Nielandt,  
Hercli Bundi,  
Katarzyna Malinowska,  
Arash T. Riahi,  
(l to r sitting)  
Magdalena Puzmujżniak,  
guest Caterina d'Amico,  
Olaf Jacobs

## 4. THE BOND BETWEEN MENTOR AND MENTEE

If you want to be a mentor, first of all you must be in love with cinema. This is the first point otherwise you are going to be bored to death as well as being unuseful to anybody. You must be in love with the form and language of cinema. You must be curious about it, eager, gluttonous; but not voracious, not bulimic. Then you have to be very honest with the author you mentor: be ready to be seduced and conducted by him wherever he wants to take you.

You should not have any kind of prejudice and you should not be in haste. Which does not mean that you must love his story at all costs. It's a journey you're going to make with the person who comes to you for advice, a journey you'll make twice. The first time the leader is the author and you have to abandon yourself completely to his guidance. The second time, the relationship is reversed: you lead the way and the author follows you. While in this second journey you guide him to discover doubts, he should have the same trusting attitude towards you, just as the one you had with him in the first one. The chemistry works only if there is total trust. Together you shall explore the territory in order to find the best route towards the final destination, which in the end may even be different from the one foreseen at the beginning. But remember that the work always remains in the hands of the author, not in yours.

Writing is an extremely exposing venture. A person who writes a story and comes to you for advice is very fragile because to write is really to undress. This should be taken into account. The person you have in front of you is in your hands. You have to be extremely delicate. He's offering himself to you. At the same time, the author must respect you and trust you, trust the fact that you don't want to impose anything or rape his work. You simply want to look at it with him. You must be extremely honest but in a delicate and respectful way.

## 5. READING THE SCRIPT

The first time I read a script I have to be in a quiet place with at least three hours of uninterrupted time. I'm talking about a script, not a synopsis. I read it through. Zoom! If the action is fast, I read fast. If the action is slow, I read slowly. If I don't understand something, I go on; I don't re-read it. I don't take notes. It's as if I was watching a movie. I'm diving into the script and I see it all with my eyes. When I'm done, I ask myself three things. The first question is: am I surprised? The second question is: have I understood? The third one is: do I believe it? These are the only questions.

Then I read it again, not immediately, possibly the following day. And only after the second reading I take notes. First I make a synopsis by the sequences and list all the characters. Then I focus on the narration, its structure, the story arc. The elements I take into consideration are these: the first is the opening of the story. Does the beginning grab me? If it doesn't grab me in the first four pages, ai, yai, yai, yai, yai – very bad. [laughter] My curiosity needs to be aroused. The second element is the rhythm of the narration, or we can call it the accents of the narration. Flatness doesn't work; I need to hear stresses. The third element is how the events are chained together. The fourth point



Louise Gough and work group: (l to r standing) Małgorzata Koziol, Louise Gough, Matthias Huser, (l to r sitting) Małgorzata Wabińska, Filipp Kruusvall, Pedro M. Fuentes Rueda, Verona Meier

is its plausibility, the plausibility of the story with the characters. In this I'm a faithful Aristotelian; I believe the characters serve the story. First there comes the story, then comes the characters. They are in service to the story, at the same time they must be consistent and interesting. I take these notes for myself, because I have to understand what kind of work needs to be done, but I don't share them, at least not at this point.

## 6. LUMIÈRE OR MÉLIES

Then I meet with the author. *The first question I ask is what type of movie he wants to make.* There was a great Italian screenwriter called Ennio Flaiano. He wrote many movies for Fellini. After describing cinema as an artwork that lives only in the fourth dimension, that of time, he writes: "There are two paths that are already clear and that are very comfortable – one opened by the Lumière brothers and one opened by Georges Méliès. The realistic path shows itself in the example of the train arriving at the station and is always surprising in its various declinations, an airplane, a ship, a car – and therefore war, revolution, conflict. And then there is the fantastic path – the cardboard moon, surreal costumes, the use of irony, the comedy that doesn't exist in nature but is a deduction of man. It is not compulsory to choose one of the two. Actually, it is preferable to follow them both together, therefore inventing a third one that leads to the marvel of dreams and of art." If we stick to the definition of the two paths, we may talk roughly about cinema that proposes fiction or everyday facts, fantasy or investigation. We can call them however we like, but we have to keep in mind that these two paths imply very different techniques of story telling.

If the author goes for the fiction, he has to consider that the plot must be strong and cleverly built, with a precise aim, development and ending. All the events have to be conceived and stuck together in

order to create a seductive and satisfactory arc. On the contrary if we move more towards the hybrid documentary as in Cuarón's *Roma*, the point isn't really the plot. He wants to make us see the world as he sees it, to communicate the sense of that world, not the facts. Also this construction needs a lot of work, because you have to decide which small events of everyday life are relevant to create empathy and commotion (emotion?). This is the very first thing an author must have clearly in his mind: the type of film he's making.

## 7. THE STORY

*"What is the story that you really want to tell?"*

This is the second question. What is the story that is really relevant to you? Sometimes the story is a part of the script you have read. Sometimes it is even hidden in a subplot. This happens because often the author is shy, and if something is really relevant to him, he hides it. You have to be able to suck it out and place it in the relevant position. This may take time because sometimes authors can be very defensive about this.

*"Is your story understandable?"*

This is another key issue frequently overlooked. I will never say of a project "it is ugly". By saying so, I would put myself in a sort of upper position. On the other hand, I am not afraid to say, "I do not understand". By declaring that, I put myself in a



Eric Collins and work group: (l to r standing) Silke Heinz, Paulo Otavio Bezerra Leite, Mathias Noschis, Marnieke Coos Klarus, Eric Collins, (l to r sitting) Agnieszka Wasiak, Karolina Galuba

lower position. In a way, I am saying, "I'm not up to what you are telling me. Say it again in a way that is more simple, more evident, so that it reaches me. You think you are very clear when you're really not. You think you're disseminating signs, but I'm not getting them."

*"Why should your story be of interest also to me?"*

I insist that whatever we are working on must have a sense. Brodsky used to say that there exist no

literature if there is no metaphysics. In other words, if it doesn't have a meaning, why the hell are we telling it? When there is a 'sense' that makes the story interesting, yes, but if not, we have to find it. It can be there but the author is not aware of it.

After discussing these general issues, we can start the analysis. Why do we do this analysis together? I have the feeling that the author is inside a hole with his story, and doesn't see it anymore, while I am up here and I see it. I see things he doesn't see anymore because he's blocked inside this hole. I help him see the story he's plunged into, but also the context around it, that he's somehow lost.

I invite him to consider the dimension of the story. The story shouldn't be too rich because otherwise you can't absorb it or taste it completely. It can't be too poor either, because then it's boring. Nowadays, when we go to the cinema, we want to see something strong and relevant, not average. Recently I read a script that was given to me to analyse. Only in the first twenty pages there were fifty-four characters. Impossible. [laughter] Mind you, I am talking about a great director and a top screenwriter. They wanted to put everything in it, but the result is indigestible.



Live mentoring session with Louise Gough and Arash T. Riahi

I remind the author that the characters are functional to the story, and that his power is limited to creating them. Once the characters are created, they do what they want. They go their way. You cannot stop them, otherwise everything becomes fake and it's not believable anymore. You cannot force a character to do something that the character doesn't want to do. You have to kill him and create another one. It's better.

The way towards communication is empathy and empathy needs plausibility. When you build a story, it's much better to create something impossible but plausible, rather than something possible but unbelievable. And if they say, "But this is true!

It has happened to my aunt!", I tell them that I don't care. It's implausible. They have to make it believable. Otherwise it doesn't work.

In Italy there was a great producer called Franco Cristaldi who made lots of great movies in the '60s, the golden age of Italian cinema. He also produced the second feature of Giuseppe Tornatore, *Cinema Paradiso*. Tornatore told me that in the evenings after each day's shooting of *Cinema Paradiso*, Cristaldi would call him and ask what scenes he would be shooting the next day. Tornatore would tell him 'Scene twenty-four and scene twenty-five'. Cristaldi would say: "Why don't you cut them? What is so relevant in each of these scenes?" It was a constant exercise to break down each scene to see if it was relevant or not. It's much cheaper if you do this check before shooting. [laughter]

## 8. THE IMAGE

In our country, writers and directors usually work together. Seldom are you confronted only with the writer. I urge authors to be aware that the page is the page and the movie is the movie. What we are looking for is the movie and not the page. Lots of things change when it's on the screen. So once you have the structure, you have to look for the image. Characters are built much more on their behavior rather than on what they say. Fair enough to have long scripts with lots of dialogue, if you're aware that half of it will disappear. Once you have the body of the actor, the look, the gesture, the posture can all say so much that then half of the words are completely useless.

When you write dialogue you know how important subtext is, so let it emerge, become aware of it and then make it disappear again. What emerges, the sense within, needs to be conveyed with the image. Also silence plays a very important part. Have you ever noticed how many great playwrights were actors? Shakespeare, Molière, Eduardo De Filippo, to mention only a few of them. They all knew what the human body can give.

## 9. MINOR CHARACTERS

Give some weight to minor characters. Give each of them a small chance and give them a look, even with just a few strokes. They make the movie rich and give it texture. When Rossellini made *Viaggio in Italia – Voyage to Italy*, he asked his production manager to call a young actress to come to Naples to shoot just one scene. The production manager asked him how he could convince her to play such a minor role in a party scene. "Tell her she will have a leg in plaster", Rossellini told the production manager. She accepted, because the look was very unusual. I'm saying this as a sort of joke, but you have to make each character memorable.

## 10. GENRE

*“What is the genre of your movie?”*

Be prepared to answer, because you will be asked. The distributor will not be happy to know that it's an arthouse movie. At the National Film School for quite sometime we devoted the second year of studies to genres. We had exercises in comedy, thriller, you name it. And we did arthouse also. Personally, I prefer hybrid genres, that is very Italian. We invented the 'comedy Italian style', which is a comedy that tackles major life issues, and is very bitter and sad. In a film like *I soliti ignoti – Big Deal on Madonna Street* someone dies: in the fifties, that was very strange for a light comedy. In *Roma città aperta – Open City*, a very dramatic movie, you have comedic moments. The leads, Aldo Fabrizi and Anna Magnani, were then very popular as light-hearted comedians. On the contrary Vittorio Gassman, the lead of *I soliti ignoti*, was a dramatic actor.



Agnieszka Marczevska (Wajda School & Studio),  
Eric Collins, Louise Gough, Arash T. Riahi,  
Marion Gompper (Sources 2),  
Julie Metzдорff (Sources 2),  
Agata Gruszecka (Creative Europe Desk Poland MEDIA),  
Agda Gruszecka (Wajda School & Studio),  
Magdalena Koszalińska (Wajda School & Studio),  
Caterina d'Amico

At the same time I am aware that certain genres don't like to be mixed up. Martin Scorsese came to Italy many years ago to present *Cape Fear*. I invited him to the school and we chatted before he met the students. He said, "Don't ask me anything about *Cape Fear*. I cannot say what I think about it, because I'm here to promote the movie". I asked him what he thought of *Cape Fear*. [laughter] I had seen it and liked it very much. He told me that he had accepted to do the re-make of the great classic of 1962 because he wanted to experiment in the genre. In the attempt to make it more 'modern' he had designed it so that the bad one was not totally bad, and the good one had his dark side. But seeing the finished movie he had felt that ultimately this experiment had not fully worked. He told me that you can't play with the noir genre. You cannot fool around. You have to follow the rules because otherwise it breaks; it loses its strength.

## 11. SOLUTIONS

During meetings with the author, I come up with examples taken from books that I suggest he reads, or from movies that I suggest he sees. I have to say that I'm used to dealing with film students whose ignorance is appalling. [laughs] My hope is that by suggesting books, they may end up reading some. I never ever suggest a way out of a problem. I would rather give hints through literature or films I recommend. I consider myself a companion, a mirror, not a doctor. If I know the solution to a problem and it's so evident that I will suffocate if I don't point it out since he cannot see it, then I force myself to give at least three solutions and let him make the choice.

Why don't I offer a solution? Because this is the conduct suggested by Homer. In the last part of *The Odyssey*, when Ulysses returns to Ithaca, he



Marion Gompper (Sources 2),  
Robert Baliński (Polish Film Institute)

meets Athena, the goddess that has protected him throughout the journey. She appears to him in the body of Mentor and gives him the courage and the strength to fight the last battle: three people against all the suitors of Penelope. Athena/Mentor gives Ulysses some strength – but not all of it. She's a goddess, so she could have him win in a minute, but she doesn't want to do that. She encourages him but then he is the one who has to fight and to prove his own strength. This is what we should do. We should encourage and push and make the author see things. We should not give solutions. We must help them find their own originality and uniqueness and bring it out. If they seem not to have one, we must help them to find it. How? I try to make them feel absolutely free to

venture and test new and unpredictable ways. The author is in the role of the apprentice wizard and I am the invulnerable taster of his poisons. He can propose whatever he wants because he knows that I won't die. But I will react. And he will know by my reaction that what he proposes is good or bad.

## 12. THE AUTHOR AND THE WORK

Earlier I said that mentors – and all filmmakers – should serve two masters: film – that is a work of art – and cinema as an industry. But rationalizing my behavior, I have come to understand yet another thing: when working with students I tend to focus on the person; with professionals, the focus is on the work, on the movie. Does this imply a different attitude? Oh, yes.

I've been quite tough. After all these considerations, a last piece of advice: Please do not cultivate the myth of the brilliant improvisation, the philosophy of love at first sight. Remember the recommendation that Gustave Flaubert, a great mentor, used to give his young friend, Guy de Maupassant: talent is nothing but a long patience. So pull yourself together and work!

### QUESTIONS?

**AUDIENCE** Thank you. You said that when working with students you are mostly focused on their development and for commercial projects you're mostly focused on the film. Does that mean you provide solutions to professionals where the main goal is to improve the story? Do you share your ideas with the writer?



Participants, guest Caterina d'Amico,  
Sources 2 mentors and team

With students I am obviously older, more mature, more experienced; but often young people are very conceited, their self-consciousness acts as a sort of shield against their fragility. Therefore you must be inflexible and indulgent at the same time, without letting their stubbornness win over your patience. You know that the film they are working on will not get that much better. They will probably end up by making a movie that has improved only 30% of what could have been done; but it is quite possible that in five year's time they'll start seeing the result of your work.

When I worked with established professionals the relationship was probably unbalanced in the opposite direction. And yet I have been confronted with a similar kind of fragility, even if more concealed. With them you must be extremely respectful, but never indulgent. The work on the project must be very open and explicit, and may even become harsh. But I think it can be done, because I have always managed to keep good relationships with the people I've worked with, even though at times

**D'AMICO** A little bit more, yes; but not too much, because he has to believe that the ideas come from him. If a filmmaker is making a movie, he must believe thoroughly in what he does, otherwise he'll get it wrong. If I suggest a way out and he's not fully with it, he won't do it correctly but halfway. It's much better if he finds out by himself what the solution is. Let's say, I try to build all the conditions to drive him there.

**AUDIENCE** Would you agree that a great mentor is also a great manipulator?

**D'AMICO** Oh yes, one can be! It depends on how honest you are, really. I was never a producer. I was a financier. I was CEO of a body that invests money in movies. But very often I noticed that the authors preferred to talk with me than with the producer. Maybe they perceived the producer more like a competitor than an ally, so they would seek my advice. They would tell me that they came to me because I was more honest, more direct. I'm more direct because I have great respect for a person

who ventures into making something, who has the guts to do it. I have enormous respect. And they feel that. Even when I say something that disturbs them, they feel the respect.

**AUDIENCE** Can you speak about the technical aspects of the process, so as to help us imagine it better? How much time do you take preparing yourself and how much time do you take for the sessions with writers?

**D'AMICO** As I said, when reading the script, I need at least two days. I'm slow. I'm not a quick person. And then it depends. If I think back to the film school, I had sessions and sessions and sessions – many. If the sessions were with professional filmmakers, then it was maybe four or five afternoons.

**AUDIENCE** Do you decide when you're done, or do you wait for the writer to say that you're done?

**D'AMICO** The final decision is always theirs.

I tell you something that happened to me. In my opinion, the best Italian director working today is Matteo Garrone. I know that Paolo Sorrentino has a wider reputation and I admire him very much. But to me Matteo Garrone has something more. I had the opportunity to work with him when Rai Cinema financed *Gomorrah*. From the first time I saw the movie I thought *Gomorrah* was wonderful, a masterpiece. It's a movie I can break down to its cells and it's perfect. But very, very dark. Before it was released, I asked Matteo if we could swap two scenes at the end of the film. I don't know if you've seen it. The movie tells five interwoven stories, and it ends with the story of the two young boys that become killers, but want to act independently from the big bosses. The last sequence shows the shoot-out of the young boys on the beach, and the terrible image of the big heavy excavators that grab their bodies and take them away. Two sequences before this one, the movie wraps up another story, the one that tells us about the illegal disposal of toxic waste. After having negotiated to set up yet another illegal dump, Toni Servillo drives away with his young 'apprentice', but the boy leaves the car. "I'm not fit for this job", he says; Servillo says, "It works like that". And the boy says, "No, it doesn't work like that. I'm different". Then he walks away, alone. I suggested switching those two scenes. It was hopeless. Matteo said "no way", and so I also said, "no way". [laughing] The film was released and was a huge success in Italy, but far less popular abroad. It's so dark, so desperately dark that entire markets ignored it because there's no way out whatsoever. My solution was a pathetic attempt to put a tiny bit of light at the end. And of course Matteo Garrone was right to say "no way", because that was the film he wanted to make. It's important that you make your movie. Ultimately, this is what is relevant.

Thank you.



Map Story Logic with Paul Tyler

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