

Susanne Schneider

Between Obligation and Freestyle or Who Pays the Rent?

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SCHNEIDER: So we're talking about a very concrete subject today. And since it's a small group, I would like to improvise a little bit and ask you questions, and you can ask me questions. So we can get into some kind of discussion. So whenever you feel like asking me something or you want to contradict, please feel free to do so.

When I was asked to do this lecture, I really had a hard time coming up with something that has not been said, written or talked about a million times before. I considered topics like "The Writer's Journey," or "How to Survive the Desert of the Second Act," "How to Overcome a Writer's Block," all that kind of stuff. I couldn't possibly do those as perfectly as a lot of people have done it already. I was specifically asked not to talk about one of my scripts or my films – so what could the topic be?

Then I thought about what always comes up when I talk with my friends and colleagues, and very often it is about money. Money is an issue. But to be honest with you, it feels a little bit yucky to talk about money. No one ever likes doing it, except in very intimate circles. It's almost a bigger taboo than talking about sex. I'll try to do it anyways, because especially for writers, actually for artists of any field, it *is* an issue, if we are honest with ourselves. And we often come into a kind of conflict because we're supposed to be idealistic, we're supposed to live on our visions, we're supposed to give something without taking, and be happy with it. But it's also a business, money is definitely an issue and even writers have to make a living.

So I thought that talking about the potential conflict between writing for hire – which we all do at least from time to time or maybe always – and for commission, and writing without any request, just because you think you have an interesting project, you have a story that you really want to say something with. This sometimes collides, and to talk about that collision might be interesting for you.

Maybe you think: What's the problem? I love writing. I don't care if it's on commission. I don't care if it's my own story, or if someone pays me in the first place or not. But sometimes you come into conflict because you just don't know how to handle this. You don't have the time, you don't have the money. You're squeezed as if you were the bacon in a sandwich. . I want to look with you at the different aspects of writing and making money. I don't have a recipe, I just want to make that clear!

The question is, I think, that everyone has to ask him or herself how strict and straight you are as a writer? Can you make a living only working on projects that you believe in 100%, projects you are convinced the world needs desperately? And I don't mean this as ironically as it may sound. Who in this room can choose whatever he or she wants, write it and sell it? Great. How did you guys do it?

AUDIENCE: Getting a writing grant from the Guinness Film Foundation. And then making a perfect script and doing a film. And controlling all the reins. Writing, producing...

SCHNEIDER: That makes a lot of sense. I'll come to the funding point later. Have any of you

experienced the line between selling the script and selling yourself? You're nodding?

AUDIENCE: I used to be an executive at various film companies in London, so I'm very aware that you're judging a writer and a team as much as an actual script that maybe you're considering. I always try to tell people that you have to sell yourself as well. I think it's a really good point.

SCHNEIDER: Because often enough this is a very narrow line. This is a very small edge. And to me, I really think as a writer you are obliged to keep asking yourself this question. When all the demands overwhelm you, when you have a script and need to make changes, how far can you go with that? When do you start to sell yourself and not only the script?

Everyone knows the phrase, "I was young and I needed the money." When we have to do stuff that we don't believe in or we think, "Oh, Jesus Christ, this is a very silly proposition," or "How can I ever make this into a good movie?" but we have to say yes just because we need the money. And to find the balance between not doing that too often and staying in good mental, emotional and moral health: That to me is a never-ending task.

Maybe you don't have any scruples and take whatever comes your way. There are a lot of good reasons for doing this. And I'm not judging this as good or bad either way. People are in different life situations. But I strongly believe this is how your approach to writing manifests itself. Either you say I cannot do this because I don't believe in that idea or story or whatever, or you say it doesn't matter, I just love to write so I do whatever comes my way. This is, in a way, indivisibly connected to who you are as a human being. This is my very strong belief. We as writers cannot separate ourselves and what we do from who we are. I do think this is impossible.

To some writers things come easily. Others have to struggle existentially to do what they believe in. For example, there is a German poet. How many German-speaking people are here? A lot! Okay! So there's a German poet called Hölderlin. To those who don't know Hölderlin, he was a very famous German poet who lived in the 18th century. He was a genius but he went insane. And he was a complete failure with selling his art. Hölderlin was not only completely incapable of doing what people wanted him to do, it also was impossible for him to make any compromise with his art. Among his best friends were Hegel, the famous philosopher, and Schelling, the other famous philosopher. They could never convince him to be more sleek, or more flexible, never ever. He went insane and lived for 30 years in a tower in Tübingen, which you might have seen. He died, poor and almost forgotten. He never made it, although now he's one of our greatest poets.

A friend of mine, she got a subsidy for a script. It was a wonderful idea. She worked on it and wrote five drafts. But she was never able to make the changes that would have sold the script. She just couldn't do it. Some people don't have a problem with making changes they are not convinced with they fight to make these changes reasonable and believable, others have severe problems with moving away from their original intentions. . And you really have to know yourself very well as a writer. Where do I belong? Where's the line for me? Where's the line that I don't want to cross? I feel like I'm on a moral mission here. [audience laughter] But that's part of it.

There's a nice quote from Salomon Heine, the uncle of Heinrich Heine. Do you guys know Heinrich Heine? He was another German poet, wrote wonderful stuff. And the uncle said about his nephew: "If he had learned business, he wouldn't have to write poems." It makes a lot of sense for people who really work for money or purely for money. And I want to show you this conflict between what do I *want* to do, what is my inner necessity for writing, and what do I *have* to do to make a living and to survive. It's probably as old as the arts are. And I want to read a little scene to you by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, another German poet. He lived in the 18th century and wrote some of the most important German plays. It's a scene where the prince had ordered a portrait of his

mistress. And now the painter Conti comes and brings his portrait. I'm just translating roughly; I don't have an English translation.

Prince: Good morning Conti. How're you doing? How's the art going?

Conti: Prince, the art goes for bread.

Prince: Oh, it shouldn't have to do that. It shouldn't do that. At least not in my little territory. But the artist has to want to work.

Conti: Work? That's the artist's joy! But if you have to work too much, then you might not be an artist any more.

Prince: Well, I don't mean work too much. I mean profound work. A little bit, but a little bit profound. You don't come empty handed, Conti.

Conti: I'm bringing the portrait that you wanted me to do. But I'm also bringing another one which you did not order me to do, but I think it's worth being seen.

Why am I quoting this? The key message, and it goes on throughout this play, is: there are things that you do because you are ordered to do them, you're asked to do them. Which is great, we all want to be asked to do the work we do. We all want to be everybody's darling, and we want to be the hot shot. We want to have all the projects that flow around. And like a painting or composition, you get paid for a script. And there are other things you do because you want to do them. But if you have to work too hard on the things you *have* to do, that might keep you away from the things you *want* to do. As Conti says, you might not be an artist any more.

For most of us the truth is that if we only do what we want to do, follow our hearts so to speak, we might end up like Spitzweg's *Poor Poet*. Who knows this painting? For the rest of you, it's a painting where you see a poor poet. He's in a bed in a very rotten room. Rain is pouring down from the rotten ceiling and he's holding an umbrella. He's very skinny, and hasn't eaten for weeks. He holds the umbrella up against the rain. He is miserable, and the painting is called: *The Poor Poet*.

We have to find a way throughout our writing life or career to balance out the projects that genuinely come out of our hearts and souls, *our* stories, and those we're asked to write, which is not always necessarily a contradiction. Sometimes these two flow into one another. Is there anybody who has a very good experience of being asked to do something and thinking: Perfect! This is exactly what I wanted to do right now! [silence] No? You didn't understand what I'm asking?

AUDIENCE: Yes, I had a positive experience with the project my producer asked me to do. It's our project here, actually. Develop a treatment and write it with him. And it's going very well, we've changed a lot, we're both very happy making all these changes.

And it's about winning 7 million Swiss Francs. It's about money in terms of getting very rich, finding inner freedom. So the protagonist, everyone is chasing after the money and nobody gets it. But in the end they all find some kind of freedom and their dreams.

SCHNEIDER: So this is the perfect match, right? There's something you really want to do, you believe in it and most likely, or at least I hope so, it will get made. You'll have a producer and everything will go fine. How often does that happen? [silence] I'm shocked!

AUDIENCE: I'm probably in a different situation as I'm part owner of a production company. I always have a producer ready. So if the idea is good and the film foundation is interested and so on, it's basically the case all the time.

AUDIENCE: For instance the project I'm here with, nobody asked me to do it. I just did it. I'm just trying to do it. I'm not sure whether it will succeed. It's a different situation than when you're asked. Most people have initiated their own project and are hoping to realise it some day. That's a different

situation.

SCHNEIDER: That's exactly what I'm talking about. Those are two different situations. If you do this you take a risk, you take a lot of time, a lot of effort, you don't know the outcome. You just don't have a clue. And during all that time you have to pay your rent, the bread, the gasoline, the cafe latte and whatever.

AUDIENCE: But then there are two stages to this. I've done things where I've had a great time working with the director, the producer and writing something that I believed in, and everyone liked it, and then we couldn't raise all the money. The development process itself is stimulating, of course....

SCHNEIDER: And then you collide with the industry! Yes, absolutely. For the writer, because you cannot create a screenplay in one afternoon, one week – at least I don't believe so – it's a big investment. You really have to know, should I do this or not? What's my personal situation right now? Can I afford to do this? If you do what you said, you come up with something you want to write and you think it's important, I think this always has to bring you back to the question : why did I become a writer? What is it that makes me a writer? And I would very much like to hear from you: What was your insight and incident, to talk screenplay-wise, that made you say: "I want to be a writer"?

AUDIENCE: I have stories I want to tell and share with the rest of the world. It's my passion.

SCHNEIDER: Yes. Most of you agree?

AUDIENCE: You want to share something with people. I think it's interesting, you hope it's interesting. You think it's interesting and it actually is.

AUDIENCE: For me it's just making money and getting rich!

SCHNEIDER: There's at least one honest person here! [audience laughter]
But basically the truth is that we became writers because we want to tell stories, that's pretty obvious. All of us who can make a living, not only a living but a good living, are happy campers when we're telling stories. This really is an extreme luxury. And as much as I think any one of us will suffer from time to time, it's extremely luxurious to sit there and come up with a story that we think is important to tell.

Again, Hölderlin or writers like Kafka or Patricia Highsmith, when they started out, they had to work double shifts. Patricia Highsmith worked as a sales girl, for example, and then she came home, changed her clothes and started to write. And this really means: I have to say something, there is something I want to tell and I think it's good to share something with the world. I became a writer for example after I worked in the theatre. I was given the opportunity to direct plays and I hardly ever found a play that I really felt I wanted to direct. This maybe sounds a little bit vain, but I often didn't get the feeling that this is a story that I really wanted to tell. So finally I started writing myself. That was my beginning as a writer, first for theatre and then for film. And how does this go together with money?

The big task and the challenge is to get the chance to write the stories that you believe are worth being told. I think we all do that when we start. We sit down and write without having anyone who believes in what we write. We write the stories that matter, at least from our perspective. We have several choices. We become an indie filmmaker working for almost nothing and celebrate the principle of self-exploitation. But how long will that work? How long can you do that? How long will

you be satisfied with making little movies for little audiences? Maybe forever? Maybe not.

Or you're fortunate enough and talented enough that you have what is called a breakthrough. You have one hit film, and all of a sudden you can do what you want. All the doors are wide open. But that doesn't last forever, , as some of us might know and have experienced. You have to constantly prove you are worth the opportunities given to you.

But this is easier for a director than for a writer. It's pretty clear why that is the case.. Directors can choose from endless numbers of scripts and they can always find something if they're smart. Like, for example, Susanne Bier, who has an incredible talent for choosing stories out of which she makes wonderful films. For a writer it's not that easy. If you have a big success, of course, lots of people approach you, but most likely they come with their own ideas. It's very rarely the case that people come to you and say, "write whatever you want."

We're the first ones to start working. We're the ones taking the first step, without knowing that there will be someone who believes in what we do. We don't have a choice, we have to sell somehow. You can't go on forever, writing and not selling. This is simply impossible. And here we are in a very special situation, because writing for film means dancing on the edge between arts and industry. We're not free artists. We sometimes wish we were, but we're not.

The industry has demands, the industry has conditions and we never work alone. We need allies, we need people who believe in us, we need a producer who comes at the right time to the right person with the right project. We have to be a little bit like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. We have to play both sides. We have to stay true to ourselves, otherwise it's my strong belief that it's bad writing or at least only craft. You can live on that, a lot of things like that are around. This isn't bad or despicable, but maybe this isn't what you want. Maybe you want more. You want to share something with the world that you think is worth it. And unfortunately arts and industry often just don't match.

Writing a screenplay is not something you can do in one afternoon. It takes time. It takes a lot of time, we all know that. We take the risk, we work for months not knowing if anybody will ever care, and what happens in the meantime? So after all this time we spent working we need believers: believers in our work, believers to be our running mate on a trip where no one knows if or when it will end. At a time when producing movies is getting more and more expensive to a point where things get almost ridiculous, it gets harder and harder to find someone who believes in your *original* story and is willing to take the first step of financing it if there is no so called 'factor' connected with your story, like a best-selling novel, a story based on a true event, a biopic, a sequel, and so on. If it's a story that doesn't have a logline that grabs people immediately, it will be hard to find allies.

Who has scripts or treatments resting in the drawer? [audience laughter] Why do they rest?

AUDIENCE: I have many stories and projects. But you need the time and the funding at the same time.

SCHNEIDER: That's exactly it. What about you?

AUDIENCE: I have one where the financing collapsed at a late stage.

SCHNEIDER: Oh, that's bitter.

AUDIENCE: Another is a project that I think I wrote on spec with the idea of working with a particular person, and that person didn't like it, and I lost heart and I lost hope in the film, which I'd

got up to first draft screenplay. I never picked it up after that.

SCHNEIDER: How long ago was that?

AUDIENCE: Years, years.

SCHNEIDER: Maybe you should now?

AUDIENCE: It's funny, it's a funny example because then I showed it to another guy who said it was fantastic and he was interested. And I said OK, let's do it. It just never happened. And then again it became a question of he's in France and I'm in another country, there's no funding in place, nobody put down a few thousand, they have a deadline, and it's for a company, or somebody's waiting for it. It just seemed for both of us that the spec nature of the enterprise was just a bridge too far because we were both kind of busy and it just never happened.

SCHNEIDER: But that's often the case; you're too busy so things can't be pursued. Something is always getting in the way. I'm actually facing this problem right now. Something is always getting in the way, something that's very concrete, something I know will be made. And the thing I really want to work on is in a profound sleep. And then you have this terrible nightmare that someone comes up with a similar idea in the meantime and you go, "Shit! Now it's too late!" But does that ever make you doubt yourself as a writer? That there are things that you think are interesting or worth being told and you didn't sell them?

AUDIENCE: My stress has always been being commissioned, like by broadcasters or film commissions, and then either people somehow have a different brief involved in your projects and it never fits the brief, or the rights run out. It's always been an industrial thing that scuppered it in the end. It's been some concrete thing about rights or someone changing their job, those kinds of things.

SCHNEIDER: There's so much that can happen along the way.

AUDIENCE: I learned to accept it like nature, not everything can grow at the same speed. And maybe something grows. I know I have plenty of ideas. I'm very careful now because I think I cannot just develop *any* idea because it needs so much time. Even if it's a finished script or something or for a documentary. Later you need so much time to find the money and so much time to accompany it and so on. I accept it, it's nature.

SCHNEIDER: This is a very healthy attitude, I think! It's just hard if something is dying on the way, or taking a deep sleep that you think is a wonderful project or would make a fantastic film. This, I think, is hard. It's because not all ideas are equally hot. Equally where you start to shiver inwardly and think, "Oh my God, I really have to write this! This stuff has never been seen before, and this is something that could really make a fantastic movie!" It's a very healthy attitude. And with ideas and developing them, there's a quote I like very much. It's from Maurice Maeterlinck, who was a Belgian writer, he wrote a lot of opera librettos. He said, "To have ideas is paradise, to work them out is hell." We all know that.

So there are these scripts you worked on, but you didn't sell them. There are these other scripts you were asked to do and you sold them, and they were paid for. To get paid for your work is essential. I think we live in a society, we're all living in a system where money has directly to do with your performance. Money and performance are connected, you cannot say, "I get a wonderful salary but I perform poorly." This is really hard. Maybe if you've just come out of film school, you don't have a family, you're young, money is not an obligation, you don't have to pay a mortgage for

a house, you don't have any obligations so far, money is not an issue, you think it's great. You can write, you go to film school and you can make films. Things don't stay that way as we all know. You're all not beginners as far as I can see. So we all know the further you come in life the more commitments there are. It seems to be a law of life, somehow. And if you have parents that support you, or if you were smart enough to marry a rich dentist who likes to be your patron, you might never have a problem. If that's not the case, then, as someone said, you have to find the gap where you can do what you want to do. But you don't know for how long, and you don't know how often.. I know a couple of colleagues that live in very privileged situations. They have a rich background so they can breathe freely.

Just to tell you a little anecdote. The mother of a good friend of mine, when she was in her fifties she called the family together. The kids had already left home and they were living all over the country, so she called them together. They were sitting at the dinner table in her house, and she said, "I have something to tell you." She said, "I wrote a novel." And the kids were a little bit surprised, but also very relieved, and said, "Okay, that's great. Mum has a hobby so we don't have to take care of her. Oh yeah, Mum, just go on writing."

Then she said, "Yes, and I've found a publisher. They're going to publish it." "So Okay, Mum has a publisher. Maybe its like 100 books and they're printed in this self-published little edition." But it turned out she had t the biggest publisher in Germany and she turned out to be the best-selling detective story writer in Germany. Her name is Ingrid Noll. Most likely the Germans here know her. Some of her stories have been made into films, and she's a multi-millionaire. So she was extremely lucky.

If we aren't that lucky, how can we find the balance without working ourselves to death? First of all, we all know that it's really hard work on a lot of levels to write a script. It's not something that you can do easily. It's always connected to ourselves, and you cannot do it with an inner distance. You always, in a way, have to pay a price. It's not a job from 9 to 5 and then real life begins. In a way you suck yourself dry and you cannot separate your real life from writing. It's even more complicated. Jonathan Franzen said that it's important to write from the heart, but to exercise discernment, that takes time. That really takes time. And often enough the result of our effort, the film, is absolutely *not* satisfying. That's the other thing that you have to go through as a screenwriter. It can be disappointing, and your frustration can be as big as a church tower. You curse the director, you curse the producer, and even more so if the payment was poor.

I just had to go through a very unpleasant experience. I wrote for a TV format. The script worked, everybody said so. Then I saw the film, and almost dropped dead and took my name off it. This is really not something you want to go through too often. You wasted your time. Of course I got paid for it, but that's basically not really why I write. It's what you all said – you want to share something.

The system we all work in, and here I'm talking about the industry and not independent filmmaking, money always means, and I've said it before, how valuable your work is. How much are producers willing to pay you? What's your status? It's also about status. Money is also about status.

When I sold my first script that I had the chance to write at the Munich Film School, I immediately found a director who wanted to direct it, and a producer, and a broadcaster. A dream came true, and I was really very thrilled, believe me. And of course I didn't have an agent then, and I got an offer for how much they wanted to pay me to buy this script. It was about a quarter less than what was usually paid for a 90 minute TV movie, so I said no. I really don't know what gave me the courage to act like this. I was a beginner and that was exactly what they told me: "This is your first script, this is a big chance for you, you should consider yourself lucky!" And all I said was, "But obviously the script is good enough that you want to buy it and make a movie out of it, so please

pay me the regular price.” And they did. All I had was a very strong sense that this was a good script, and that I didn’t want to be treated unfairly for my work.

That’s what I always tell my students. I try to encourage them. Value your work. Don’t work for nothing! . Nobody ever appreciates cheap work. It just doesn’t happen. And I really hate, and I mean that, *hate* producers who go to students who do their first features saying, “Consider yourself lucky that you can do this. I’m not going to pay you!” And then they call me: Are you doing this right now? [audience laughter]

AUDIENCE: Most of the advice from producers is: take beginners, they’re cheap.

SCHNEIDER: Never, ever...

AUDIENCE: It was like a strategy in certain uncertain circumstances.

SCHNEIDER: Okay, this is not a strategy. This is pure exploitation. No one appreciates cheap work. It’s never the case. If you work for nothing, you get kicked in the ass. That’s what happens. If you know your story is good, sell it.

AUDIENCE: What’s the name of the film?

SCHNEIDER: In German it’s called *Fremde, Liebe, Fremde*. It’s very hard to translate. “Stranger, Dearest Stranger.” It was in the middle of the 90s. It was a TV movie, and thank God I got several awards for it. And I always encourage all my students, don’t work underpaid! You saw off the branch that you’re all sitting on . This is just stupid, it’s damned stupid.

The value of your work brings me to a hot debate that’s going on in Germany. Let me just briefly go off-topic. The Germans here might know what I’m talking about. I’m talking about what’s going on right now with copyright, intellectual property and the right to free access to information and cultural assets on the Internet. The people who are not from Germany, is that any issue in your countries right now?

AUDIENCE: In Sweden it’s pretty big because of the Pirate Party... Where I’m from as well.

SCHNEIDER: So that also has a lot to do with how much our work is worth as writers, painters or composers. And this is a crucial debate and a crucial issue, and I want to read something to you that was published by a professor of linguistics. He teaches in Bremen. And it was in a way the answer to what a German musician, his name Sven Regener, had said. He gave an interview where he spoke very strongly against the demands of the Pirate Party, and he used tough language, it was really great. Then 51 writers, including me, wrote an open letter, saying what we think about what’s happening, about how people think there is no such thing as intellectual property, they want to have a flat rate to access any cultural asset, and so on. You guys know what I’m talking about?

AUDIENCE: Yes.

SCHNEIDER: Okay, I just don’t want to bore you. This is the professors answer to our letter, and he also writes it as an open letter. I’ll try my best to translate it.

First of all, the letter starts with:
“Dear writers of open letters,
Dear junkies of government subsidies,

Dear slaves of the content industries,
Dear tie-wearing administrators and salesmen of cultural assets-"

I think that puts you in a very good mood when you read that!

So, then he goes on:

"First of all, no-one invited you to put your songs, your librettos, your scripts and films, your articles, your novels, your sculptures and your efforts as an actor, i.e. your work, in a public area. You did that without asking us. And you did that long before there was anything like the Internet. You stuffed the radio with your music as well as the TV programmes. You stuffed the bookstores with books. You stuffed the record stores with records and later with CDs. You stuffed the cinemas with feature films, the stages with operas and plays and you just wrote in newspapers..."

AUDIENCE: Excuse me, Sven Regener wrote that?

SCHNEIDER: No, no, no. This is one of the reactions to Sven Regener's interview. And not to forget, this guy is a professor of linguistics.

AUDIENCE: Who wrote it?

SCHNEIDER: His name is Anatol Stefanowitsch. I'll continue:

"And so you overloaded us with your work without being asked to do so. And where you could get a flat rate for that, you got the flat rate and you took the money. And where you did not get a flat rate, you took care to ensure we had to buy the access to your work, trying to manipulate us and persuade us that we need to know your work to be fully valuable members of society. You nested into the curriculum of schools just to make sure that we learn to see your work as the cultural heritage of mankind. And of course you also created the anti-cultures, the subcultures that gave us the possibility to retreat if we felt the need to rebel against this cultural heritage.

"Where you could give us your work for free because clients paid you for that, you loved to do it, and you did it. It just was perfect for your big plan to dig yourselves so deeply into our lives and brains that we would sense holes. We would have a feeling of deficit if your work, your wares were suddenly not there any more. Some of you made an industry out of that, others served this industry. From the cradle to the grave, you colonised our collective cultural subconscious and occupied it with memories from a song, any vision of life with a film heroine, a comic character, or the protagonist of a novel. Then you seriously wonder, you seriously are amazed that the people into whose heads you are constantly pumping this stream of content get the very strange idea that they want to share this content with the Internet? That they want to exchange it like they did before – exchanging physical data like cassettes and video cassettes and all that stuff? You're amazed that there are people who overtake our business model or want to make it better without even asking if they're allowed to take your content?"

Graciously he says that he doesn't have anything against us making money, but we're not supposed to get money for what we do. This is a very extreme position, right?

AUDIENCE: It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. What's this guy's background?

SCHNEIDER: He's a professor of linguistics.

AUDIENCE: Is he paid for *his* job?

SCHNEIDER: Oh yes. I'll read that short paragraph to you. Of course he's paid pretty well; he's a professor!

"Secondly, talking about money. I don't have anything against you artists and art dealers that want to make money. I don't know anyone at all that has anything against making money. Sometimes, I make money with what I write. And of course I can understand why you think making money is appealing. But mostly I write for free, just because I want to write. And with this I'm one of the millions who work, who compose, who paint, who write poetry, who make films for nothing. And who make their money in a very old school, old fashioned way – by working."

AUDIENCE: Isn't this written to be ironic?

SCHNEIDER: No, definitely not. I went to his blog, he has a blog on the Internet, and I went to it. Of course a lot of people were commenting on the blog and he absolutely defends it. The guy's very smart, don't underestimate that, and that's his pure 100% conviction.

Just to finish that, I think you know why I'm reading this. He says, "OK, these people work, right? You guys often say to me, 'Well, you can talk, you have a job for life, you never have to think about how you're going to pay your rent next month. But we have to live from singing, from writing, from making films.' But guys, indeed, you only *have* to do this because you've *decided* to do this. The network administrator, the truck driver, the CEO, the professor, they also have to live off something and that's why they work 40-60 hours a week for a living. And then they sit down and they compose, they write, they act, they play the guitar. You want that too? What's holding you back, besides a deeply rooted belief that your ideas are worth money?"

AUDIENCE: Well I'd love to see what kind of a script he would write, or song he would compose, or ... [audience laughter]

SCHNEIDER: That's exactly what Sven Regener said. What do you think we do? It's not an eccentric hobby, writing scripts or music or things like that. But it just shows you where the train is heading, and a shocking number of people think, "Yes, this guy is completely 100% right." And what's so shocking is the gap that it shows between the creative branch, the creative people and the users. I'm really shocked about what's going on right now.

AUDIENCE: There's a good reason people share art on the internet. It's because there is some quality to it.

SCHNEIDER: Yeah, but why should you pay for that? And what these people are saying is that it's not intellectual property. Why should I pay you for something that's not your intellectual property? The words were already there, the letters were already there. Every colour in the world was already there, so what did you create? It's a remix. That's all. And why should they pay for a remix. So, it's a very weird way of arguing.

AUDIENCE: Okay, how about a teacher? A teacher teaches something, biology or something, that's already there! So why would that person expect to be paid?

AUDIENCE: A lot of people think that artists or writers or whoever just sit at home, drink coffee, listen to music, enjoy their lives, and then they hand in something and it's just like a hobby. Because for them it's a hobby and they don't understand that for us it's a job.

SCHNEIDER: Yes, exactly. And the other thing is a 100% romantic idea that if you really are an artist, things have to come from your heart, and how can you dare to want money for that. If you

want to have money – this brings me back to Conti and Lessing – you might not be an artist any more. And this is, I think, a profound misunderstanding. Did you want to say something?

AUDIENCE: What can you expect from the masses who never deal with art, who are not interested, or don't know what art is good for? You have to make allowances for that, and make clear in your campaign what the use of art is for normal life. We're making a documentary about a hospice, where old people are dying. We found out that singing is something that brings them back to life. It comes naturally to them. They sing Frank Sinatra, or take songs and make their own lyrics to them, and it gives them great last days or weeks of their life. With this kind of stuff you can show them that art is not just for an elite.

SCHNEIDER: Why did I bring this up? Because we were talking about how much your work is worth, and if you can make a living doing what you believe in, and does that give you the right to try to make a living with what you believe?

What Stefanowitsch basically does is, he talks about what we call in German 'breadless art' ('brotlose Kunst'). It's a German expression for actions and activities, mostly in a professional way, that are important for the one who does them but don't contribute to the living costs of the person doing them. That's written on Wikipedia. And here is the old question again that a painter I used to know sometimes asked: Do I want to paint or do I want to sell? And does that necessarily have to be two pairs of shoes? Of course, hopefully not! If you're not lucky enough to be a millionaire with your books or scripts you have to struggle and find the balance between what you have to do and what you want to do. Sometimes this is perfectly in sync, like what you're talking about, sometimes it's not.

I read an interview with Jonathan Franzen, who you most likely know. Jonathan Franzen said that a piece of writing is not interesting if there is no personal risk, if it's not dangerous in some fashion. Whether you expose something of yourself that you'd rather not talk about, or something you're serious about that the rest of the world is cynical about, or if it is some kind of content risk. You might not want to be seen writing this or that, or it might even be dangerous to write it. Think about the Italian writer Saviano, who wrote about the mafia and is now threatened by them and has to live clandestinely. This is certainly an extreme example, and taking a risk by writing something certainly doesn't mean to risk one's life, but something has to be at stake. Exactly like for your protagonist. At least, I truly believe that.

First of all, it helps to be honest with yourself. So who am I as a writer? That's the question. How do I see my profession? And what do I want to achieve? If I were to ask you what do you want to achieve, what would you say? Where do you see yourself in like three years, four years, five years from now?

AUDIENCE: I think this is an interesting point. I agree with you that we should write things that are important. This goes for a T-shirt. It goes for a price. It goes for somebody who sells clothes. He shouldn't say, "Oh, this suits you perfectly!" He should love his job and say, "This is bio cotton. This colour is not so good, this colour is better." Everybody should do what they do from the heart. That's how I see the world, and this frustrated linguistics professor really makes his point. He invites artists because it seems to me they're doing something they like.

SCHNEIDER: And then it cannot be called "work".

AUDIENCE: Well, I think, without knowing this professor, but I get the feeling that in the science world there is nothing more worthwhile than scandal. He's written this on purpose, maybe not 100% believing in it, but he gets a name out of it. I don't know him, maybe it's a true belief but to

me it sounds a little bit like I'll write something that I know I'll get a reaction out of.

AUDIENCE: It's like the sex tape of the university professor! He gets free publicity.

SCHNEIDER: I'm not so sure that you're right. That's probably wishful thinking. I think we should all take attitudes like that dead serious. Dead serious. Because the train is really going in another direction, and we have to stop it. . It sounds a bit dramatic now, but we have to fight this battle. It's really time to do so. I think the time for leaning back and saying, okay, let them play, let there be a Pirate Party, let them fuss around, is over. It's really over. This is what I think. I take it dead serious. But nevertheless I hope you're right!

AUDIENCE: He really thinks this? It's so ridiculous that you can't believe it!

SCHNEIDER: That's what I thought when I read it. Then I read what he wrote, the letters he wrote, the blogs he wrote. It's not ironic.

AUDIENCE: There's another obligation, and Devon Mallett puts it very well: that if you are a writer or an artist of some sort, you have been given a dispensation from the heavy lifting, as he calls it. You don't have to do boring jobs, you've been given the privileged position of writing for a living, and you have to take that privilege seriously in terms of giving something back. I think that's the other side of the coin. Yes, it's a privilege to write, so what do you give the audience? What do you think about the relationship between the writer and the audience?

SCHNEIDER: That makes a lot of sense, and I think we're all willing to give something back. I mean this is what I hear from you. We want to give something back, we want to share something, there's something profound we think has to be told. We want to make movies and films and write stories that are worth being seen. And then it's a deal, and that makes perfect sense. But just to say, "Okay, we didn't ask for your stuff, so what makes you think that we need it? Why should we pay for something?"

AUDIENCE: Tell the professor, "Well, look, I don't enjoy what I'm doing, I hate writing, but people want to go to the cinema so I have to write! I'm sorry! I don't want. Give me a job at the university, okay?" [audience laughter]

SCHNEIDER: Unfortunately he's not here, that would be an interesting debate.

AUDIENCE: It could be a privilege that you're able to write, that you even get money, perhaps lots of money. At the same time it's a strange thing because I feel as if I should feel guilty for doing what I want to do. I think that's what many people think, but our society is so organised that if you enjoy something you should feel guilty. That's Christian society, I think, basically. Somebody who wants to be a sportsman, somebody who wants to be a doctor, somebody who wants to be a train driver, this is also something people like, but they don't feel guilty because they serve. I can imagine that there were other societies where a writer, an artist was somebody who also educated or served society in his or her way. I mean I totally understand. It's something I say when I'm working, when I go out at 11 in the morning into the city, and normal people are working and I'm just getting a coffee, and I have to say to myself, "Yes, but you're writing." So I know this kind of guilt is terrible. And I'm the first to say, "No I don't need money, I'm just a music person." But it's so, so very wrong, and it says a lot about our society I think.

SCHNEIDER: It's a very Protestant approach, that life should not be fun and work should not be fun otherwise it's not worth anything.

AUDIENCE: So why do you do this? Because it comes from you. I do it because I think it's me, as much as I can exist, and also I don't do it just because I don't have anything else to do or I think, "Okay this is the best thing I can do right now. The alternative would be something else." I do it because it comes from my personality, from my character, and I don't have any other possibilities. I live this life now. I want to do what I can do with my life, and also enjoy my life. Why should I be responsible for other people's lives? I don't want to be an asshole or anything, but I don't tell other people what they should do, so I don't feel that people should come to me and say, "Go, get a job."

SCHNEIDER: Or go, get a life, yeah.

AUDIENCE: But I think that's relatively new, getting to see how art is made. Art was mostly made to praise the king or the state or whatever. And most artists were anonymous. I mean painters, the guys that built the cathedrals, nobody knows their names. It's the romanticism of the 19th century where everything went wrong there because there the artists said, "I'm this genius, you know, I'm this Übermensch." And we're paying the price for that, I think .

SCHNEIDER: You think so? You think we deserve it?

AUDIENCE: It doesn't have anything to do with deserving it, but I think there was a time when artists were craftsmen. I still think that artists are craftsmen. But there was a time when art couldn't be craft, and the arts and crafts movement was something special which is interesting I think. I'm just trying to see what happened. I think in the 19th century, something really interesting happened and certainly in the beginning of the 20th century, when people like Duchamp said, "Art is all bullshit." Even artists themselves say it. Warhol said "Yeah, art is like, it's commercial, you know? That's what art is." There are some very strange things happening out of the world of the artists themselves. And I don't have a clue what the general thing is or how to interpret it. But I have seen that there is a lot happening.

AUDIENCE: I think the general thing is that when you're making art today it's art for the masses. Before it was really as you said for kings and the elite. And the common people never got a glimpse of art, except maybe in a church to look at a painting. But in the 19th century it started to be art produced for the masses, and there the picture of the artist changed because now it mattered what most people like. This is popular art. The days before, it was what one king liked, what one pope liked. And what the masses liked, they weren't asked. But when it started to be that what the masses liked is good and then there were some experts that say this is good, and the masses are like, I don't know, it's not good and then I think there came this imbalance where the masses say: "Don't pay the artists, they're just vain." A lot of people in the masses are angry because they say they give money to produce art they don't like. Lots of the artists, something the arts should do, criticise the masses. And I think this causes a backlash because a lot of people don't want to be criticised and say, "Okay, I'll rethink myself." So they say, "Hey come on, you say I'm shit and I should give you money." I think that's a major problem. The image of the artist has changed because art belongs to everyone all of a sudden.

AUDIENCE: I think that what you said about craft is really the nub of that matter. And that's what I was trying to say with the Devon Mallett quote. The reason I said it was that if you're a writer you have to first and foremost have a responsibility towards your craft. If you don't take that responsibility seriously, then you don't have the right to call yourself an artist, and you shouldn't expect to be paid for your work if you aren't taking yourself seriously as a craftsperson.

SCHNEIDER: That's absolutely right. I think this is a very important aspect. As screenwriters, we're in an almost schizophrenic situation. On the one side we have to be an artist and really listen to what comes out of ourselves, what are our fantasies, our ideas, our genuine approach towards a

theme, towards a topic, an issue. On the other side we work for an industry. There's no way around that. We work for an industry, and if you make a film and that film, even if it's a small budget film, needs people that go and see it otherwise it's a poop in the air. We're servants of two masters. And this is not easy.

AUDIENCE: But just coming back to this professor, no matter if it's art or craft or whatever you call it, in the end it's a kind of product. Of course artists don't like the term 'product' but whatever it is, it's something. And if this professor says nobody asked you to produce that so why should I pay for it? But then I can say, okay, I'm going to the shops and I'm going to take everything for free. Nobody asked this guy to put Nutella in his shop. So why can't I take it for free? So I don't understand his argument. I think it's very simple.

AUDIENCE: It's not the same, because if you accept that you can write, or paint, or do whatever you want without other people's financial input, then that's fine. You can do whatever you want, you can publish it in whatever way you want, you can hang up your pictures in Times Square. But if you accept that you're in an industry where what you want to create costs money, resources and time of other people, then you just have to accept that and learn the craft that will make that function for all those other people. Otherwise you should go away and write a novel, or paint a picture.

SCHNEIDER: Basically, the difference is that Nutella is something someone worked on: On an assembly line, the truck driver who brought it to the shops, blah blah blah. What I want to say is that the misunderstanding in the first place is that what we do is not considered work. It's fun. We choose to be artists, we choose to sit in our little rooms or our nice rooms writing. No one says from when to when. For example, I live in a little village. I work at night. Everyone sees the light is on until 6 o'clock in the morning, therefore the windows are closed until 12 noon. And it took some years before people finally realised, "Oh yeah, she's working," because they saw my stuff from time to time, and they saw something's coming out of it. But it was really hard. I was not working in their eyes. I just led a Bohemian lifestyle. That was the misunderstanding in the first place. This is not considered work. We all have an enormous amount of fun.

It's defining what work is that makes it so hard to debate. How do we define work? Among us we don't have to talk, we all know how terribly hard it writing can be and that it *is* work. But on the other side, and this brings me back to what you said, I think a very important point is that we can be completely self-determined when we write. We can take a walk, we can drink a cup of coffee, we can have a chat with friends. We don't have to deal with the boss, we don't have to deal with colleagues we probably hate from the bottom of our hearts. None of that bothers us until we get to the executives and boom! You now have the reality clash. To work in this "bubble" so to say is extremely luxurious and privileged, and might not be considered work for someone who works 9 to 5. This is a big part of the misunderstanding. For me it's actually the biggest part. Because who wouldn't want to live like us? Coming up with ideas, getting paid for it more or less. Having a wonderful life. Going to parties. Going to premieres and meet celebrities. Going to the Berlinale or to Cannes, or to wherever. Flying to Siberia or Marocco to shoot a film there. It's adventurous. We're children who can play. That's how we're looked at. And I think that's subconsciously part of the debate that's going on. Sometimes we are. It's good, we have to be!

AUDIENCE: But it's funny that most of the people who say art isn't a job adore at the same time football players or skiers or stuff like that. They're doing the same thing.

SCHNEIDER: They sweat! They have training! You can see them working, like the players of Bayern München and Borussia Dortmund.

AUDIENCE: But their work is fun. Many people work out after work just to get in shape and they

pay money to do it, so a football player can say what another man could say: "It's my hobby and I love doing it!" They pay a lot of money for it, actually!

AUDIENCE: My understanding is that art has always been, and is today, training for your brain. And if you don't read things you don't understand the first time, which are strange, which make you think, you will never understand that different points of view exist. You'll never understand that the minority has some rights or something to defend, and it will end in war. You say that what we do is education? We live in a culture and you know there are people that are defending our culture and so on. The left-wing parties defend our culture, and they forget that our culture is constantly changing, values are constantly being reconsidered, what's right and what's wrong, and that provocation is also a legitimate part of that. Of course, I can't stand any artist who only provokes without any sense of responsibility. But I can understand why provocation is so important in art.

SCHNEIDER: If I would play Stefanowitsch, I would say, "Yes, you're right. But why should I pay for it? Provoke whoever you want with whatever you want, but it's not my business."

AUDIENCE: We need to show these different cultures.

SCHNEIDER: I think we all agree. Absolutely. It's just we cannot neglect that there is a big movement that is on a completely different journey. And probably this is also a chance to rethink, like what you said, why are we here? Why should we get paid? Why are we doing what we do? It's a challenge, and we have to face that challenge.

AUDIENCE: I'd like to say something else – there's another perspective here. People talk about history. You mentioned Heine. The big novel by Heine, *Winterreise [Winter Journey]*, where the guy is the woodcutter, who is travelling through Germany, is betrayed and becomes an artist. And that's the way people became artists in the old times. People wrote that they learned a trade or whatever. I don't know since when, since the late 19th century, since there's a leisure society here, there are more people who are willing to write, willing to paint, willing to act, willing to direct than there are outlets for that particular work. And it sounds very hard to say but there is a supply and demand thing going on, whereby if there is a glut of art, of work that's there, a body of work, and a limited amount of resources to get that out, inevitably the squeeze will be put on people who are legitimate artists or who are legitimate writers.

Now I believe that personally a lot of people could write. I believe that in the general population there's a creative side in everybody. My mother, my father, anybody. If they could just tune into that, and they were willing to take a risk, like everybody in this room was when they were 20 or when they were 18. I'm going to try, and I'm going to give this a punt. I know it's not safe, but I'm going to try and tune into my ... I'm going to try to write, I'm going to try to do something artistic. I'm going to take a gamble. Most people don't do that. But they could! Most people *could* do something artistic like that. Most people can, and more and more people *do*, because that's the nature of the society we're in. Leisure society is kind of a harsh word, but you could call it something else. There is a freedom, there is a greater freedom to orient oneself towards more artistic enterprises. The price to pay is that there are simply more artists out there.

SCHNEIDER: Yes. It's not an elitist thing any more.

AUDIENCE: You say that we have to fight against the train. The train is going in a different direction and we have to start fighting and telling stories from the heart. But how do you fight against the train going in that direction? Do you have to go into politics? How do you do that?

SCHNEIDER: Well for example, without going too far now in this direction, it took a very long time, at least in Germany, for people to stand up and say, "Listen, this is not going to work." We need a copyright, you can't just have intellectual property thrown away for nothing or for a cultural flat rate. Whenever I hear cultural flat rate, I think about the Telekom. Why should that be? What Sven Regener, the musician, said was that artists are afraid of not being considered cool if they say they're not in favour of free access to any cultural asset on the internet. That we need a copyright, and that we need to protect artists. This is just not cool. You're old fashioned, you're old school, you're 20th century, you've lost it. Nobody, especially in the music industry, wants to have this kind of image. You don't want to be uncool. So that's why nobody said anything for a very long time. Meanwhile a lot of people have written articles, given interviews, like what I said before. Fifty-one writers wrote an open letter that was published in almost every newspaper, and now there's a debate going on, thank God. There's a big debate going on and it was about high noon.

It reminds me of *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* [*Biedermann and the Arsonists*] by Max Frisch. The arsonists are already in the house. The owner of the house says, "Oh nothing is happening, it's all fine. I talked to them and they'll go." Of course, they don't go. The house is burning down at the end of the play. And this to me is the situation. But that's the answer to your question. People are really trying to get their voices back. There are journalists writing in newspapers. It made me wonder about the journalists that it took them so long to react, , it's their profession too. Why did no one write anything about what is going on ? But it's happening now.

AUDIENCE: So what's your position? In Austria there's also some heated discussion about the way to do it. We cannot go back, and it's clear that we cannot take our stuff off the Internet. It will be there and there will be technical ways for people to take it. I wouldn't say steal it. For example, with my brother's film, which was the first Austrian hip hop movie, there are a number of youngsters who want to have the film for free. Some of them put it on YouTube and we warned them and they took it down. One of them wrote us an email, and behaved so innocently. You could really see this guy doesn't know anything about it. He's a complete new generation that's growing up with the possibilities of getting free stuff.

AUDIENCE: We're facing a generation that grew up with things being free. They have never paid for a song.

AUDIENCE: So in Austria they are discussing what the possibilities are. Maybe we could have a flat rate, or something that everyone pays like a tax, a minimum guarantee for an artist?

SCHNEIDER: No. I'm absolutely, deeply, old school, old fashioned, conservatively against that. 100%. If you want to have a song, you have to pay for it. Boom. It's 99 cents if you download it from iTunes. I don't see the problem. And of course I'm not talking in favour of hounding people and putting them in prison for 5 years just because they did some downloads. I mean that's ridiculous. We have to create a consciousness for those young people that, as we're saying, that *this is work*. People are working for this, and if you refuse to pay, there'll be no more songs. People cannot live from nothing. And they have to understand this, even if it takes years, and maybe it will never happen. There are these two positions: The ones grew up with the Internet, and are used to get everything for free. The others are used to getting paid for their work. That's the situation. And we have to debate from that position onward. How do we get together? Here, thank God and finally, the Pirate Party initiated a round table. The Pirate Party, creatives from each branch, administrators, the record industry people, the publishers, let them all sit together and talk and find out what the solution might be. This should have happened a long time ago.

AUDIENCE: Recently in film school in Brussels we had an interesting talk from a director, a Belgian director Jaco Van Dormael. He made a film called *Mr. Nobody*. It was a very expensive

movie, and it was actually very badly received in the press and there were a lot of countries where it was practically not shown, very much to his disappointment. But he said it's a huge hit on the Internet. He's totally glad that people downloaded the film illegally because he said, "I want my work to be shown." And that's a very strange situation for him.

SCHNEIDER: It's very short sighted. Of course I can understand and I have a lot of sympathy for that, but where does that lead us? What's the consequence of that?

AUDIENCE: What's the consequence? Then you say, OK, my film isn't distributed, nobody will see it, bad luck for me. I'll try harder next time. That's really, that's the craftsman. There are other economic things that play along and it's not only as an artist. You have a certain power, responsibility and at certain moments you lose it all. I totally agree that if you work you should be paid. That's it basically. But the Internet is such a huge resource. It's a library and I would not be so black and white about it. I'm totally glad that I can find things that I wouldn't even know *how* to buy. They just don't exist any more on DVD or film. And now I can have them for free or I can look them up on YouTube: bad translation, bad quality but I at least know what it's about. It's tricky I think.

SCHNEIDER: It's tricky and it's of course more complicated than it might sound in the first place. Like with everything, it's just about the attitude that you have towards things. And of course as I said I can understand that perfectly, and that maybe I would feel the same way and say, okay, there's like two million clicks and people saw my film. But where does that lead us? And even if he's happy, I do not agree that people download my stuff and think it's their human right to have that for free. It's not a human right, it's definitely not. I read an article recently where the writer said: "Someone's making money with this film. It's YouTube. It's Google. These guys make millions and millions and millions so why not go after them? This is just ridiculous."

AUDIENCE: That's why people are trying to work out contracts for creative people that involve how you monetise, how you work out the value of a click. How do you calculate the value of that attention, those eyeballs. And then that has to be reflected in the contracts for creative people.

SCHNEIDER: Exactly, because these guys get money for advertisements that are shown beside the movie. And Jaco Van Dormael doesn't get anything. No, that's not right.

AUDIENCE: So that's between the content creators and Google. We need to negotiate those terms. Effectively we're back where we started in the publisher / broadcaster-type relationship, and we just have to have new contracts for different types of content. It's a process, that's what's happening.

SCHNEIDER: But the process has to start. And thank God, that at least here it started.

AUDIENCE: Maybe we should all stop doing films, and just do theatre! [audience laughter]

SCHNEIDER: We'd all kill ourselves probably. Plus the theatres, there's a very interesting book that came out in Switzerland, it's called *The Cultural Infarct*. I heard an interview, it's shocking.

AUDIENCE: And another thing which is often forgotten, certainly because it's an industry, it looks as if we are all a little bit afraid of asking money for our work. But the fact is I don't know how many people in a normal feature film are at work. We put a lot of people at work, earning their money because someone has found a story. That's a very important point. In that food chain, you are the most important person that delivers.

SCHNEIDER: Absolutely! What about the cameramen, make-up artists, casting agents? During the writer's strike in America everything stopped! Everything stopped. I'm going to continue because otherwise we'll never finish. A lot of stuff has already been said.

We stopped when I was asking who am I as a writer? How do I see my profession? What is it that I want to achieve?

There's nothing bad about writing for the industry full time. Do the big stuff that brings the big money. I don't want to be misunderstood. I do not rate or judge if you work full time for the industry. If you work for daily soap in Germany you easily make over € 10,000 a month and have a wonderful and settled life. You can be smart and do that for some time, save the money and then write what you always wanted to write. It's like a crossover, you just switch the leagues. I know some writers who do that for years, writing dailies, and they're proud of what they do and feel like they're part of a family – the family of dailies. So you can be perfectly happy with what you do not having any conflict. And there's nothing better you can think of and you have a nice life.

In a way, of course, it seems bizarre to me that you can make a lot of money in a certain part of the industry, whereas if you write a full-length feature film your fee in Germany is 0.3% of the entire budget. That is really ridiculous. And because we are not in Hollywood and we do not deal with multi-million budgets, this really isn't much. The first feature film I wrote went over a period of almost eight years, until it finally got financed. It was an historical film about Hölderlin, a biopic about the poet Friedrich Hölderlin. The fee was ridiculous. I wrote 7 or 8 drafts. The film flopped. Definitely not because the script sucked, I can really say that! [audience laughter] The budget was way too low, the producer tortured the director, the actor who played Hölderlin had severe drinking problems in those days. He would disappear for days and no one could ever find him. These days he's changed, he's a perfectly wonderful, wonderful actor. But in these days he was in a terrible state. And the actress who was supposed to play the love of his life *hated* him and didn't want to play love scenes with him. She just refused, and so on, and so on. Just a lot of stuff that makes shooting almost impossible. And it's nothing that you can influence as a writer. All you can do is pray.

Anyway, I loved writing that script, and this is important to say. But as a result of all that work I had invested in that film, I was paid so poorly that I had to do double shifts because I was almost broke. And nothing came out of it, you know, as I said: the film flopped. It was not at the Berlinale, it didn't go to any festivals, it was from Kiel to Konstanz, from north to south Germany the biggest flop you can imagine. [audience laughter]

It was a nightmare. And I remember the night when I sat in a restaurant with the director, she flipped through the reviews and there was not one review that was good. It was a national slaughter. The judgement of the film changed during the years, but then it was just horrible. The other example of working myself almost into bankruptcy was when I did my first feature as a director. Of course, I wrote the script. I was poorly paid because the producer knew that I desperately wanted to make the film and we had a very small budget. And of course I was also poorly paid as a director. So I worked my butt off for a very long period of time for almost nothing. When I was done with the film I again was almost broke and had to work like a dog to fill up my bank account again and pay the debts. I'm not complaining, absolutely not. And I would do it again – not for that money, never again, but I would exploit myself, definitely, because the fulfilment of doing the film that I wanted to do, to do what I strongly believed in and to see my ideas and my visions appear on screen, to go to wonderful festivals all over the world was a great payback.

But the question is how often and how long can you exploit yourself like that. Where do you see yourself? Do we have a job like any other job? Is it vocation? Are you on a mission? The answer to

these questions is clearly your guiding line for making decisions. And it's also clear that your decisions are influenced by the situation you are in, of course. Are you about to become a parent? Do you have to take care of your sick mum? Are there any financial obligations? And can you really afford to say no to a financially attractive offer even if the project doesn't interest you at all? What if you have to feed children, buy them clothes, and send them to good schools? Some of my colleagues had to bury a lot of dreams of making feature films, making their own films, because of their life situation.

I've worked for the industry and I still do. I *have* to. I wrote series, and I wrote feature films. I've written detective stories and thrillers and dramas, and I'm in the luxurious position that I can choose the projects I work on. And as I said before, it's not a law that what you do on commission cannot come from your gut. It just helps tremendously, this my conviction, to find the point where it comes from your gut.

There's another story. I'll keep it very short. I was asked to do a feature film about Romy Schneider. You all know who she is? I was never interested in her as an actress. I just didn't care. So I went to the producer. The producer was interesting, it was a big company, and we sat and talked, and I could play very easily because I really was not interested. So I talked to my agents, and how do I get out of this? I didn't want to say no too briskly, I liked the producer, so I said to my agent: "We'll do it with the fee. I'll just call up such a tremendous fee that I will be out of this project immediately." My agent negotiated, and I thought the producer was going to have a heart attack and think I'm crazy, but he said yes. The fee was way beyond anything I'd ever imagined.

So here I got stuck with a project I didn't want to do. And I really had a hard time finding out what my problem was with it. But I found it. The problem was that it was Romy Schneider. She had such a public life. You seemed to know everything about her. So where is your very personal space if you want to write something about her that people don't already know? What's your point? Thank God I found it. I think it was a very good script. Unfortunately, the personal rights could never be bought so that was a problem that the producer couldn't solve. But that's also what can happen. It's my strong belief, you always have to find *your* very personal approach on what you write about.

Which story is worth being told? I don't know about you, but it takes a lot of courage to say no if I get a serious offer with an 80/20 chance that the film will be made. But there's this other story, the one I really want to write, that one that sticks somewhere in my brain and my heart. It can wait for a while.

So I start working on the bread and butter projects. It feels safe and comfy. I feel okay, and sometimes even better, with what I do. I feel fine. The last script I finished was for a German format called *Bella Block*, a 90-minute detective story for Saturday evening primetime. Actually today is the first day of principal photography. It was a wonderful, satisfying work. And I could get my car repaired and take a little trip to St. Petersburg – all those nice things you want to do. Art goes for bread. That's what Lessing said. But the other story pushes and presses and urges me to write it down. I know this story will take me at least six months to come out with a first draft. I will have to do a lot of research and it's a pretty complicated subject. And even though that I got the script funded, it won't help for very long. It's just not enough. So, what do we do?

There is this one very successful German screenwriter who works five hours a day on his actual bread and butter job. Then he switches over to the novel he's writing for one or two hours. He started writing a novel because he was so frustrated with screenwriting that he said he has to do something he has control over, and can bring to an end from the very first idea to the end. I think we can all understand what he's talking about.

I already talked about Patricia Highsmith. This can be a way of doing it – working double shifts. It

just takes an enormous amount of discipline and willingness to take risks. And here we are again – the risk that no one will care about what you write, that you waste a lot of time. You're a year older. You could have spent the time much more effectively. The risk that what *you* think is interesting or important is boring and completely senseless for the rest of the world. The risk that your belief in the story is not strong enough to carry you for months and months. Some stories, we all know that, shrivel away over the time like an old salad. And I'm sure you all have ideas for stories that lost their fascination over the time. But I believe that if you do not create these realms of self-realisation, you'll lose the urge to write, and over the time, you maybe become a very cynical person, or you drink too much, or you just give up in a very subtle way.

As I've already pointed out, we cannot separate ourselves from what we do. You cannot write with a self-distance. It's always you, thinking and feeling and writing down the result. If you don't belong to that lucky group that doesn't feel the gap between what is required of the greedy machinery of entertainment, and you love to feed it, this is a great talent that requires a lot of skill. But if you belong to those questioning if what you do is worth all the effort, and if you really have something to say, you might have a conflict of priority. You always have to ask yourself: What are my priorities? Again I'll quote Jonathan Franzen. I think this is a really wonderful quote: "What is fiction, if not purposeful dreaming, and a way to find and experience meaning? This personal struggle is what makes good writing so hard."

I completely agree with Franzen who was brilliant enough to write two best-selling novels that empowered him with the freedom to choose the subjects that he wants to write about – or not write at all, and do nothing. You might say that this works for a novelist, but is it a possible motto for a screenwriter? Yes and no. Yes, because it reminds us what writing can and should be. And no, because we would end up like Spitzweg's poor poet with no chance of surviving in the film industry by always digging into the abyss of life. But also, for us average writers and non-Hollywood big shots, I think this is a wonderful motto that is often endangered by our daily routine and needs.

Probably, and I'm now coming to the end, this is a very European approach. All the American screenwriters I've had the pleasure to work with, including Jim Heart, who wrote *Dracula* and *Hook*, and David Magee, who works with Ang Lee, they probably would be a bit bewildered by my thoughts. They just love their jobs and for them it's crystal clear that they have to serve the director's and producer's needs. There is nothing like a 'film d'auteur,' although they all admire this approach towards filmmaking. And of course, there is a desire to work like that. The difference is that with their work they make so much money that they easily can afford to take a holiday, a break from their, I wouldn't call it bread and butter but croissant and caviar jobs, and they can write whatever they want to write without getting into any financial trouble. They all have their little babies in the drawer written but not yet realised. I'm often envious of their ability to make compromises without complaining, their ability to be pragmatic and not vain and self-pitying.

I just want to say before I finish talking about money: I'm not complaining, I'm not grumbling and I'm not moaning. I love my profession. I just wanted to reflect this very persistent attitude that for any person who works creatively – artists, writers, painters – money should not be an issue. That was the discussion we had before. Why do we want to get paid for something that should be pure fun? And not only do we want to get paid, we want to get paid well.

I'll finish with another quote by someone we all know – Oscar Wilde. Oscar Wilde said, "I don't want money. It's only people who pay their bills who want money. And I never pay mine."

Thanks for listening. [audience applause]