

Vinca Wiedemann

When writing, what happens beyond the writing itself?

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VINCA WIEDEMANN I don't think film is of a different nature, really, than literature or theatre or other art works. The element of film that is art is a completely individual thing. But there are also other art pieces or artistic elements in the film that the scriptwriter did not create.

AUDIENCE I'm a scriptwriter, and if I see the movie of what I wrote and it is exactly what I wanted to see, it means there is no art in it at all. [laughing]

WIEDEMANN Yes, you think it would be paradise, but it might be your worst nightmare. That's the first thing you must get accustomed to. The only thing you'll never see on screen is what you were imagining while you wrote it. So are we here or are we still waiting? [She is formally introduced]

I'm kind of unstoppable, so please stop me with questions whenever you feel like it. I think I'll start by continuing the conversation we were just having because what you said reminded me so much about Dogme 95. Have any of you seen the Dogme films? Or have any of you *not* seen them or are unfamiliar with what Dogme is about? Okay, so the first films of this movement were *Festen/The Celebration* by Thomas Vinterberg and *The Idiots* by Lars von Trier. *The Celebration* became a huge and completely unexpected success. Even the Danish film critics were so skeptical thinking this was all some sort of stunt or something for intellectuals, and that no one would actually go and see these movies. I remember a Danish film critic saying this at the opening night, that we could finally stop talking about Dogme after this premiere. But the critics loved it and so did audiences. Is it a blessing or a burden? I don't know really, but it has influenced so much in the Danish cultural world ever since, and internationally it is one of the few waves created in the film industry after decades. All of us in the Danish film business who had gone through film school were happy about it but not surprised. It was the way we wanted to work. Some said that it was a great film, but that it would have been even greater if it hadn't been a Dogme film. This raised the question of could you have done this film and not made it a Dogme film? This is the core of what I would like to talk to you about today.



AUDIENCE Can I ask exactly what made a Dogme film?

WIEDEMANN There were these "ten commandments" written after one hundred years of filmmaking. The creators of the commandments felt as if film had become like a big cake full of everything, and we needed to take all that superfluous stuff away and get at the core of what filmmaking is. What does a core film ask? All the technical stuff, the lighting, expensive costuming,

all the devices of storytelling needed to be taken away to see where the core of the drama was. Where is the core of the storytelling? One commandment stated that the actors should never be slaves to the camera; the camera should be the slave of the actors. We came from the '80s where the directors wouldn't even talk to the actors; they would just talk to the cinematographer. The actor was an object that had to walk from one point to another and recite a line. The camera would have a very complicated movement but the actor was told to stand on a marked spot and told to feel something, blah, blah, blah. When the shot was done and the director said, "Cut", the actor might ask if it was good. But the director was already discussing the shot with the DoP. What was common was that directors would often be a bit afraid of the actors and the actors would be afraid of the director, and it would just be a strange technical set-up where some kind of motion would be manipulated.

Dogme wanted no props, no smart tools for storytelling, no music, or add-ons of any kind. The centre of storytelling is the moment of truth and creating moments of truth. If you had those, nothing else is needed. On the set, because no one had anything to hide behind, the story had to be sure to be true. Every moment was true and the actors were acting goddamned well. So there were grainy images, bad lighting – because there was no lighting – and a lot of handheld shaky images. But there was intense storytelling. It was also in the elements of the scriptwriting, something you should just get down. Don't think of suspense or dramaturgy. I think the Dogme movement felt about dramaturgy the same way as Buñuel states in his book *My Last Breath*. When he was young, he was so bored with conventional storytelling.

AUDIENCE I think we should thank director John Cassavetes, the director who most influenced this Dogme movement. He has global influence on all independent filmmakers.

WIEDEMANN I would say the big difference between Cassavetes and the Dogme movement was this crazy idea of having these ten commandments – no lighting, no music, no sound recording separate from the image, no props.

AUDIENCE Was more than one take done of a scene?

WIEDEMANN Yes. But a scene is also a situation and if it didn't work, you didn't move on until it did. There was a lot of improvisation, and if the actors didn't feel it was working, they would try something else. Another strange thing was that it had to be shot in this academy format. The other really strange thing was that the director was not to be credited. That was the only thing that no one really understood. I didn't really understand it until it opened in Cannes. People thought it was fantastic, and when Thomas Vinterberg got his award, he went onto the stage and he was so happy. After his speech, the moment he went offstage, he realised that he had forgotten to thank his Dogme brothers. In that moment, he had forgotten that collective effort. His ego just exploded. He was so ashamed. He spent the rest of the evening apologising. When I saw this on television, that was the moment I realised this commandment made some sort of sense. Filmmaking is about technical aspects and it is about egos – dramaturgical egos, but also directorial egos.

So, coming back to the question of could you have made the same story but not make it a Dogme film: I don't think so. Or at least it feels completely absurd to ask that question. What happens when you write a story? There is a conception that as a filmmaker, you get an idea and you have a vision of your film. You have your vision and have the script inside your head. How does it go from the head to the screen? Many people think this is how filmmaking works. If I could download what's in my mind onto a USB stick and screen it, you would see a perfect masterpiece. Unfortunately, we have a lot of obstacles in the way, and because of those obstacles the film becomes something else entirely. Then you might withdraw into your attic and create a new perfect vision, emerging like Moses did after talking to God. [laughter] This is the reason why people can ask this question. Vinterberg had a vision of a great film so couldn't he have made it another way? But we know that

this is not what film creation is about. I have never met anyone who had a finished, fully fleshed-out vision of a film inside his head. There is something inside, but it's something you have to build upon.

Let's talk about having this little something that you have to build upon. First of all, this is just something I am saying. I don't know if it's true. One of the reasons I'm saying it is that I've never experienced a situation where someone had everything inside his head. Maybe some geniuses can have this. I worked with Lars von Trier on some of his movies. *Melancholia* was the first film we worked on together. I was kind of a secretary to him, you could say. I did all the writing. When we were talking about this notion of having a discussion about what is beyond writing, I was thinking of my collaboration with Lars von Trier because he never did any writing on that film. I did all the writing. But he did all the creative development. I didn't write the script; I wrote *his* script. The role was more of an editor or secretary. But he never touched the computer. This film certainly has some elements of art to it I think you could say. Some might conclude that there had been a really strong vision from the beginning.

The first time he and I sat down together, he was emerging from a very severe depression and still feeling pretty bad. He felt he would never be able to make a film again. The producer called too early and he told him that he had nothing. In a way, it was too early, but when does an idea start? For you, perhaps it starts with the need to express yourselves, to express something. But let's face it you could also start with the need for some money, or the need to show someone that you're not a complete disaster. You've been calling yourself a scriptwriter or a filmmaker for three years and you haven't made a film. You get to a level of desperation where you feel something must happen. That's also a really good starting point for a film. Vanity, money, wanting someone to look at you – there are lots of reasons for this need to get a film project going. If you don't have an idea, you might have a beginning and an ending and a title. Maybe this passes for being very far in your development.

Lars von Trier had that when we started. How many have seen *Melancholia*? Okay, well, for those who haven't, this will be a spoiler. He knew it would be about two sisters. In the beginning, one of them will get married. The ending will be the end of the world. It would be in two parts. In the first part, one of the sisters would be the main character, and in the second part, the other sister would be the main character. That was it. This is a genius and this is the only thing he knew. What would the normal writer do? Maybe he or she would write this down? That's what we did. I told him we could start with that. Why couldn't he do that? All he needed to do would be to sit down and write out this synopsis and show it to the producer. This is a writer-director but he couldn't do it because he thought it wasn't anything he could develop into a film. For him, scriptwriting is nothing. It's not a finished piece of art. It's just a tool for communication with your film crew and with the financiers. He acknowledged the need to have a script. It's all built up in his mind but the problem is he doesn't remember so well. Or that if it's in his head, he actually has to talk to so many people. His way of developing something is not about writing. But it's also not just about building the pieces inside his head. That might be what he thinks it is but I've been observing him, and he is great as an inspiration of what it takes to develop an idea apart from sitting in front of a computer. Sitting in front of your computer will be useful in the long term of a script's development. I will try not to talk too much about that because I'm sure you know a lot about it already.

The really hard thing about writing is that it's a very lonely process. It can be a great process if you can establish a dialogue between yourself and the computer. That's often how you get things going. And then it is a back and forth of writing, re-thinking, re-writing – a dialogue between you and what you have written. I think this is how many creative processes work. This is so different from how many playwrights write. Many playwrights try to have one long wave of creation by beginning to write and not stopping, making one continuous movement. When it's done, it's more

or less there. And then come all these horrible theatre producers and commissioning editors who want re-writes. It's the worst possible thing you can ask. Isn't it so?

Playwrights are always horrified when they enter the film world. Because there is just one long request for re-writes. It's a completely different process.

AUDIENCE When you're in rehearsal, the director will turn to you and ask to change a word. What a great relationship. [laughter]

WIEDEMANN Or could I please take this one piece of dialogue out? And I would say, no, I think it's really important and the director will say, okay. Maybe we can just show this without words? No, no, I think this line is really crucial. This is how it works in the theatre. In film, it's completely different.

So, if you don't write, what would you do? Lars von Trier does not see himself as a writer. He does see himself as a storyteller. I think he's been the same as from when he was a child – he likes to entertain. He's really funny. At his film company, Zentropa, he used to walk around and say hello to people. You would feel really honoured when you just met him and he'd start to tell you about his new idea for a scene. "A nearly blind lady has shot someone in order to get some money for her son's surgery. She's convicted to death and she will say she did it because she loved him so much." You would feel so privileged that he had just shared a scene with you from his next movie. And then he would say, bye-bye! Then you'd hear him enter the next office and hear him say exactly the same thing. Maybe he would tell the story a bit differently. This would also happen in the canteen during lunch. He would sit and entertain the whole table. This is part of his method. He's sharing a story before there is anything more than a title, maybe even before the title.

So with *Melancholia* and in the first stages of *Nymphomaniac*, he would start sharing. We would be in the canteen and over lunch his producer would ask him about a new film. He would say that he thought *Melancholia* was much too neat, so now he thought of making a story about an old man who is dying. He's lying in his bed and shitting all over himself and has these horrible bedsores. The shit gets into the wounds. The title would be *The Old Man Shits in His Wounds*. The producer would laugh and tell him that was very funny and that he thought it would be a big commercial hit. They would sit and tease one another like that.

At lunchtime one day, he came and told us he had another idea. You can choose: either we make a film about an old man lying in blah, blah, blah, or we make a film about a nymphomaniac. We took the nymphomaniac idea. [laughter] So he starts walking in and out of the offices talking about nymphomania. A lot of women work at Zentropa, so he started to ask them about early sexual experiences, but doing it in a really okay way and in total confidence. So he did storytelling, sharing and research from an early stage of an idea.

How early is it to share ideas? I think most of you might have a method that works the other way where you work on the idea alone before sharing it. You might want to get to the point where you can write a synopsis or storyline or a first draft before sharing. You feel too insecure otherwise and it seems dangerous. I think the reason Lars can do it is because he has his own company and in that, there is security. He never invited people into *his* office. He visited others but never shut the door so everyone could hear him. He also never told the whole story, just a fragment. He never told the whole thing and therefore, never lost control. He could test things out. If he told the same situation in three different offices, it would be told a bit differently each time so he could feel it out and see how it went. He could see people's various reactions, and he could also hear how it sounded when he told it.

When we started working together, he told me that he didn't want me to put anything of my own into his film. Don't feel you need to improve it, he would tell me, wanting to be sure that I wouldn't change anything. What he needed from me was someone to applaud. When he told me something, I was to applaud. [clapping hands] But I wasn't just to applaud; I was to be intelligent. "This is so good, Lars, but maybe you can do it a little bit better." He wanted encouragement to do better from anyone he shared these bits and pieces of information with.

My first piece of advice when you are developing a story is don't think of yourself as a writer. Think of yourself as a storyteller from day one. The best way of developing new material is through telling your story. You will be in contact with your audience while still having a safe area. You define who your audience is and you define how much you will tell them. It is important to define a safe space where you feel secure. I would also advise teaming up with someone as soon as possible. This is a way of teaming up with your audience, obviously. It could be anyone, really – a boyfriend, your mother, a friend. If you have an idea and want to make it into a movie, it will typically be a producer, director or scriptwriter. If you're a writer, find a producer or a director. The earlier you can get valuable feedback in a sustainable way from these partners, the better.

Coming back to Dogme, this is how they worked together. Dogme is a good example of what can happen with really good partners. If there is a really good collaboration between a writer and a director and then a producer and the result is a great film, then what happens next time? Next time you just know that you want to work together. So the collaboration doesn't necessarily start with the idea, it starts with the question of what you will do together next.

There are different stories about how Dogme began but one of the versions is that Lars von Trier and producer Peter Ålbæk were sitting together and talking about how it had been hell to finance their films. It had taken years. The average Danish movie back then cost around two million euros. The first million would be easy to get. The second million would be extremely difficult to get. So they thought why not make films for a million and set about figuring out how to do that. They knew that if they tried to make similar films for half the money, they would look like shit. They knew they needed a concept that involved making cheap films that was also a provocative concept, as well as artistic, something bigger than just one movie. Peter was really clever. He told Lars that it sounded great. He didn't say that he would make a low-budget concept. He himself would say he's not that clever.

So five directors got together and tried to figure out what would be fun to do. And they set about making the rules of the game. The rules of the game would be the concept that would challenge them as filmmakers. So they jotted down these ten commandments to follow. When you read what they wrote, it's about how to produce films and how to finance them. It was also about how to use cinematography and sound design. They were bored to death with smooth sound. They were not just into Cassavetes. They were also into Godard and his way of using sound and editing. The whole concept that an edit be smooth and invisible was boring to them. They wanted to take away all the smooth, nice manipulative devices. They knew it would be impossible to take away, but those would be the rules of the game.

Coming back to development and the whole idea of having rules for that stage is another way of dealing with your writing. It will actually be a big help for you. Thomas Vinterberg's biggest challenge was not necessarily figuring out how to make a very, very cheap movie with a lot of crazy restrictions. The most difficult part was after his success in Cannes when everyone wanted to give him money. He had all the financing he could ever want. It was a big artistic crisis for him. It took him ten to fifteen years to get back on track consistently. The most difficult film of them all was *It's All About Love*, where he had everything he wanted. Having restrictions was great and it was fun. Put a lot of restrictions on yourselves because it will limit the number of choices. It will also create a concept for you. Think of it as one set of lenses that determines this specific way of seeing the

world, giving you a distinct direction. If you can only shoot outside, or only in daylight or you can only make scenes with one kind of action in them, or only restaurant scenes – think about these options. Perhaps you have characters in a love story that are never allowed to touch one another. I'm sure there was a restriction in *The Bridges of Madison County*, where they didn't touch each other until the midpoint of the story. That's a great part of the film. It can also be an aesthetic concept; it doesn't have to be thematic. Your own creative energy increases if you place restrictions on it.

Lars von Trier was, in a way, duplicating the way he worked in film school with the restrictions of Dogme. In terms of economics, sharing a story helps to be open with your producer because you are creating a safe and confident space. To create a really great economical concept will not restrict your fantasy, but it can supply you with really great ideas for developing your story. You really don't know a lot about economics as writers or directors. If you set out to write a cheap film, it will be too expensive for sure. On the other hand, you might think what you want to do will be too expensive, but your producer has a lot of knowledge as to how to find a way to do it. You can make a film up here making big explosions in a much less complicated way. If it's a film set in northern Norway, maybe this isn't such a problem. But if it's set in Copenhagen, it would be horrible. Don't think you know so much about what can be done and what cannot be done. Producers know a lot about organisation and financing. This is their trick of the trade. They also know a lot about what can happen with a film after shooting. Listen to them and also challenge them.

Lars von Trier happens to know a lot about budgets and a lot about production. He is really technical. But he also shares from a very early development stage. Even back in film school, he shared with his cinematographer, his editor and his sound designer. In 1980, he made his first small film with his team where they developed a film together. At this stage of the projects you brought here, how many of you have involved a film editor? One, two, three, four, good, four and a half. By doing this so early, you can benefit from their ideas. They see different things from what you see.

Sound can be so boring in film – the sound of dripping water or the sound of birds outside – if it's not integrated in the story. The dripping water tap is a bit more fun if you see it in the image. It's a bit more fun if you can see the clock that is tick-tocking in the picture or if one of the characters looks at it. It belongs to the film a little bit more. This sound can have some importance to the development of your story or impact what happens in your story. This is one tiny example of what we know, but what we forget, and that is how images and the sounds in them can play together, or how editing can contribute to your story. When we sit and develop the storyline, we sit and look at words. It can be great, I know. I also like to write and read dialogue.

Lars von Trier made a very small story where everything was so well-integrated, you couldn't really feel what was story, what was image, what was sound, what was acting, what was editing. It became like a little diamond. You couldn't separate the things that were completely intertwined. It was a five-minute masterpiece. The same thing he did with his graduation film, he did on *The Element of Crime*. The four of them worked so closely together. His first feature film won the technical prize in Cannes that year. They were just ordinary students from the Danish Film School. Of course they were talented. But I think their real talent was in collaborating from a very early stage. He wasn't afraid of sharing his stories with them. He used their input to develop story and the way he conceived the scenes. It wasn't a finished scene in pre-production. It would be from the very first draft and maybe even before that that he would involve them.

Another thing that he never did, but a lot of other directors do with big success, was involving the actors. What von Trier does with his technical crew, Mike Leigh does with his actors. I think he even involves them before there's an idea. This is also a concept and that is to involve your actors

from the very beginning. I'm not a specialist in Leigh's way, but you can ask actors to bring characters.

AUDIENCE I heard for *Naked*, Leigh had this basic idea that one guy comes to his ex-girlfriend's because he did something bad in Manchester. Leigh rented a house and this guy came and they recorded everything they rehearsed. At one point, they realised that it was boring. They needed a third person. They brought in a second actress who was the girl's friend and then everything started to develop. They recorded again and looking at the material later, took the best parts of it, and shot those scenes.

WIEDEMANN You can use all kinds of variations. You can give actors characters and let them play or improvise or do a reading of a pretty early stage of your script. How many of you have held readings? Not so many of you. The ultimate horror when you've written some dialogue is the first time you hear the actors read it aloud. One of the movies seen by the biggest audience in Denmark was by Kim Fupz Aakeson. His films play in the Berlinale Competition every year. He's a great guy. I remember the table reading with the actors and he was cringing, like who wrote this piece of shit? It had seemed so great to him when he was writing it. But when he heard it, it was horrible. You can put way too much information in your dialogue but you can't realise that because it's on paper. But when you see it acted, you realise you can take it all out and just try acting.

AUDIENCE When I mentioned Cassavetes to you, it was especially connected to that because of the way he worked with his actors – they were like a family: Gena Rowlands, Peter Falk. He was also adamant about retaining his economic independence.

WIEDEMANN I was the commissioning editor for *Dogville* because I was working for the Danish Film Institute at the time when Lars was in development. How many of you have seen the film? Okay, most of you. So you know it takes place in this big studio and he wanted to test this whole concept. It was extremely expensive. But he really wanted to test how the actors would move around. He used Danish actors to test this and to also test the characters, the background, all of it. This cost € 500.000, I think, for just this testing. But it was also nice for him to work with stand-in actors. My advice would be not to do an early reading but if you do, you should use actors that won't be the ones to actually play the roles. I've seen the real actors desert a project after the reading of a first draft because they could only see the flaws and not the potentials. But a reading can be helpful because you can listen to your lines and get some kind of idea of how it sounds. Another benefit of using stand-in actors is that they can have very useful input. The real actors would be too busy defending their characters, especially if you ask them to do so. Actors will have a lot of suggestions and it's nice to have it out in the reading, creating a safe space for dialogue. You may or may not use any of it. Everyone is willing to give feedback and wants to contribute. The only thing you won't hear from an actor, of course, is a suggestion to reduce his or her part. The big challenge is that everybody wants to increase his or her influence. You have to make your safe space where you can withdraw and reflect.

Today, at lunch, we discussed the difficulty of having all the investors, all the co-producers coming in and offering their opinion. How can you actually stick to your story when you have all these differing opinions? A friend of mine who is a theatre director says the worst thing is just to have one opinion – that to have more than one is good. Eventually, they will always contradict. Then you're set free.

Sometimes you can do all this without actors. Everybody has different methods of writing dialogue. I was discussing with this writer this notion of a synopsis or a treatment before a script. He uses all these text formats, but not in that succession. He told me that he couldn't start out with a synopsis. A synopsis could be written only when the editing was finished. Then you know what the story is about. If he knew what the story was about from the beginning, it would be too boring. For him, it

starts with writing dialogue and that's how he gets to know his characters. You can write pages and pages of dialogue. You don't have to use everything you write.

Director Susanne Bier never writes herself. She always works with a scriptwriter. The writer will sit and write and she will cook big meals. They will work in the kitchen where she will act and she will cook and they will talk themselves through the scenes. While she's talking about what happens in the scene, she will also be moving around. What's great about that is that she can immediately know whether it will work or not, which is something you can't know when you sit at your desk. Maybe the timing is completely off. What you thought might be a beautiful long moment doesn't work at all. What works in your imagination might not work in actuality. If you act things out while you're inventing them, you get much more of the feeling and ideas build and become stronger and better. We know that there is the anxiety of the blank screen, or the blank page in the analogue days. You want something to be there, even just a few words. You might be lucky as Susanne is to have the scriptwriter right there.

That's how I worked with Lars for both *Melancholia* and *Nymphomaniac*. He would invent the dialogue sitting beside me and I would encourage him when he said something funny. He would practice on me. Sometimes I would just write it all down but then we'd get to something really good, and I could take the rest away and go with that after much back and forth and trying things out. So my job was to listen and help him hone and build ideas. Very often, we would have different options.

Film is about what you can see and what you can hear, basically. It's about people acting in defined spaces. No matter what kind of story style or subject matter, it's about characters and rooms and relationships and situations. It's all played out in what you can see and what you can hear. It's a scaffold for your fantasy, how we actually act in the world, the rituals of everyday life. That's how they built the entirety of *The Celebration*. It was a film about incest, but the whole idea was about a birthday party. What happens when you have a birthday party? You need a place. And everyone arrives there. What happens when they arrive? They find their rooms and they unpack. Then there is the dinner with many courses. This was used as the scaffolding. It could be used in an exotic way because of this ritual. The son gives a speech. But what he says is pretty unusual. Or, the married couple arrives together, but they're fighting. Or, the husband sees his brother and throws the rest of the family out of the car and tells them to walk the rest of the way because he wants to talk to his brother. Sometimes you can have a really unorthodox situation like the son accusing his father of incest. But then the next activity involves everyone singing a song, everyone continuing as if nothing had been said, even though the party should have been cancelled.

What happens when we go to a café? What happens when we are sleepy and go to bed? What is the actual situation and how would you act in that situation? You convey your stories through those rituals. Have you seen *Westworld*? It's the greatest series. See it! If you want to develop stories on a contemporary level and you want to see what storytelling can do today and what dramaturgy is today that it wasn't yesterday, then here you can see how the level of philosophy and different concepts of human conscience is used in storytelling. They use story structure and time and space in this strange and extremely refined way. But they are also using basic ritual, as well, rituals that we all know from our everyday lives.

The final thing I want to discuss with you is research. I'm sure you all do a lot of research when you write, but one thing I am really captivated by is this idea of metadata. Netflix is able to get so much information about its audiences enabling them to develop sure hits. We know that's probably not true, because what they can predict, really, is how people will react to very conventional stories. But how much can they tell you about stories you've never seen before? But at any rate, I'm sure this can be used to prevent making boring stories. Our stories should be boring only when they're meant to be boring. Or if it's slowly told, it should be intense on another level. But I think metadata

can be used for lots of things and I think the whole concept of being very close to your audience should be interesting for all filmmakers. In the case of bands and musicians, their connections with their audiences must be extraordinary in order to create a certain atmosphere and intensity with their music. The same thing happens with actors on stage in the theatre, this way they and the audience react to one another in a strange chemical way. There's an intensity there that can be impossible for filmmakers to attain. The new technological developments give us a chance to get much closer to the audience.

But I want to tell you about something that is the opposite of metadata. There is micro-data research and it was performed in Norway from the Norwegian national broadcaster. The team there developed this television series called *Skam / Shame*. It features teenagers in a Norwegian high school and became a huge hit in Norway, but it became an even bigger success in Denmark and not just with the targeted teenage audience. People my age were watching it and it became a huge, huge success in Denmark. Someone asked me how this kind of really smart success was made in Norway. No one can reach that audience. The target group is just impossible to reach. Someone thought they might have done the series just very cheaply and quickly. The reality is that it took them ten years to develop. Ten years ago, this broadcasting station knew that they wanted to develop a series that could reach this teenage audience. Three series were made that failed until they realised how they should do it.

Long-time partnerships, long-term development yields good results. Instead of saying that teenagers are statistically like this and like that, they went out and did in-depth sociological interviews with a small group of teenagers about what their lives were like and what was important to them in their everyday lives. This is what micro-data is. They used this material to build characters, themes and storylines. They also realised that this was a multi-platform audience. They built the stories to be featured on Facebook and to build during the whole week. Have you seen *The Clock* by Christian Marclay? It won the Venice Biennale in 2011 and is a fantastic piece of art. It's a 24-hour film and it was synchronised to local time and it features sequences where time is involved. For instance, in a scene where Cary Grant sets his watch, the actual time would be the same time on his watch.

This television series does the same thing. They release scenes that play at the same time that they are featured or talked about on Facebook. In between these times, the characters will text one another so there will be updates. If you just watched the episodes that aired every Friday, you would miss out, actually, on a lot of the story. You would need to follow it every day in order to see everything that happens. Users can react to all this so, in essence, they are also giving ideas back to the producers and writers. There is an incredibly close relationship to their audience as they're producing the stories. Research, getting close to your audience, and sharing your work are the most inspiring things to do when you're not writing. Are we out of time? Well, so much for having time for our discussion. [laughter]

APPLAUSE

AUDIENCE I do want to ask you about audience awareness and how we should research that to find out who the audience is for our work. I'm a writer-director and sometimes I am interested in telling a story that is interesting for other people. But I feel the priority is that it has to be interesting to me. I can't imagine Lars von Trier really caring what people are going to think about *Nymphomaniac* or *Melancholia*. At what level do you care about what others think, or say fuck them?

WIEDEMANN That's up to you. For von Trier, as much as he likes to entertain, he also likes to provoke. That is why I explained to you his habit of creating a relationship with just one other person. When I say "audience", that could really mean a spectator, one person. When you tell a

story, it could be to one person or it could be to millions. You recreate a situation where it's you and me. When I sit here and talk, I can realise how you're reacting. I also can hear my own voice. Even though it's only you and me talking, you can get so much information. The information can be that I'm just stupid. Or, perhaps you were really moved when you told your story and maybe I was just not the right audience. Sometimes we tell what we think are really good jokes and no one laughs. Then you might realise you have to do something else in order to make them laugh. Maybe it's not the joke that's the problem. Maybe the joke was tragic and they're laughing too much because they didn't understand it. I don't think it's so important that they like it. I'm not interested in opinions. As you get older, you get less and less interested in others' opinions. People have opinions on everything. People were always interested in improving *Nymphomaniac*. "Wouldn't it be more interesting if, blah, blah, blah?" It's very rarely about getting some kind of reflection of your work. It's about the telling. Sometimes you can talk about it afterwards, but not necessarily. You use the audience as you please.

But sharing is different than not sharing, I would say. During the editing process, it's great to have a test audience. The test audience always thinks you're looking for something specific, but most often, you just want to see their reactions. It's when they start to get clever and tell you, "I started to get bored there because..." Usually, they're wrong. They don't know why they're bored. The audience will be stupid, generally, but they will have reactions. In the old days, it would always be the projectionist at the test screening you could rely upon. You would have otherwise intelligent people giving advice, and then afterwards you'd go up to the projectionist and he would start to talk about how he was confused in certain places and how he didn't like the ending. But he really cried when such and such happened. That's what you really want to hear, and then you can reflect on his good suggestions as to what should happen. That's your job.

AUDIENCE [laughing] Thanks.

AUDIENCE To me, *Melancholia* was a whole different film and I didn't really like it, actually, to be honest. Maybe I didn't understand it. He always works with the same people in the same manner so how did he make such a different film where people say very little and you have to guess what's happening with them? To me, they're very beautiful but that's it. It's a surprise when you say he has the same crew around.

WIEDEMANN He doesn't always have the same crew. He has a tendency to work with the same themes. For *Melancholia*, he changed his DoP. He wasn't pleased with the way the cinematographer of *Antichrist* worked. He thought he tried to improve his images. The first part of *Melancholia* has a lot of dialogue; it's the second part that's very silent. I think the script was something around 82 pages. It's a very long movie. I don't think this had anything to do with the crew.

AUDIENCE Did he want to make something else?

WIEDEMANN It was his way of depicting a depression somehow. *Antichrist* and *Melancholia* were, more or less, made on the way in and on the way out of a depression.

AUDIENCE For me, it stayed very distant.

WIEDEMANN Yes, for me, as well. I saw *Antichrist* without knowing the script. At the first screenings we had for *Melancholia*, the commissioning editor for the Danish broadcasting station suggested taking the whole prologue out thinking it didn't work. Many people didn't think the long dream vision in the beginning worked, and others thought that was the claim to fame of the whole film. But he never sets out to please anyone. That's the way he wanted to do it and he always wants to push the limits. His feeling was that *Melancholia* was too neat – he said that several times

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– and too boring. I guess that's why he made *Nymphomaniac* afterwards. I don't think there's a simple explanation, that's for sure.

APPLAUSE