

# Writers for Europe

Documentation of a Four-Day Symposium

## „How do stories learn to travel“



Edited by Jochen Brunow for

**dffb**  
Screenwriting  
Academy

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Books on Demand

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**Participants in alphabetical order:**

**Sedat Aslan, München - Sebastian Bleyl, Berlin - Jan Bosse, München - Sarah Bräuer, München - Caroline Bruckner, London - Jochen Brunow, Berlin - Catherine Buresi, Berlin - Roos Rosa de Carvalho, Amsterdam - Maja Costa, Berlin - Keith Cunningham, München - Jacqueline Epskamp, Amsterdam - Ilinca Florian, Berlin - Friederike Gralle, Berlin - Shady Hassan, Amsterdam - Hans Heesen, Amsterdam - Veit Helmer, Berlin - Julia Hertäg, Berlin - Gareth Jones, London - Jesse van't Hull, Amsterdam - Oliver Keidel, Barcelona - Jeroen Margry, Amsterdam - Dorothea Nölle, Berlin - Marijn Prakke, Amsterdam - Andreas Resch, Berlin - Susanne Schmitt, Potsdam - Ariane Schröder, München - Tillbert Strahl-Schäfer, Berlin - Alexis Waltz, Berlin - Natascha von Weezel, Amsterdam - Pascal Yorks, Berlin**

# Foreword

**Jochen Brunow**

When Hans Heesen first called from Holland two years ago and I heard that the screenwriting class of the Amsterdam Film Academy wanted to visit us at the dffb's Screenwriting Academy in Berlin, I thought, what a great idea! In school days we had what we call in German *Wandertag*, why shouldn't we have one or even more academic *Wandertage*? Field days or excursions were fun, the highlight of our school days. But my second thought was, we need a programme for this visit to make it more than just the fun meeting of students, the exchange of ideas and experiences. So what is the question that matters for all of us as writers, whether we come from the Netherlands, France, Germany or Iceland? What makes stories so interesting that they are able to cross national and linguistic borders? Our first programme lasted just one single day, but the question "How do stories learn to travel?" was our guiding motto even then. Teachers and students of both participating parties were so enthusiastic and exalted about these extracurricular activities that Hans Heesen and I decided to continue this event.

With the chairwoman of the supervisory board of the dffb, Prof. Barbara Kisseler, Head of Berlin's Senatskanzlei, I found a great supporter and a financier for the idea. And so I could plan a four-day symposium for 2010, inviting not only our initial guests from Amsterdam but also students from London's NFTS and from Munich's HFF. We set up the

programme that you can see on the following pages. “How do stories learn to travel?”: That was the motto to gather some experienced film people for four days of border-crossing listening and learning, pitching and discussing. There were key notes held by international speakers, there were case studies of European Development Programmes like *éQuinoxe* and *SOurcES 2* and there were pitch sessions followed by discussions about the border-crossing potential of the introduced projects. And it all ended up with a party for our foreign guests.

But not everything went smoothly. Nature and its forces interfered with our high-flying plans. The ash cloud of the Icelandic volcano shut down the European air travel and some of the students, experts and speakers could not reach Berlin in time. The programme was very exciting and instructive nevertheless, so when we got some money back from cancelled hotel reservations, I thought the results and findings of the symposium should be available for those who were not able to participate: not only the guests who could not travel but also other students and people interested in screenwriting with an international appeal. The idea for this small booklet was born, and with the help of lector Barbara Heitkämper I edited this compendium. On the following pages you will find the key notes of some of the speakers trying to answer the central question of the symposium: “How do stories learn to travel?”, enriched by bits and pieces from the fascinating and engaged discussions of the participants.

Beside the above mentioned Barbara Kisseler, I would like to thank the staff of the dffb, Bodo Knapheide, Maximilian Müllner and Juliane Dummler, and the heads of the participating screenwriting classes for both getting the symposium organised and this documentation into print. From Amsterdam I’d like to thank Hans Heesen and Jacqueline Epskamp, from London corinne cartier and from Munich Michael Gutmann, as well as the speakers and

screenwriting teachers who allowed to document their key notes and who led us all through the experience of the symposium and the pitch sessions with their knowledge and wisdom: Gareth Jones and Keith Cunningham. Susanne Schmitt from Media Antenna Potsdam, Marion and Renate Gompper from SOurCES 2, Susanne Schneider, Ellen Winn-Wendl from éQuinoxe and Veit Helmer, who filled in for them at the very last minute, Arash T. Riahi and Oliver Keidel for their case studies.

Nora Ehrmann, student of production at the dffb, was more than a great assistant, Sebastian Bleyl und Alexis Waltz, Second Year students at the Screenwriting Academy, helped with the documentation. Great thanks also to everybody who participated in the symposium and is listed at the beginning of the brochure.

## **On Formulas**

The question we ask ourselves, “How do stories learn to travel?”, might already be answered – once and for all. I do not know whether you have heard about it, a German professor of marketing at the Bauhaus-university at Weimar has found a sure formula to forecast the worldwide success of a movie. He developed an algorithm which enables his computer to predict the financial success of a film. There is an institute in London which offers – for quite a lot of money – a service which also predicts the success of a film with a certain amount of reliability. But this is no reason for us to go home, I think, because we are not looking for a formula for economic success. When we ask, “What makes stories cross national and linguistic borders?”, we are searching for sources of inspiration. We are looking for the sources of creativity and the basis of understanding each other’s stories. So let us try to tap this source.

Jochen Brunow

## **On Stories**

We are involved with stories all the time and, in a sense, we cannot separate the stories that we try to tell dramatically from the jungle of all the other stories out there. But in fact, that is only an artificial separation. The stories that we choose to tell are impacted by the stories that are out there.

...

So we are in “super-stories” all the time. Many of these stories are pseudo-stories, in that they do not have any meaningful connection back to a real world. They create a kind of internal reference. In modern systems theory this is called an attractor. There are many different kinds of attractors. Normally, we are in the midst of several different kinds of attractors that pull us, that create tension. This tension is dynamic for us. We are creatures who have, in a sense, created an entire universe for ourselves, made out of stories, and it is a universe that to a large extent defines our potentialities as individuals and as a collective society.

...

I do believe that the entire context of the stories that we have to tell, the whole range of what is going to be out there in all media for people to take in, does shape us. It can put us to sleep, it can wake us up, it can make us hate our neighbours, it can make us more tolerant to people. The function of drama in all this is to make us ask questions. I think this is the power of drama. I am a dramatist and I am concerned with drama. And I look at things. I look at this question of “Writing for Europe” from a dramatist’s perspective. That is, how can we dramatists use our craft to raise questions that are going to be interesting and important for people?



Keith Cunningham

# Alone in Writing – The Limits of Isolation

**Sarah Bräuer**

**A**s writers, we are spending the greatest part of our work alone, and we deal with the thoughts surrounding a project in isolation from the public. But the thoughts themselves are without boundaries. Maybe this is the premise for writing – or, as Keith Cunningham termed it, “by telling stories we create our world”.

Practice and the transition to the professional world, however, reveal the immeasurable value of mutual exchange, especially among colleagues. For me, this is where this year’s dffb symposium, *Writers for Europe*, took effect. Through its intensity, it gave us the opportunity to create contacts beyond our own environment, beyond our own school, to exchange ideas and to interconnect. For four days, script writing students from four different film schools met with experienced authors, directors and lecturers.

Those of us who did not live in Berlin started out with a journey – and thus had delved right into the subject before the symposium had even started. As writers, we are always in motion anyway, but not always physically. And many stories begin with someone who starts off on a journey, carrying much luggage or little, and has no knowledge of the boundaries he or she is going to be confronted with.

We need these places of encounter: limitless and connecting in action, in passion *and* in language. We live in

Europe, and in a comprehensive political understanding, the borders have been lifted, which enables us to cross old barriers and open a larger cultural and artistic terrain.

The symposium addressed internal as well as external topics. Authors have to fulfil the balancing act of finding solutions for their stories and exterior reality, marketing the stories and implementing them. Both was sufficiently discussed during the meeting in Berlin, our knowledge expanded. It became very clear that every project has to face the question of placing the film at some point, of answering which market it is written for.

The introductions into the individual screenwriting programmes opened perspectives for an international work area and for funding an artistic development beyond national borders. Moreover, it was very valuable to experience the “people behind the scenes”, how they read script material and which developments they predict for the coming years. And just as it was all about dismantling borders, the artistic process is also about distancing oneself, finding one’s stand – finding oneself, one’s profession, one’s project. Even before I start to narrow down a project, there is the question of where I see myself. And this question needs its space. Seen from this angle, the symposium was unique for me, because with the support of the lecturers and the four-day time frame that gave us room for development, every participant had the chance to position him- or herself. Such a week has its own dramaturgy, and it takes time to open up. The symposium created a foundation of trust, culminating in the students’ final day pitches, which we discussed with the findings of the previous days in mind. Language was a positive side effect. For one, because the common denominator English exists, but especially because non-native speakers could use this setting to prove themselves. Professionally, such an exercise is only healthy.