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Berlinale Talents

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By Bryerly Long

Films are born from the imaginations of individuals, and through many solitary hours of work, but they only materialize when great teams of people come together and make something happen.

Berlinale Talents, a networking platform, brings together 250 film professionals from around the world at the Berlin International Film Festival. Participants were selected from a pool of over 2700 applicants this year. They receive sponsorship to attend the Berlin International Film Festival and take part in labs catering to specific professions, as well as events open to all Talents. This year I was selected for the Actors Lab. The fourteen other actors came from France, Nigeria, Mexico, Turkey, Germany, Argentina, Lithuania, the Philippines, Kazakhstan, Peru, India, Nepal, Malaysia and Romania.

Jean-Louis Rodrigue, a movement teacher, who has coached Leonardo Dicaprio and Ang Lee amongst others, taught an acting workshop. Using Alexander Technique, we became aware of our breath and any tension in our bodies, taking the time to relax and focus. Knowing how to remain calm, concentrated

and free to be creative, whether on a busy film set or in an audition room, is an essential skill for actors.



On the first day of the workshop we studied five basic rhythms of movement: stillness, staccato, chaos, flow and lyrical. Working in pairs, including with a few directors who joined the studio, we explored the emotions and relationships, which organically arise from different types of movement. Immediately people were willing to engage with complete strangers, and try out new things creatively.

On the second day, we worked on embodying animals, which we had each chosen to represent a character from a play. Using imagery, we explored the animal's movement, sounds, environment and relationship to other characters. We then worked on monologues from the plays and continuing to draw on the physicality of an animal when playing a human character. The lessons were held in English, and I wondered what it would be like if each participant had instead performed in his/her native language.

Berlinale Talents invited producers, directors, actors and artists at the top of their fields to share their experiences with us. The producer Raymond Phathanavirangoon's talk about surviving a co-production was relevant to me as I am in the midst of putting together a French/Japanese co-production. European producers rely on co-production treaties to access public funding from various national and European institutions. These in turn are meant to create jobs in the respective film markets. In practice, a Singaporean film (set in Singapore with Singaporean actors and a Singaporean director) could have a French producer attached and receive French public funding if for example post-production (editing) is done in France, employing French staff. In other cases, a film might be shot in multiple countries in order to access various national funding schemes. Unfortunately Japan and the United States do not have co-production treaties, and this limits their access to international funding.

Of the films I saw, I was most deeply moved by "On Body and Soul" by Ildiko Enyedi, which won the Golden Bear. Enyedi tells the story of two shy people working at an abattoir, who discover they are meeting in their dreams as deer in a forest in the snow. The heroine struggles with her inability to communicate with other people; and her colleagues make fun of her almost robotic precision, memory and gestures.

In an Acting Lab meeting with the German casting director Iris Baumüller, we were asked to describe ourselves as actors, and the characters to which we are drawn. Being surrounded by gifted actors from all over the world, I realized then that what draws me to acting is precisely my own struggle to express myself freely while wanting to connect with other people. I tend to play characters that are outsiders. Some of my favorite films – “The Lives of Others”, “Tokyo Sonata”, “A Separation” – deal with loneliness, repressed emotions, and people’s inability to communicate with, or fully understand one another.

I enjoyed acting on stage because of the constant interaction with other actors, the director, and the audience. However since I started working more in film, I also find myself spending a lot of time alone, looking for and applying to jobs online, and researching and rehearsing for roles by myself. Sometimes I am frustrated that too much interaction these days takes place through the interface of a computer.

At Berlinale Talents we were asked to look into the eyes of a stranger, to share dreams and aspirations with people we might usually only meet through a screen, to try to understand one another and where we each come from, and to think about where we want to go together in this world. The participants of Berlinale Talents, no matter how successful they may be in their respective markets, or perhaps because of that, all seemed to come with open hearts and minds. The sense of community and generosity made me feel excited and motivated to continue working in film, and reminded me of the ability of films to transcend time and space.

Now that we have each returned to our respective countries, and I slowly go through a pile of business cards, trying to follow up little by little on social media and email, I long to meet people in person again somewhere in the world, ideally on a film set or as part of the audience of a cinema.



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