

MY INDEPENDENCE IS MORE INDEPENDENT THAN YOUR INDEPENDENCE

A DECLARATION BY DANIEL FAWCETT



Still from *DIRT* (2010) by Daniel Fawcett

Written for One+One, the Brighton Filmmakers Journal, 1 February 2010. Also published in AN Magazine and New Art criticism Magazine.

“Art is always in danger and must be constantly reinvented in order to fend off the invasion of the mechanical, the constant march of monotony and cement.” -Hans Werner Henze

Developments in art are always married to developments in the tools and technology used to make it. Technology is always changing; each change gives artists new grounds for exploration. When people talk about the future of cinema and film-making, the focus of discussion is often on how digital film-making, HD, and CGI will allow filmmakers more control and more creative freedom. There is, however, one major flaw: even if the opportunity for more creative freedom and control is there, the environment is not. I propose an entire rethinking of the attitude to how films are made and exhibited.

-I believe in film.

It is the art form of now – it is only now that it is starting to spread fully its wings and reach its potential as an art form. We are now in a position to be able to make films at very inconsiderable costs, and it is this that is the key to its future. It is time for film to be fully liberated from the weight around its neck – that is, money.

Film and money have been ever entwined, due to the vast amounts of money needed to make them in the past. But

we are now in a new era: an era we have been slowly moving into since the invention of video. Jean Cocteau once said:

“Film will only become an art when its materials are as inexpensive as pencil and paper.”

That time is here. We need the art of film more than ever today. Today’s culture is a tired man – he trudges along, overweight and sick, replete with things no longer good for him. He needs a new art. That art is film – but film made with an attitude that has barely been glimpsed before now. It is time for change.

There are more films being made now than ever before. Of course, many of these films are being made independently of industry funding – but these films are not truly independent. Even those without the industry’s money behind them are industry films in attitude and approach.

We have two types of so-called ‘independent’ films now – those called ‘indie’ (but which are industry-funded), and those made without that funding but which still want to be picked up by a distributor and act as a calling card for the filmmaker to find work within the industry. Most people who are making films ‘independently’ are doing so not out of choice but because they have been unable to acquire studio or institutional backing, and, in any case, still desire a place inside the industry.

I propose a new attitude and approach towards independence: an approach that rejects the old system of making films as a product; an approach that makes films without any intention of ever making money from them.

-I reject the film industry.

I want no part of it. It is time for a parting of the ways. The industry may go its own way; I am on another path, with the artists – the true independents. Our path shall be the one that realises film’s potential as an art form – an art form that is still young, like a teenager that is allowed out on its own for the first time it is still finding its voice, it is an exciting time, it’s the start of its life as an adult.

Why is it important to separate money from art? -The very hope of acquiring a distributor will affect the project. This effect may appear to be a small one, but it breeds an attitude that eventually manifests itself throughout one’s work. Even anti-commercialism is a marketable commodity today – this is secretly recognised by even the most stridently ‘anti-commercial’ film-maker. A true anti-commercialism has to reject the very notion of making money, or it is a lie. True art cannot spring from any other conditions than a creator’s contempt for the pursuit of money through art. The desire to be anti-commercial? – that is not enough! The film-maker’s motivation must overcome this desire – there must be more: the will to personal exploration.

My vision for the future of film-making is unashamedly Utopian, but I and others around me are already on the way to realising it. The first question will always be, How does the true film-maker survive in a capitalist society? -Want less. It is simple: great artists have long lived simple existences. To be an artist is to put art at the centre of your existence.

The endurance of property places a demand on the artist that he will provide himself with some small material sustenance today – but the artist ought to count his material needs for far less than he has been taught to do so. Learn to live with less. The artist today must work for his sustenance. If he has no support from a source that believes in the truth of profitless film, then a separate day-job is necessary. One ought to clean floors or serve coffee rather than look for a salaried place in the film industry, if it means that one’s art will remain uncompromised. Do not misunderstand me: the artist must not live outside society – whom else should he speak to? He ought to be fully integrated in it and play a key part in it, but never forget that he is a seeker of truth, a questioner, an explorer. His role is to encourage change for a better future.

People need to believe in art again. People need to believe in people again. Whatever resistance to my ideas may come will come from those who have lost faith in humanity. I have hope; I will fight for it. Art is needed; people with money ought to support the artist – but we do not need a system for this: we must embrace chaos. Systems occupy themselves with the minimizing of risk. We do not need that! Too-keen organisation takes us back to the pages of tick-box criteria for funding that asks for commercial potential in return.

-We must maximize risk.

I do not reject the films of the past, but it is time for change. I do reject most films of the present. We do not need just a new content, but a new attitude towards the purpose of film. New stories and styles are perhaps a part of the future, but if the only merit of a film is its 'newness', we should dismiss it as a work of gimmickry, going hand-in-hand with the will to feed the fashionable market. Gimmickry can be packed and sold. The future of art will not come from a mere surface 'originality', but a wholesale change in the very process of creation and the life attendant upon it.

I reject any money that asks for artistic compromise in return. But you say: Why not compromise with the industry the once, and use their money against them? -I say: what of the danger that one compromise will become two, will become ten, will become...? And even should your first compromise be your last, I would remind you that a film-maker cannot afford ever to take his or her eyes from their true purpose. Film-makers must hold fast to their vision – must protect it at all costs – if there is to be any change at all.

I make films as non-profit experiments. I shall self-distribute my films and shall not demand a fee at screenings. I shall make DVDs and sell them to cover costs, but I won't discourage people from copying them. I shall offer free downloads, to ensure that there is access to the best quality versions of my work. Film ought to be as freely accessible as art in public galleries and literature in lending libraries.

I urge you to join me on this journey: to make films true to your own vision, and not to use films as a passport into the industry or a way merely of trying to please an audience, be they funders, festival programmers, or the public at large.

-Embrace your independence and help others to do the same.

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