

Through broad exhibition, I aspire to increase the demand for greater exchange of international stories (including fresh American stories) told through cinema for young audiences. Let me take you to the mecca to tell you why. At the Berlin Film Festival's renown section for children and youth, *Generation* (called *Kinderfilmfest* until 2006), the 900-seat Zoo Palast theater fills up daily with children and adults watching films like *MINOES* (dir. Vincent Bal, Belgium 2001) dialogued in Flemish, subtitled in French and English and simultaneously translated in German. The theater is completely still with all viewers engrossed in picture, sound, word, aesthetic and story. Following, children eagerly gather with the filmmaker or cast member for the question and answer session, often exchanging through a translator. Those children I speak with afterward are fearlessly engaged, speaking to me in their second or third language. They convey a sense of exhilaration for having experienced something great. I knew nothing like this in the U.S. and set out to replicate it, with the counsel of its longtime director, Renate Zylla. Her model has been copied worldwide, including the three children's film festivals I know most intimately, The Chicago International Children's Film Festival (the most established in the U.S.), The Mill Valley Children's Filmfest, and Screen 360: Films for Children of the World. In the paragraphs to follow I will tell you what I've learned in my years of international exchanges through this medium.

My passion for children's cinema arose out of its potential action on a grand scale. It is an excellent economical means of offering a liberating view of the world outside the confines of socioeconomic limitations. Cinema delivered in the film festival model offers an independent learning experience for its viewers and likewise, offers a dynamic group experience when engaged in the discussions following. An international story is uniquely capable of augmenting with a sensation of living abroad and the richness that comes with it: exposure to different languages, culture, geography, aesthetics and the possibility of meeting someone who watched the same film. The value of international peer connection was effective in 2003 on the eve of the Iraq War when Bay Area Progeny, the first program of films made by youth from the U.S. was offered as "A Different America" at the Olympia Festival for Children and Youth in Greece in an effort to prevent deep-seeded anti-American sentiment. Adults acknowledge the power of cinema; for children, it's more powerful: First films become a childhood cornerstone memory, offering insight and sparking curiosity throughout the life built upon it. Ask, most people remember first films.

Back at the Zoo Palast, we see a film in Farsi from Iran (prolific in its films for young audiences because most of Iran's filmmakers come through the Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults) showing us the streets of Tehran; on another screen, there's a film from Cuba in Spanish, showing us Havana through the eyes of a boy looking to complete the musical scale on his bottle pipes. Both are embargoed countries, forbidden to U.S. citizens and therefore, scarcely seen or known outside of negative press. Perhaps, if a child experiences a foreign land for him/herself through a film, then he has the opportunity to begin his own knowledge of the place and its people. I'm compelled to understand how we learn lasting information that contributes to the development of a worldview and ease of communication across differences.

At the Berlin Talent Campus where 500 emerging filmmakers from around the world were awarded places in an electrifying banquet of exchange at the Berlin Film Festival, I experienced an atmosphere that only exists when human imagination and different intelligences are honored. I witnessed it again at Labyrinth Kindermuseum also in Berlin, watching children try things in a giant experiential play space based on the theories of John Dewey. It was also in Ingeborg Jensen's documentary *SCHOOL SWAP* (The Netherlands, 2004) where a boy from a Waldorf School explained to the exchange student from public school that at Waldorf, he would be allowed to believe in elves until he didn't anymore, and if he continued that would be okay, too. I'd like to know how to design an atmosphere for students and young audiences that stimulates imagination and honors different intelligences.

As a lifelong athlete trained in Dance, I understand how the body learns kinesthetically. I believe that language is learned similarly through layers of exposure. I believe that individual "accents" are muscles that change with each language and surrounding environment engaged. We know that immersion is the best atmosphere for language learning— an atmosphere easily facilitated through carefully selected international cinema. Access to a second language before teenage years, as I understand it, offers capacity to learn more languages— a skill and life pleasure often missed in an America, satisfied for decades that "they all speak English over there." I want to understand how we learn, especially how language is learned, so I can convince the timid to stumble with me.

Now is the right time to commit international programming for young audiences to New Media because our nation is ready for it, as it was in the early 1970s when a period of innovation in children's television was one response to

the nation's need to get society back on track. I see a parallel between the early 1970's political, economic, social and ecological climate and today's. Then, a visionary collaboration between television directors, foundations and the government enabled the advent of The Children's Television Workshop (responsible for Sesame Street, The Electric Company and more) and The CBS Children's Film Festival. It's foreseeable that a similar movement to "parent" the nation in a more humble and worldly direction is afoot again and one solution might again be a re-focusing on getting it right in the beginning, our children. Even as a non-parent, I'm concerned about the development of our citizens and want to be part of this discussion.

The CBS Children's Film Festival, hosted by Fran Allison and puppeteer Burr Tillstrom (a.k.a. Kukla, Fran and Ollie) televised irregularly from 1967-1984, is the best example of broad exhibition of international programming for children in U.S. history. What contributed to its cancellation? This analysis and a likewise closer look at the development of Children's Television Workshop (and its subsequent translation into several languages for international distribution) would provide invaluable research toward the revival of a program exhibiting foreign films for young audiences. Framed by a carefully planned curriculum focused on teaching language, social studies, geography, art and friendship, I believe a program of this nature would thrive today. It would serve as a resource for research and assessment, contributing to the development of valuable curriculum for further programming and inclusion in institutions. Herein lies the stuff to reassure over-protective parents and to assuage their fears with the greater purpose of sharing stories with international peers.

This film genre presents a compelling market frontier. The increasing discovery of international programming can be seen in the launch of four new film festivals of this nature on both U.S. coasts in the past five years. My investigation revealed that although American participation at the Berlin Film Festival showed very little change from 1993-2000, and previously included only two American films from 1977 to 1993, the past five years have shown a slight increase in filmmaker participation. Surprisingly, I'm often the only American programmer present at the children's section. The opportunity is prime for partnership in endeavors to increase the accessibility of this programming through inclusion in rental collections, as well as via the Internet, and cinemas. Despite its 9000 titles, the U.S. leader in DVD rentals does not carry, for example, the award winning films curated by Renate Zylla in her eighteen years at the Berlin Kinderfilmfest.

For the future, I would like to apply my education to finding the best approach for presenting these films in an enhanced festival model for camera and streaming. A thoughtfully packaged program like that described above--designed in conjunction with education specialists, and the continued collaboration with mental health specialists at the Children's Center at UCSF, and a group of "kid researchers"--would exhibit both short and feature length international films to studio and location audiences, and be viewable via the Internet on personal computers in both private and public settings. I'd like to design a way for viewers to communicate with each other and with the studio audiences. I'd like the program to be energetic and encourage the love of moving and learning to trust one's "own skin" as a secondary feature.

Additionally, I would like to support the education of filmmakers interested in this genre--first through the delivery of a university-level course and ultimately, with the development of curriculum that exchanges with film institutes and film festivals. A teaching position could be partially funded through new initiatives of the European Union MEDIA, for example. The base of international colleagues I've built is a rich resource for co-teaching.

I would like to work with the Danish Film Institute to research the societal effects of regular viewing of international, multi-lingual programs in countries known for their heritage in children's programming like that in Denmark, Sweden and Germany. The Danish Film Institute is an excellent resource that continuously innovates in the area of children's programming and has met my inquiries thus far with generosity.

Finally, I do hope to return to my own filmmaking when time allows.

Our 2007 documentary SYNERGY captured the art-sparked ideas of the seven to nine year-old collaborators of mosaic artist Sarah Dorrance, who used Buckminster Fuller's ideas with the children. We closed with Fuller's quote "*...Then you will conceive your own way of doing that which needs to be done— that no one else has told you to do or how to do it.*" Fuller imagined people finding their greatness through independent thought and courageous innovation, exhilarated by their own discovery—I imagine that, too.