

Choursoglou Clip 4

Philippides:

You have expressed the view, I believe, that you find it important for a film to have something to say, to be a kind of narrative. Can you tell me if I have understood this correctly (from my reading on the Internet) and how the thought of a narrative, and a film having a story, corresponds with the photography and the visual impression that a film has to make?

Choursoglou:

When I began teaching in the Film Studies Department in 2005, they asked me to create a program for courses in film-making. The initial course is called, "I narrate a story." In all the courses I teach, I never forget to tell the students that they should narrate a story. You just narrate the story with images and sounds. Let's say, you tell the story through briefer stories. There are two kinds of films: films that respond to life and films that respond to other films. The films that I make and find interesting are the ones that respond to life. I have respect for the other films too, but perhaps I don't understand them because I am not close to them.

In final analysis, when I teach, what I try to do — when I review the story that is told in the scenario in a student's film — is to uncover what lies hidden behind. Namely, to see the student, the young film-maker behind the story; the young person who narrates. Where is he going to put the camera, what lighting will he choose for filming a scene, if he is going to do a close shot, if a sound is going to be heard more loudly or more softly — all these aspects hide the person who narrates. He is simply using the medium of film. All in all, I try to teach him how to say better whatever he is trying to say. To show him that a particular sound that he is using, if he looks at it in another way, can be more effective. Or if at a certain point he does something less impressive but more personal and esoteric, it can be more profound.

I recall a teacher of mine in Film, a scenario teacher; at the time when in my scenarios I would often use literary elements. He insisted on getting me to rewrite several versions, to get rid of the literary elements. He even asked me, when he first saw me, "Do you write prose fiction?" I told him no, but I use literature because I believe that I thus express myself better. He told me to rewrite the same story omitting all literary elements. At the start it was cumbersome, because I liked what I had written, a more literary style. Over and over he repeated, "You will learn to write as simply as possible — just what one sees and hears; and what you will write will be stronger than poetry." Indeed this is a phrase that I repeat frequently to the students in my courses: that they should say what they want to say as simply as possible.

Unfortunately in Greece, one of the biggest problems we face in the University Department where I teach is the twelve years of prior schooling, where the students don't give their opinion and aren't taught to give an opinion. Just imagine: they have been studying, they are eighteen years old when they enter the Department, and they have endured for twelve years an education that they don't love. They have learned not to love learning or to love creating things, although they have gained admission to a school that promotes artistic expression. Not all of them, but many. They hide either by not talking or by hiding behind something that is very poetic or very impressive. In either circumstance, it takes hard work to see what such a student wants to say deep down inside, if he has something to say.