

BAFTA David Lean Lecture: Yorgos Lanthimos 2 February 2018, Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA 195 Piccadilly, London

Anne Morrison: Hello, my name's Anne Morrison and I'd like to wish you all a very very warm welcome to this year's David Lean Lecture. This event is named after BAFTA's founder David Lean, and is generously supported by the David Lean Foundation. Last year was BAFTA's 70th Anniversary, and David Lean was appointed the very first Chair in 1947, when the academy was created. Now if you look on the wall outside the theatre, you'll see his name right at the top of the list of Chairs, and as a more recent Chair, I'm down the bottom, usually behind a table of some sort.

[Laughter]

AM: But as somebody who has been involved with BAFTA for a long time now, it gives me enormous pleasure to see how Lean's legacy as a pioneering filmmaker, and his passion for sharing his expertise, is passed on every year through these lectures. It's an opportunity for directors with an exceptional body of work to explore the craft of directing, and give to us a rare insight into their vision. By doing this, they inspire others.

Yorgos Lanthimos is undeniably one of the most exciting filmmakers of our generation. His unique vision and daring choices has made his films some of the most anticipated - making us laugh, cry, and yes, sometimes cover our eyes, at the absurdity and the horror of life; pretty much all at the same time. His filmography includes *Kinetta*, *Dogtooth*, *Alps*, and last year, *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*. In the BAFTA Film Awards in 2016, his film *The Lobster* was nominated for the Alexander Korda Award for Outstanding British Film, an award named after another founder of BAFTA. So following the lecture, Yorgos will be joined on stage by producer Tanya Seghatchian for a question and answer session, and then you too will have the opportunity to ask some questions.

But before all that, let's have a reminder of some of Yorgos's work.

[Clip plays]

AM: And now it gives me great pleasure to welcome Yorgos Lanthimos to the stage.

[Applause]

Yorgos Lanthimos: Thank you. I heard the music from behind the door, I thought I was in the wrong theatre. But I think this is us.

[Laughter]

Thank you all for coming, I hope you don't mind me sitting, but I just didn't want to be behind a podium, pretending this is a lecture.

[Laughter]

So yes, thank you for coming here today, and I'd like to thank BAFTA of course and the David Lean Foundation for this honour, there have been some great filmmakers here before me that have appeared here and I'm hugely honoured to be part of this. I did say that I really don't want to give a lecture, and I've never thought of myself as someone who can do that, on any occasion, for any subject. But I thought what I could do here today is, um, if we assume that some of my work is of interest...

[Laughter]

YL: ...is to first acknowledge certain common experiences that we all may have, and common cultural influences in popular culture that we have all been exposed to; but also in addition to that, share with you some of my experience that might be more foreign to you, just because of where I come from or the particular circumstances of my life. So basically yes, tonight I just want to share bits and pieces that have somehow shaped my view on things, and have shaped my sensibilities over the years. But of course, as with many of my films, I'm not really going to draw conclusions for you in the end, you'll have to figure out for yourselves what all of these things mean if you put them together.

So yes, I'm going to start by saying that I grew up in Greece, for those of you who don't know. I was a teenager during the 80s and during the 90s, but mostly during the 80s. During that time there was a lot of discotheques where I come from, but also many people who listened to heavy metal music, and I was one of them, and there were the cool people that listened to New Wave - which we listen to now, us that came in later. When I went to the cinema I, like most of the people around the world, would watch films like *Back To The Future*, *Indiana Jones*, *Top Gun*, *Airplane*, *Dirty Dancing*, *Ghostbusters*, *E.T.*, *Goonies*, *Rocky*, *Jaws*, *Flashdance* - and those last three you probably might have guessed if you've seen a film of mine titled *Dogtooth*. But what I was obsessed with, was Bruce Lee films. It's my oldest and

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strongest memory of cinema, watching *Enter the Dragon*, which in Greece was very inappropriately called 'The Yellow Asian from Hong Kong'.

[Laughter]

YL: So um, the title is still the same. I looked it up. So I'd like to share the first clip with you, which is one of my films that showcased that kind of influence.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

YL: So I didn't make a full on karate film in the end, but this is what I got. One other interesting thing about showing this right now, which I didn't realise in the beginning, is how differently films are seen within different periods of time and within the context of its era, because this used to be funny also because Prince was alive when we first made this film, and unfortunately since then he's passed away, so I guess the scene changed somewhat, over the years.

So the other wonderful thing about Greece, where I come from, there's a lovely cultural phenomenon which are the open air cinemas, and during the 80s again and 90s, there used to be many more than the ones that exist now, but there's still quite a few - there used to be like two or three cinemas in every neighbourhood, open air cinemas, and some of them are quite peculiar in the sense that they're little plots that are surrounded by tall apartment buildings. And the back of the apartment buildings has the balconies of its apartments, so when you go into this open air cinema you would be surrounded by people in their apartments, and there would be laundry drying on the balconies, and people in their underwear just hanging out in the back of their apartment; there would be mops and buckets stored there.

So it's quite a surreal experience to enter in that kind of cinema, where there's a whole world that you can observe beyond the screen. This is not something I actually noticed back then, to me back then that was just a normal thing, that's how open air cinemas were, you could just see people taking a shower at the same time. I was jealous of them because they could see the films that were playing in the cinema for free every night. But that I guess, might become a little annoying

after watching the same film for a week, two times every evening. So, I got over that.

So I don't know if watching films in that situation had any effect in how I perceived the films, but that's where I discovered the films of John Cassavetes and Robert Bresson, who are two of my favourite filmmakers. But I mentioned them, and I'd like to share two clips of their films with you, just because they appear to be, their approach in filmmaking, seems to be so antithetical, and it's hard to believe that someone can equally like both, but I assume why I like them is they move me equally by using completely different means of reaching the exact same core. So I'd like to show you a couple of clips, they're basically treating the same situation, or a similar situation, in a very different manner.

[Clips play]

YL: So yes. I don't know how to comment on these things, and if I had my way, I would just be showing you clips all night, and then you'd have to figure it out. Anyway, I think some things put together next to each other, just reveal a lot of things - and that is true for an individual film as well. You gather all the elements, and you put them next to each other, and it all makes sense. So I hope this way we can communicate. So, moving on.

During the time I was growing up in Greece - so back to that - there weren't many young people making films in Greece, and there weren't many people making films in general. So in order to study film, I had to find an excuse, because people would be worried if I told them that I wanted to make films in Greece during the 80s and the 90s. So what I told people, and myself as well, that I wanted to study film in order to do TV commercials, which made sense, that I would be able to make a living, and everybody would be happy and not worry about me.

[Laughter]

YL: So I did just that, and I was very lucky that because during the 90s and the early 2000s advertising in Greece was booming, I was able to become very confident technically, and I was able to partly finance the films that I made in Greece because there was no, and still is no great industry in Greece, and there's no structure for financing that is adequate in order to be making feature films. So I was very

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fortunate to also meet the people that I kept working with when I made films, and that's how I made *Kinetta*, *Dogtooth* and *Alps*, my first three Greek films.

Making many commercials also enhanced my aversion towards polished images, so when I made my first film I got rid of lighting completely, hair and make-up, pristine framing, music as a soundtrack, sentimental over-the-top expositional or melodramatic performances, which are usually called realistic.

[Laughter]

YL: Big crews, build sets, and a traditional script. I wanted to avoid making a formal film, by going against everything that was the norm, and everything that was considered beautiful. And making up all those rules, I ended up making a formal film, and sometimes unintentionally beautiful. So I'd like to share a clip of my first film with you.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

YL: Thank you. So before I made this film, I was fortunate enough to work quite a lot with quite a few Greek choreographers. And I watched a lot of their rehearsals, and I filmed a lot of their performances, I edited a lot of dance. That opened up my mind about what narration is, what story is, what character is, how you portray certain emotions, I discovered there's so many different ways in telling a story, and traditional narration just started to seem very boring to me. I also realised by not saying certain things, or by not showing certain things, then the viewer is engaged much more actively, instead of watching passively and being told everything.

So filling in gaps, and using your own imagination and perception, I find much more satisfying. I'd like to share with you one clip of the work of a friend of mine, Dimitris Papaioannou, which you might have heard of, who is actually going to direct the first new Pina Bausch creation this year, for the Wuppertal Dance Company. Anyway, I won't share his CV with you, just the clip.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

YL: So, working within contemporary dance made me remember something from my childhood. My grandmother was from Ikaria, it's a very beautiful and idiosyncratic island, and I spent a lot of summers there when I was little. And every village there has their day of celebration, it's usually a saint's day, and people set up long tables full of food and drink, sometimes it takes place in the woods, sometimes by a little port, like fishing port, and there's a traditional band playing music, and it starts from noon and ends the next morning. And people eat and drink, and dance traditional dances all this time, and the band plays tirelessly, for a whole day almost, and I remember vividly because kids had to sleep in the car, which is parked somewhere near. So I was one of those kids that was trying to fall asleep in my parent's car, and every now and then looking out the window seeing people still dancing, drinking and eating.

Later when I grew up and I could be part of the celebration, I tried my hand, or foot should I say, at dancing, but as you can imagine the results were not very impressive, so I was one of the weird city kids trying to do a traditional dance. But despite that failure, dance and movement and physicality became very important to my work, and it's the basis on which I rehearse with actors every time I do a play in the theatre or when we're preparing a film. I'm always fascinated by the relationship people have with their bodies, especially when they're pushed outside of their comfort zones. There's a lot of revealing things that happen, and you can see a completely different person through the way that he dances or moves.

And it's also many times very funny when you try different things this way. Laughing and making fun of ourselves and playing games, and not taking ourselves too seriously when I work with actors is very important for me. I find that sometimes when someone's dancing or singing and performing badly, but they're doing it with conviction, it's sometimes even more moving than someone who has it easy. Sometimes I find it off-putting, someone who can do things easily. That's another reason I'm attracted to working with people that are non-professional actors, they're always extremely surprising, they can make professionals feel very awkward, because they don't know what to expect of them, but they enjoy it very much at the same time, to be put in that situation. What I want to share with you now is something

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I came across a video on YouTube, it moved me terribly and amused me at the same time. It's two old men dancing a Greek war dance called Pyrrhichios, and they're dancing during a wedding celebration. So thinking where this dance stems from, it's from ancient years, imagining warriors dancing that, and the transformation, and how it has survived over these years - and ending up seeing it on a YouTube video taken on someone's wedding, well, it's something you're going to see right now.

[Laughter]

[Clip plays]

[Laughter]

[Applause]

YL: So what could I have said to do justice to this? I so wish I could create something like this in one of my films, but it's impossible. And the moment where the bride goes by behind them, it's like, yeah, anyway.

[Laughter]

YL: So I discovered things I liked in Greek cinema later in my life. One of my favourite Greek filmmakers is Nikos Papatakis, he lived most of his life in France. The reason I'm going to share with you a clip of one of his films, is because when I saw that film, I never could have imagined that you can treat the subject in this way, which would otherwise be folklore, and would be treated in a very academic way. This film is a film that takes place in rural Greece, it was made in the 60s, and this film helped me feel freer about how you go about respecting legacy and tradition, but to not fear messing with it, and be able to reinterpret it and present it in a different way that makes it feel contemporary and relevant and personal at the same time. So I'm going to show you a clip of one of his films.

[Clip plays]

YL: So yes, no comment. So another Greek who has been an inspiring figure, not just for me, just because of the way he interprets something purely traditional in music, through his performance and his personality he completely reshapes the original, and I just think he creates something which is beyond punk but starts from traditional Cretan music. And this particular

song I'm going to share with you, the lyrics are from a 17th century work called Erotokritos. Yeah, there's some Greeks here I guess! So check out this guy.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

YL: So. Next up, an actor. A Greek actor, who's extremely unique and particular. He's performed various Greek tragedies on his own, wearing a mask, an ancient Greek tragedy mask, reading the ancient text according to his understanding of how it would have sounded back in the day, and he's done a lot of research about how sound travelled in those ancient theatres, and how certain lines should be directed in a certain direction, and yeah, he's really delved into it. We're just going to hear something with a picture of his, and see what that sounds like. By the way I don't understand a thing because it's Ancient Greek, so don't worry about not getting any words [Laughs].

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

YL: So this goes on for hours, as you can imagine.

[Laughter]

YL: No, it's a really unique experience and he does the whole thing on his own, this was an excerpt from Sophocles's *Antigone*, um, and I wish I could understand more. The reason why I'm sharing all these things with you is, being exposed to such great artists, who create these unique things, is what inspires me and makes me want to continue making films, and try and make them better. Although, I don't really know what 'better' means and I cannot define it, and I don't know what it is that I'm looking for. I think we have something in our heads, which we're trying to rediscover in reality, and we hope that by making things and creating things, at some point we're going to see it in front of us and be absolutely satisfied. I doubt that's ever going to happen, but at least the effort into getting there is mostly what counts. And, it leaves along the way artefacts that other people can experience and share with other people. So, finishing up my monologue and then talking about stuff you want to talk about. I'm just going to read you something by

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Efthymis Filippou, he's a very close friend of mine and we've written most of my films together, and this is from a new book of his which was just published in Greece. It's very short, I believe the literary term is 'short prose', and I've roughly translated it for you. I hope I do justice to it, because obviously Efthymis is someone that has affected who I am as a filmmaker greatly, and it was very important in my life that I found someone in my life who I can work with. It's called Excursion.

[Reading]

My brother is 70 years old, my father is 64 years old, my mother is 14 years old, my sister is 22 years old, and I'm 41 years old. We got into our car on Sunday to go on an excursion. We visited an archaeological site and then we ate. "Let's see who's going to die first", someone at the table said, and we all laughed heartily.

[Laughter]

[Applause]

YL: Thank you very much. I'm just going to have Tanya here, who's going to ask us some questions.

Tanya Seghatchian: Thank you Yorgos for that - I think I speak for the entire audience when I say that was the most illuminating lecture, or entree into your headspace, and I think if nothing else, the clip of the dance piece, with the physicality of movement contained in that beautiful tribute to Pina Bausch just makes me realise how those early influences are replicated in the way you work with actors, and you craft something very special on screen. But I wanted to talk to you a bit about your signature, the Lanthimos signature, the absurdism, the qualities that are now being attributed to you, and whether they are very very conscious, or whether they are part of a process that you have evolved over time making films in Greece and in England and in the English language.

YL: I don't think it is very conscious, and that's why I chose this way to speak here today, because I can't quite make sense of it all, and I don't try to very much, to be honest. I'm not analytical in any way when I'm trying to create something; I'm not doing that afterwards. So I think it's just an accumulation of things that I like, of things that I experience, of relationships

with other people, experimenting with things. I'm also very practical: I like to try things out, and see how it works, so I think one of the reasons I quite appreciate dance and physicality is just because you do things; you try things out, try it this way or the other way. So it's very grounded in a way at the same time, although the ideas that we're trying to do and the situations we create might be absurd, the process grounds it, and there's an interesting conflict that goes on between the two. I don't know if that answers the question.

TS: That does! You've written or co-written so many of your films with Efthymis and given us a sense of how he thinks, but how do you begin? They're invariably original ideas. Is it a concept, is a premise, is it a philosophical question - how do you start with an idea?

YL: It can be any of these. Again, I don't know where exactly it starts. It's observing a situation, thinking about different situations, trying to create tension and conflict between different characters that you thought of; it never starts the same way. The way I work with Efthymis is that sometimes he comes up with something or I come up with something, and then we add to each other's ideas, then we develop it and it progresses, and maybe at some point all of a sudden it changes completely. It's a very organic process that none of us can ever say "yes, I saw this happening in the street and this is where the idea for this film comes from". It's again an accumulation of different thoughts about things, that form a more particular idea for a story. The stories come in later, I think. We gather the elements, and figure out what kind of story serves the exploration of all these elements and situations.

TS: And if we look at the body of work and your influences, we saw the clip from Bresson and the clip from Cassavetes amongst the other Greek films you shared, but in a way Buñuel could be there too perhaps, because your attention, if not directly, but to the bourgeoisie is in all of the films.

YL: Well of course, I would just show you clips all night, but you have to choose certain things. It's always a difficult question to answer, "who are your favourite filmmakers", "what are your influences", and so much of it is really unconscious and subconscious, but of course I love Buñuel and many other filmmakers, and individual films by different people, but it never starts by trying to create something similar to

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something else. I think we never decided, that's the thing. I never decided I'm going to make these kind of films, and Efthymis never decided he's going to write these kind of things, it all comes through process. It's "how do I know how to do this", "what do I like when I see an actor saying these words", "why doesn't it sound right to me" and "why does it sound right when he's jumping up and down at the same time". I mean, I don't know. I just try it out and see what happens. We haven't come to a conclusion that this is the kind of films that we want to make, or I want to make. And I do try in any case to evolve and progress with every film I do, I try to do certain things differently, certain things just because I want to make different things, some others because things haven't worked for me in previous films, but then you end up messing the things that worked before, and it's just a constant struggle with all the elements in order to try and get something that you feel comfortable with.

TS: And if we look at the body of films you made in Greece, I remember seeing you on a panel in Toronto with your producer and friend Athina, who you've also acted for, and being envious of the collective, of the sense that you had a community who were working together even in difficult circumstances with not big budgets, but somehow you took confidence from one another, and you were going to will your films into existence. Is that what it felt like at the time and is that how you work?

YL: Well, not really, it's just surviving. You're not thinking "yeah, let's all just be together and create these things and have fun!" It's like "I wanna make films! How am I going to make films? Could you please help me, someone! Could you work for no money, could you give me your car because we need a car, could you give me this t-shirt, it's good, this is the t-shirt my actors should wear".

[Laughter]

YL: Again, it's just very practical. I think it's kind of idealised, this whole thing, about Greek cinema right now that has some kind of light on it, but basically it was just figuring out any way that you could make films with very little money. I have to say, we learned a lot of things while making them, and there's quite a few things that I'm trying to maintain and carry with me as I'm making slightly bigger films and films in the English language. The structure which that brings into the filmmaking sometimes is

disruptive to the process that we were used to, making films on our own with no structure, no money, because there was a lot of flexibility, a lot of freedom. When you enter a more structured environment in an industry, you discover that there are a lot of rules that you didn't have to mind, when you were just five friends making a film doing whatever comes to your head. So I do try and carry the spirit of making those films the way we made them, as much as I can, and while we're growing - I mean growing is too much to say, because we're just now making films that people are getting paid, I'm getting paid for once instead of paying for the films. So it's not as if all of a sudden I'm making huge films, but it does change, and I do appreciate certain things that I may have nagged about in the past, in the process of making films in Greece. I do sometimes go back and say "oh, look how easier it was to do these kind of things", that now seem more difficult, back then.

TS: But with the work in the English language, there are some particular characteristics which I don't know if you used in Greece, but the tone of the delivery that your actors use, the sort of metronomic, monotone delivery which is non-inflected - is that an evolution of what you were doing in Greek, or is it that an extension of something particular to how you work now here?

YL: Defensive stance.

[Laughter]

YL: Well, I hope that my whole work is an evolution from film to film, first of all. I think that from film to film it becomes different, the language. But it mostly comes from the written word, and from what I consider appropriate for the particular film that we're making. Which, again, unfortunately I can only explain in words what is appropriate, what is the appropriate tone for this kind of language. The actual language, apart from them being in Greek and now in English, but the language, meaning the tonality, hasn't changed that much. We're the same people. But as the stories change and the world that we built around those stories change, the tone shifts as well. Myself, I don't particularly see that kind of extreme stylisation that most people describe, hence I reference that what to most people seems realistic, to me seems something different. Or, the fact that, you know, commonly people call John Cassavetes films "realistic", is something I don't

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particularly understand - because I think they're very different to Bresson films like we just discovered before, but I think he just pushes it so far that it comes out the other way of realism, and then it becomes absurd as well, what they say and how they behave. It has the face of realism, but it's not. Yeah, I don't know where I was going with all that.

TS: I'm really interested in that process, because I find your films so funny. They're so chilling and so horrific in so many ways, and yet, they make you laugh. And I wonder where in the process, if you start and you're playful when you're writing it, whether the playfulness comes from the rehearsal space, whether the casting is so critical about who can expose themselves in the way that you need them to. How you bring those elements together.

YL: Every element is almost equally important. I think that the humour is there and the tone is there from the writing, that's for instance why I read you something that Efthymis has written that's not a script, and even me delivering it has a certain tone. So it starts from there for sure, and then materialising it with the actors, or non-professional actors sometimes, is figuring out exactly the way it needs to sound in order to achieve that tone, which is at the same time, awkward and funny, and disturbing, and kind of hanging in-between things - which is something you achieve, again, by doing it. Certain actors get it immediately, and others need to work on it. Without saying that one way is better than the other, because sometimes the actors that need to work on it end up achieving much more with it. But it's never the same thing; it always changes. And the more people are involved, you need to find different ways of getting where you want to get. Because every person is different and they react differently to it, so you just have to figure out the way by doing things again, and trying things out, how to achieve what you're trying to achieve, which you don't know.

[Laughter]

TS: And music - where in the process do you decide how you're going to bring music into the film? With *Sacred Deer*, you have this beautiful opening and closing and the echo of that piece of music is very powerful for the piece that you've constructed. Was it there when you conceived the idea? Or did it come later?

YL: Well first of all in my first three films I barely used any music, I couldn't figure it out! I couldn't figure out a way of using music without the music limiting the effect that a scene had, I always just found it too heavy-handed and pointing to one direction and all of a sudden, really reducing scenes to a very particular feeling or sentiment. Although I really enjoy music, I couldn't figure out a way to use music in my first films, it just always felt better without it. I think *The Lobster* is the first time I actually used music in a soundtrack extensively, and then on *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*. Music comes in mostly during the editing phase, because I do extensive research while we're editing, and I have a bit of an idea of what I'm looking for, but again, trying it out on actual images and scenes makes me understand more of where it can go.

I think I've managed to use music, finally, because it occupies a different space again. At least in the last couple of films that I've made, it's almost like another character, or a different element, which sometimes works against the scene or against the feeling of the scene, or enhances what you understand from the scene so much that it becomes absurd. So that part of it I need to try it out during the editing and make sure that it is what I'm looking for, and that's why I think I haven't managed yet to work with a composer, because when I work with it for so long with the music and try and find exactly the right tone for every scene, then it's hard for me to replace it with something different and feel that I achieved the same thing. So um, it's been hard for me, but my next goal is to work with a composer early on, so that I don't have to go through that process and be more open minded, and freer.

TS: Just mindful of the fact that there is an audience here who may have questions, could um, you put your hands up if there are questions that you want to ask, and wait for the roving mic to come to you.

Q: Hello.

YL: Hi.

Q: I was just intrigued to know whether there was a lot of improvisation on your set, you know, is it written and you stick to the script, or are you open to actor's interpretation? How does it work on set?

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YL: We do stick to the script quite a lot. First of all since we're talking about a number of films, it is different film to film. In my earlier films we did improvise more, I have to say, because we had more time, weirdly enough, although less money, and um, but I mean improvising in the way that, because there's a very particular written language already there, and we had rehearsed a lot with the actors, they had developed a certain code, and improvisation meant they were able to work within that language and that code to create a little bit more of what was already there. Or another example is that we would come up with scenes on the spot if we ended up one day having a few extra hours and we had shot the stuff that we needed to shoot for the day.

On the spot, within that location and with the actors, and sometimes my co-writer Efthymis would be there, and would scribble something really fast, just as an indication for the actors and again, the actors having the code that they've developed between themselves, they would be able to do a scene which was not on the script originally. And some of that would end up in the films, some of them would not, but I found that always helpful, because it informed myself and the actors about even more about the characters, the story, the tone of the film. So it was useful even if it didn't end up being in the film that there was, you know, another scene created that would have information for both myself and the actors.

Q: I want to ask somewhat of a meta-question, how important do you think is the figure of the director, whether it is a filming tradition or your own films?

YL: How important is the role of the director?

Q: Yes

[Laughter]

YL: Well, I shouldn't sound self-important.

TS: But you can in your instance, you have the most important role; your films are your films.

YL: No but I wouldn't um [Laughs]

[Laughter]

YL: I'm not trying to pretend to be humble or anything, but I literally wouldn't be able to

make these things without certain people around me, and that's why I always refer to the films as "the film we made" and "the things we made" because it is true, you need to guide people to a certain direction and that's obviously very important, you need to make great choices, but if you don't it really affects the film and you alone cannot necessarily remedy that, so I think that the most important of a filmmaker is to choose right. You know, actors, crew, every day is a thousand questions, from "who do you wanna cast for this role" to "should the paper be this white or is it off-white". And you have to give answers to these questions all the time, and it does affect the end result and the people that present you with the questions, they also had to make a choice themselves and they need to present you with two options, so that enters into the equation, and in every step of the way from writing to filming, I really value the people that I work with. And um, yes you end up making the final decisions, and it's important, and it is a vision that started from you, or you and the writer, but also I have to say it never resembles what you had imagined in the beginning, it just takes a life of its own and it becomes this other thing that you're trying to shape and manage, to something that you feel ok with. And I never, I don't know, there might be some people who managed to imagine something in their heads and then be able to produce it, but I don't even try anymore, I just put the elements together, and you know, work with them and discover what it becomes. So I don't know if that doesn't really answer the question directly, but um

TS: What do you do when people say "what does this mean?" Your actors, or your crew...

YL: Oh right

[Laughter]

TS: Do you answer that question, or..?

YL: I do this [Laughs] no, I don't answer the question, is the answer to the question. Because I don't know! Again I make choices, and I work very instinctively, and I feel certain things are right and others are not, for my truth and my sensibility, and I don't know why that is. And I don't want to know, because it always spoils it for me, if I think too much about films. It's like when you need to write treatments for your films in order to get money, it's just, it's not the work, it's just the fact that I need to analyse

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myself and the film so much in order to explain it to others, that it ruins it for me. It just becomes more one-dimensional, all of a sudden it starts being about these particular things and it couldn't be about anything else, the actual reason why I make films is to ask questions and expose things and allow people to have different opinions about what they are and what they mean, and create various feelings that might be different from one person to the next, so for me to go "ok I'm making this film for this reason, and this is what it means and this is what I wanna say" is completely besides the point. So sometimes I end up lying in those things, is what I'm saying.

[Laughter]

Q: So, why are you making films?

YL: [Laughs]

Q: What is it that you want to experience? Is it uh, therapeutic for you, is it creative, is it expression, is it sharing your experience of being a human being with the rest of us? I know it's a bit of an explanatory question, you don't have to answer it, but uh

YL: Great! [Laughs]

[Laughter]

YL: No it's not, it's just that, again, why we do what we do, I... at this point in my life I don't think I know how to do anything else [Laughs], but how did I get here... um

Q: Maybe what, forget about the why, the why would take hours of analysis perhaps, but what is it that you get then? Do you get catharsis, do you get an experience of being alive and present and existing?

YL: Well... you say much more things than I could have say [Laughs]

[Laughter]

YL: I don't know, it's my way of investigating and exploring and asking questions and seeing how people react to those things. And it's fascinating for me to observe how different people with different backgrounds and different experiences and different cultures, perceive things in different ways. And how they mean different things to them. And that is very interesting to me in understanding human

beings, and behaviour, so... that's something, I think.

Q: So you talk about something universal, and you mentioned earlier this code, a code that you develop

YL: Not necessarily, I create what it is that I create, and universally it is perceived in different ways, it doesn't mean that I'm making something which is universal.

TS: Can I ask you which film has surprised, the reaction to which of your films have you been most surprised by or most happy with?

YL: Oh, with all of my films because again, with different audiences, it's different each time, so I don't think there has ever been a film where everybody perceived it the exact same way, so yeah, I... silence.

[Laughter]

TS: We have time for two more questions so can we take one here and one at the back, thank you.

Q: First of all I'd like to say thank you for your work

YL: Thank you

Q: My question is not so much about your work but rather your perception of cinema. Do you feel that cinema is an art form that can communicate messages that are different to all the other art forms, or rather a combination of all the other art forms to communicate a more powerful message?

YL: The short answer is no, I think. I don't think cinema is more powerful than any other art, I think that individual works can be very powerful no matter what the form is. Unfortunately I don't think cinema, and the other art forms, have much of an ability to change things or to affect things, but at least it has the ability to shed light on various things and make us notice them in a different way. But I don't think cinema is particularly more powerful than photography or theatre or literature, or... yeah.

Q: Ok, thank you.

Q: Hi Yorgos. How do you work with your actors on bringing the characters to life? Do you enter the process with a very fixed idea, um, for

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them, or is it a conversation where they can bring their ideas as well and you can workshop it together.

YL: Yeah no, of course they can bring their ideas but there's no conversation.

[Laughter]

YL: It's ideas that we have on paper, in the form of a screenplay, which I give to them

[Laughter]

YL: And then they come up with ideas that they present, by performing the words on the paper but I avoid any kind of conversation about what that is and why they're doing something. The reality behind it is, it's not like I don't want to speak to people, but I also find it quite helpful to not know what they have in their heads, because it allows me a certain kind of distance. And to perceive things without the filter of their ideas. So in other words, to not be influenced, and pushed to perceive what they're doing in the way they have it in their minds. So if I'm clear about what it is I'm seeing in front of me, I'm more able to help and shape what it is that they're doing. Or realise whether it fits what we're making, whereas if we both discussed it and agreed on it I think there might be many times that we were seeing something that wasn't there. So I try to, you know, have that distance between myself and what they're doing, and what my ideas are and what their ideas are, in order to be able to have that clarity when I watch something. So yeah, it's not just about being anti-social or anything.

[Laughter]

TS: Well Yorgos, thank you so much for this conversation and for sharing with us.

[Applause]