

Film
i Väst



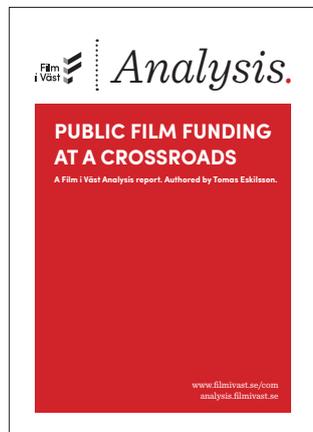
Analysis.

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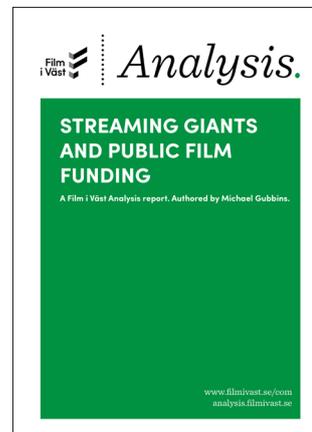
A Film i Väst Analysis report. Authored by Wendy Mitchell.

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Credits

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BACKGROUND

We are reminded daily both personally and professionally that we are living in a golden age of storytelling, a so-called ‘content boom,’ thanks in part to the ‘streaming wars.’ Indeed, there are more stories being told today than ever before – even during a pandemic year, global spend on film and TV production and licensing of new content by streamers, studios and independents in 2020 soared 16.4% year-on-year from \$189.1bn to \$220.2bn, according to Purely Streamonomics. That spend is forecast to rise to \$250bn for 2021.

The Nostradamus initiative – a multiyear international project launched in 2013 to document and analyse audiovisual industry changes – has talked to experts each year to predict the near-future of our rapidly changing industry. Swedish regional fund Film i Väst is now the lead partner of the Nostradamus project as part of its larger commitment to examining the ecosystem of the audiovisual industries.

In February 2020 at the Berlinale, Film i Väst, Nostradamus, Cine-Regio and Olsberg SPI presented a panel discussion about the “global production deluge,” looking at the opportunities and challenges presented by the unprecedented expansion in the production of film and television content on a global scale.

At that Berlinale event, Olsberg SPI launched its report *The Global Production Deluge*, which revealed that worldwide spending on non-sports content was estimated by Ampere Analysis to be \$123 billion in 2018, a 29% increase from \$95 billion in 2013. A further rise of 26% over the next five years is forecast.

That discussion in Berlin was fruitful and thought-provoking as it looked at topics such as the future viability of the European independent feature film, the risk of over-production, who holds the power and control over modern storytelling, capacity issues over crews and infrastructure, and the future role of public funding structures.

Yet that debate involved only the voices of funders, executives and producers. Afterwards, Film i Väst believed the natural evolution of that discussion was to then talk to the storytellers – the writers and

directors – about how they are coping in this boom time – how are they earning a living, are they trying harder to hold onto their intellectual property (IP)? Are they working locally or globally? How do they juggle the realities of working in feature film, where they can sometimes have more control of their own stories, compared with reaching wider audiences, or getting more work made more quickly or with more financial stability with platforms or broadcasters?

The tug-of-war between top creators working in feature films vs episodic is perhaps even more polarized after the COVID situation – as the world waits to see if cinemagoing fully recovers, especially if independent filmmakers can still draw in-person audiences as much as Marvel movies and James Bond can.

So the time was right in mid-2021 to approach a diverse range of writers and directors, working in disparate countries with unique career paths, to talk about how they are working now, the opportunities and challenges they see in telling stories today and in the near future. We thank them for their honesty and openness in talking about their work today and the pressures they feel, as well as what excites them for the future of films and episodic series.

We hope this report is an eye-opening read and we plan to continue the conversation with a series of live discussions starting at Cannes May 2022, as well as continuing to explore the changing industry in future editions of the *Nostradamus report* and in other Film i Väst projects such as a recent report about the future of European public funding for the audiovisual industries.

A CONTENT BOOM, BUT FOR WHOM AND WHAT?

There is more content being produced and distributed now than ever before – across streaming platforms, television, films, games, podcasts and even social media stories. Netflix alone debuted 371 new original shows and films in 2019 – more than the entire television industry did in 2005. Purely Streamonomics estimates global streaming membership in 2020 at 1.1bn compared to 642m in 2019, predicted this reached 1.6bn by the end of 2021.

This content boom can be seen as exciting or terrifying, depending on who you ask. The writers and directors we spoke to all agreed that there are more opportunities than ever before to build a career telling stories, compared with even five years ago. That's due in large part to the episodic boom and the rise of the streaming platforms. This, however, doesn't necessarily equate to a deluge of passion projects being made, or helping independent films to reach an audience.

Desiree Akhavan, New York-based writer and director who has



worked on her own features *Appropriate Behavior* and *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* and TV show *The Bisexual* as well as being a director for hire on TV projects including 2021's *Hacks*, says that independent filmmakers are more in demand than ever... to work in episodic content. Those opportunities to crossover into TV weren't as relevant a decade ago when she started making films. "There are more opportunities for directors today. There is more reaching out to indie filmmakers to work on shows that there was before." But, she cautions, "There is a question whether those opportunities translate to doing things that feel honest or personal to who you are as a creator."

London-based writer **Tony Grisoni** agrees that there is a wealth of opportunities, so it's even more important to align the right project with the right creatives. He says, "My sense for myself is, 'Yes, there's a huge demand for me as a writer. The question is, do you want to be writing the stuff they want you to write?' I've gone to tons of meetings where people say, 'Oh Tony, we love your writing.' And then they say, 'We've got this project, it's a teenage alien sex thriller' (laughs)." (His track record speaks to a rather different set of interests, working on films including *Fear & Loathing in Las Vegas*, *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*, *In This World* and TV's *The Red Riding Trilogy* and *The Young Pope*).

Richie Mehta, a Canada-born, Europe-based writer/director, previously worked in arthouse features like *Siddharth* and more recently on *Delhi Crime*, an India-set episodic drama which sold to Netflix, agrees that this new landscape "provides more opportunities, no question about it. If I was pitching an independent film five years ago, it could take it four or five years to see that through and for it to monetize. That's a huge piece of labour. Whereas now, the demand for content is so strong, nobody can keep up. There is a shortage of writers and directors, so this can be an interesting time – I look at this as an extreme privilege to be in this position where we can communicate in a refined manner to people."

Instead of shopping around and piecing together a patchwork of independent film finance, or a cohort of broadcasters, getting a green-light and full financing from one global streamer can be a quicker and easier option. French writer **Fanny Herrero**, creator of *Call My Agent*, felt burnt out after working on the first three seasons of the hit comedy (which started at France Televisions and was then boarded by Netflix). Netflix gave her the creative space to think about what she wanted to do next. She says, "The head of fiction at Netflix France came to me and asked me if I wanted to think about some new subjects, they offered me a deal for six months where I had carte blanche I could think about anything I wanted. It was exactly what I needed at this time, they gave me the time to think about ideas, that was precious." The

result was her forthcoming show, *Standing-Up*, about young stand-up comedians in Paris.

Despite *Call My Agent* being a global hit, Herrero says most of the offers she gets are still within the French industry, but that could be because of her personal preferences. “My agent at CAA in Los Angeles knows I might not be the right person for those US projects. I don’t think I gave the signals to try to do something bigger in America yet. My life is in France and I have small kids. Also, my co-writers are in France and I like the way we are working.”

Norway’s **Iram Haq** is another of those filmmakers who has started working in TV as well. “When I started out, I thought I would just do film, because I find it magical. Everything is changed now, and we see more and more TV series – both good and bad. A lot is very easy and simple storytelling but there are also some great stories out there and also ways to tell stories that can be detailed in a different way than just two hours in a cinema.”

Haq directed acclaimed features *I Am Yours* and *What Will People Say*, and then directed several episodes of the Danish TV thriller *When the Dust Settles*. Now she is writing a TV project for Norwegian state broadcaster NRK, as well as developing a feature film. And if that’s not enough, she also still works in theatre, and has even published a novel in 2021. “When it comes to storytelling, as I grow older, I feel like it’s more interesting to explore different way of telling stories. I think it’s exploring different rooms and I don’t want to close any of them.”

While this boom is beneficial in getting more work for more creatives, Danish director **May el-Toukhy**, best known for Sundance award-winning film *Queen of Hearts*, worries what it means for younger storytellers thrust into big jobs quickly. “My younger colleagues get a chance to direct bigger projects much faster than I did, when I finished film school. I finished in 2009, and my first film premiered in 2015. I was a director’s assistant when I entered film school, and alas, also after I finished. I welcome the fact that it has become much easier to make your debut as director, especially for woman, both in films and TV. At the same time, I detect that there is a tendency for younger directors, both male and female, to crumble under the pressure of going straight from school into big gigs. Knowing yourself, what you need to create and deliver, being able to handle the pressure of expectations, recognizing what battles are worth taking, etc. takes some life experience and hands-on production experience. Not everyone has that fresh out of film school.”

There is also such a thing as getting a greenlight too easily at any stage of your career. El-Toukhy explains, “if you are a person who thrives with having to fight for your idea, and backing comes too ea-



sily, the originality of a project could suffer,” she says. “People asking critical questions can be important because it forces you to question the theme or the way you tell the story. Ultimately these discussions can make or break a project. It worries me a little right now, that the demand for plug-and-play content is so big, that it seems like the development period on projects in general, is getting shorter and shorter. The critical questions that potentially can strengthen a project can end up being unasked and unanswered.”

Germany’s **Jörg Winger**, creator of *Deutschland83*, jokes that he “comes from the other side” and when he started working with TV series in decades past, it was “very unpopular,” he recalls. “I would call agents and they would hang up on me. Most TV series were seen as inferior to film. So I’ve been lucky to live through this change of times and the zeitgeist has flipped completely.”

Winger’s new show about East Germany’s first Black police officer, Samuel Meffire, is an idea “my co-producer **Tyron Ricketts** and I had for a very long time” but never got off the ground in the past. During today’s content boom, there were several bidders wanting to make the show in 2022, with Disney+ winning the rights. “Now the streamers and the broadcasters are looking for stories that stand out more,” he says. “In the past maybe they were looking at the variations of the same. So it feels like for me personally, this landscape gives us the chance to tell stories that we weren’t able to tell before.”

One thing everyone seems to agree on is that the boom in content can open doors for new voices, including those traditionally under-represented, at the same time as more global audiences are also viewing more non-English-language content. Netflix announced in mid-2021 that 97 percent of its American subscribers had watched a non-English language title in the previous 12 months (this was even before the *Squid Game* phenomenon, which Netflix estimates will be worth at least \$900 million in value for the company).

Mehta says “there is definitely an openness to stories from more places. The demand really is global — people are also just tired of the single voice and point of view.” Haq points to “amazing stuff the Turkish show *Ethos* [on Netflix]. Ten years ago, I would not have had the chance to see that living in Norway.”

Swedish writer/director **Ruben Östlund**, winner of the Palme d’Or for *The Square* and currently launching his first English-language film, *Triangle of Sadness*, adds, “I do think a lot about the domination that comes from the Anglo-Saxon part of the world, I feel a bit ambivalent to that. I see myself as a European film director, I want to continue working in a European tradition. I feel like there is a great quality of doing a film in Swedish or other Scandinavian languages, so there is

maybe something in the language that expresses something about the culture and I don't want to lose that. But I enjoy working in the English language, and I don't feel it's too far away from me, I feel I can control it quite well, I don't see it as a limitation for my kind of style of working."

Especially in this market, it can be crucial for creatives to understand the power of their intellectual property (IP) and hanging onto those rights if and when they can – something that is proven to be harder with a global streamer than working with an independent film production company.

Akhavan explains, "Owning your own IP is the standard that all of us aspire to. But that can be hard especially in the first 10 years of your career – if you get a greenlight, you just take whatever you're given because you're so desperate for that opportunity. You want your work out there no matter what."

She says she is inspired by fellow creatives standing their ground and what she's personally learned from bad negotiations early in her own career. "Moving forward, I would like to approach [IP control] very differently. I was incredibly inspired by the way **Michaela Coel** made her second show." Coel made the groundbreaking 12-part series *I May Destroy You* with the BBC, turning down a \$1 million deal from Netflix in order to keep more creative control and have a stake in the rights.

With Winger heading into production on two series in 2022 "we had pretty good bargaining position because there were several bidders," he says. Although he accepts, "if you do an original show for a streamer, they want the rights. That's just the standard deal. But I believe there will be an ongoing conversation about finding the right balance – if a streamer pays enough up front, then producers are willing to sacrifice the back end. At the same time, so much is changing so fast, maybe we'll be looking at a back-end component again. It's two different risk-return models that will just keep shifting."

Grisoni hopes viewers can be critical thinkers noticing what they are clicking on and what is quality to them. "During the pandemic, we all clung to TV and streaming, and that felt slightly dangerous because it was a little like eating sugar. These shows are so very, very well crafted, there is a reason why you don't go to bed and you just watch the next one. And we all have found ourselves hooked on something that we didn't always care much about. Some of these shows are well crafted and shiny but don't feel as authentic or felt."

Mehta also hopes the audience feels that power they have with every click. "In a way the viewer has the power, the viewer can be mobilized to have a unified voice against a power that they don't like anymore.

If, all of a sudden, everything coming out on a single platform starts to be mediocre, people will just stop paying for that platform. And I hope viewers are going to demand change.”

Haq knows there is room for all kinds of stories – mindful or, yes, even more mindless ones. “It’s great that we can find things for everyone. Sometimes when you stream you just want to turn your brain off instead of engaging it. So, yes, there is junk out there but there are also more complicated stories that make you think. Sometimes I get a chance to see something original and I learn something, but sadly, very often there is stuff that I do not find interesting.”

El-Toukhy says that range of offering is important on the creatives’ side as well. “I’ve been in dialogue with Netflix and HBO so far, and I really find that they’re very, very engaged and very committed to tell stories the way you want to tell them, when they take on a project. They have such a big range in terms of audience groups, and that can allow you as a storyteller to be very specific and radical. That’s one of the beauties. If you are making a very niche, nationally financed independent film, there might not be a big enough local audiences for it, but with streaming services, even the niche stories can potentially generate a significant number of audience members, because of the global nature of these platforms.”

Chernobyl director **Johan Renck** has found that to be true. On his current Netflix film *Spaceman of Bohemia*, a sci-fi feature starring **Adam Sandler**, he says, “It’s a risky project because it is different, but Netflix are not scared to make it.” That might have not happened if it was the usual patchwork of risk-averse film financiers. “There aren’t those co-producer notes coming in saying, ‘Maybe this is going to be too challenging for audiences.’ With the plethora of content a streamer like Netflix can provide, they can work in all echelons.”

The home for more niche content has a benefit for viewers outside of the major metropolitan areas, where the content world has traditionally concentrated its efforts. El-Toukhy adds, “A young homosexual girl living in the countryside with no one, in real life, to mirror her or her journey can discover fiction that makes her feel less desolate. I think almost everyone can find someone in the world of fiction to mirror them, especially now when there is so much to choose from.”

But Grisoni wonders if the platforms are always willing to back the kind of very precise, geographically specific work he has loved working on in England in the past, such as the *Red Riding Trilogy* (in Yorkshire) or *Southcliffe* (on the Kent marshes). He adds, “those stories are really set in this soil and that feels like a harder thing to do now, it’s the perception of what counts as global. The adage holds true: what is particular is universal.”

The range of potential work is astounding, as Renck says, “It’s a booming environment for filmmakers but there are so many things to be done if you want to be in TV series or limited series or film or documentary series it’s a klondike right now for the production of content.”

Just because there is a gold rush, that doesn’t mean a creative has to pan it all himself. As Renck adds, “there is more stuff being made, but I am so picky, 99% of the stuff I see doesn’t interest me.”

Even while being picky personally about his own passion projects, Östlund says it’s a great time to be a storyteller. “To be a director today must be a luxury when it comes to different opportunities to get a job.” But he cautions that “we don’t want to end up where we have the possibility to widen the spectrum of different expression but the competition for viewers is aiming too wide, so the spectrum of expression is narrowing down instead of widening up. That would be the only bad thing for the possibilities of global distribution. You have to find the audience that is a specific audience for different kinds of content, so we don’t repeat the same clichés and stereotypes and the same stories.”

As much as there is an opportunity to speak to a global audience, that prospect can also be intimidating during the writing process. Herero tries not to think about millions of people who might tune into her series. “I don’t really think about the audience, it’s too terrifying to think about the worldwide audience. You shouldn’t think too much of any audience, what I try to do is be as sincere and authentic and sharp and funny as I can. And as good as a storyteller as I can be. If I do that correctly, people will be here.”

Winger first envisioned the *Deutschland* trilogy at a time when the German TV industry was in a different mode—it was groundbreaking in 2015 that *Deutschland83* had its world premiere on Sundance TV in the US before it even premiered on RTL in Germany. Amazon then stepped in to purchase second-window rights for the series, and became the lead financier for final two series, *Deutschland86* and *Deutschland89*. Making a show led by a platform didn’t have any creative impact on Winger: “Creatively it didn’t change anything,” he says. “Amazon really loved the first season so they wanted us to keep doing what we were doing.”

He certainly didn’t want to start writing differently for a global audience. “We don’t think about a global audience. We believe that the audience for shows like *Deutschland* are coming to these shows because they want an alternative to the more standard series.”

Winger continues, “This audience thinks if they are going to watch a German show, they like the idea of being parachuted into something foreign. They don’t have to understand every reference point, as long

as they are drawn into the emotional connection. Those emotions can be universal – a father looking for a son – a theme like that transcends borders, but then you also want the specifics of that context, to explore a world you didn't know." (And, for better or worse with second-screen habits, he knows if there is something that confuses an audience historically, they can Google it while they watch.)

The globalization of the episodic world represents so many opportunities for storytellers, Winger says. "It's amazing how we're crossing borders. I could not have dreamt about this when I stated in this industry," he says. "Before, every smaller country was sitting in its own sandbox and that's not a very healthy place."

EVOLUTION OF THE EPISODIC WORLD

The episodic world has greatly changed not just in volume but in number of funders, and in the process for series to be commissioned and produced. Concepts like the showrunner and the writers' room, once found almost exclusively in the US, are becoming more commonplace in the UK, Europe and other parts of the world.

Winger has seen Germany start to embrace that 'showrunner' culture – "There is a lot of respect nowadays for people who create the shows. That idea of respect for the creative teams – the creators especially – is coming from the US and it has arrived in Europe. We do feel this for the partners we are working with now. For instance with Disney+ or from Amazon with *Deutschland*, we are getting great notes and feedback and it's a good conversation we're having with those streamers. This wasn't always the case in the past, in the old days the broadcaster might have been more telling (the creatives) how to make it, sometimes it was the broadcaster who thought they had the recipe... overall I'd say we're on a healthy path now where broadcasters are more like curators and they are helping the creators make the best version of the show."

Herrero says, "The way things work are changing here in France because we look at the showrunner model of the big shows in the US, and the way they are doing it seems to be working well. In France, we had this long tradition of cinema d'auteur, so that is hard to change that mentality sometimes even if it is more acceptable now. Often, the directors and producers agree on paper that the writer is important, but when you are actually in the world of making the show, they see you on the set all the time and are surprised. But the situation is way better than when I started *Call My Agent*."

Herrero is not ruling out film work personally – "that could interest

me” – but she says her TV experience is so hugely in demand in the current market. “I started when I was 30 in the series industry, that’s where I got my expertise and experience, and that’s valuable right now. There are not so many of us who can write, who can be head writer, and be a showrunner, so that experience of 15 years is precious. With everyone wanting more content and ideas, TV is where I can have something quite valuable.” She adds, “in series, writers are more and more powerful, that’s not the case in film unless you work with the right director.”

Herrero relishes her role as a writer and showrunner – “I am on set every day, I love being on set, and working with actors, when you write, actors are the continuation of yourself, they are the body you don’t have when you write. The links between writers and actors in a series, can be even stronger than the director and the actors.” She does think she could eventually move to directing as well, perhaps even with season two of her new show *Standing-Up*.

Also in France, even in-demand writers and showrunners “don’t have the huge contracts that they can have in America. We can make a comfortable living but we’re not seen as these big stars.” That could change as the landscape gets even more competitive, if more players like Amazon or Disney start making content in France, “the competition could become more fierce and maybe there will be more of a fight to get the talent on board.”

Herrero says the issue of IP rights doesn’t bother her as much as it might working somewhere other than France. “There are so few French shows that are a big success abroad...so selling the rights to Netflix is a good opportunity for French showrunners,” she adds.

Audience potential is certainly bigger with episodic work, on linear TV or a platform. A creator doesn’t get to sit in a dark room with the audience as with cinema, but more people are more likely to have seen that work. Grisoni, who says he still loves the cinema experience, admits, “The thing about TV is that there’s a real audience, and a very, very strong contract with the audience. Even the smallest audience on TV is for me is huge in comparison with most cinema. I walk out my front door, and I’m talking to people because they watch TV. I’m more likely to have a conversation with someone about what they saw on TV than if they saw a movie.”

Chernobyl’s Renck says of platforms and broadcasters, “I like the fact a story is accessible and there is something democratic about more people being able to see it.”

That popularity might come with a price. There is also the feeling that with episodic, there is more creative intervention. As Akhavan says, “With television, just the very nature of what you’re making,



Triangle of Sadness



Southcliffe



Red Riding Trilogy



When the Dust Settles

there are so many creative voices in the room. That is really difficult to have the kind of control that you would have on a feature. It's just a different game. Sometimes in TV, you can't even add a necklace to a costume without 40 executives having an opinion on it."

Indeed even TV writing can bring more collaborative experiences than on film. Writers' rooms are becoming much more commonplace in the UK industry, Grisoni explains, which can be a great thing if run properly. "A writers' room can offer a beautiful synergy... especially when people make an investment in the spirit of the piece. They have to bring themselves to it. Not everyone can do it. It's like playing with other children nicely, and not everybody is good at that," he says with a laugh.

Also, establishing, running and funding a writers' room can take more preparation – and investment – than some executives realise. "I'm not sure if some companies in the UK realise the worth of that labour and if they are cashed up enough to do it properly. You're asking for a lot of involvement, a lot of work. If you've got four writers working on 12 hours of drama, that's something that needs time. And time is money."

It's important to note that the writers' room might also not just be 9 to 5 hours. "It's not just about the time you are sat together, you're thinking about the work even when you knock off at 5:30 or 6. You've got the rest of the evening to be thinking about it because you've got to be prepared for the next morning at 9."

Winger says he has worked with writers' rooms in Germany before they were gaining in popularity there. He explains, "For many years working on a primetime crime show for ZDF, we experimented with our version of a writers' room. And then on *Deutschland* we also did that, there was a different kind of writers room for every season." For the shows he is developing now, he adds, "I tend to write or co-write the pilot, to establish that tone in the pilot script, and then bring in a more diverse team of writers. I like having different people look at the same subject matter from different angles," he explains. Each writers' room should vary based on the creator and the project – "there is no one size fits all."

Haq was one of those film directors who wasn't sure she wanted to move into TV until she found the right project to collaborate on – *When the Dust Settles*, about the aftermath of a terrorist attack, was a drama for Danish public broadcaster DR written by **Ida Maria Rydén** and **Dorte Høgh**; Haq already "knew and trusted" producer **Stinna Lassen**.

She directed three episodes of the 10-part series. "I thought it would be an interesting way for me to get a taste of how to make a TV series

without it having to be a project that I had to live with for six years.” Of course, coming into a show “did feel less personal” than her feature films, but she felt a personal responsibility to engage with everyone on the set as she would when she was directing her own film.

She is now creating a more personal TV series for NRK, a drama about Pakistani immigrants in Norway from the 1970s to today, and is “open minded” to read other TV projects if it is “a story creating something that would engage me”. For instance she is attached to direct the new series *Palomino* for Netflix UK. She adds, “In the beginning of my career, I never thought I would do television. Now, I think it’s interesting that we can tell stories in several ways, and TV series open up the possibilities for new ways of storytelling. I’m open to working with the platforms as well...but I’m not going to jump into something just because of the salary.”

That salary disparity can’t be denied – episodic work often offers a better salary or more consistent income. There can also be creative advantages – such as delving into a story in a richer way than a two-hour film. Haq adds, “TV gives me the possibility to dig deeper into the subject and the characters. With cinema, one of the hardest things to do is to cut out all your darlings, small details because there is no space for them. Television gives you the possibility to tell more.”

Belgium’s **Koen Mortier** is another authored filmmaker – his credits include festival hits like *Ex Drummer* and *22nd of May* – who is delving into the episodic world for the first time. He is making an 11-episode documentary series, *Voices of Liberation*, about World War Two soldiers, resistance fighters and civilians (it also marks his first non-fiction project). He explains, “It was already in the works when Netflix came on board as one of the partners.”

Netflix has been completely hands-off with his creative process, he says, “I don’t have any contact with them. This project was coming more from the side of their spend obligations, so maybe it would be different if I was making a Netflix Original.” (Belgium passed a law requiring the streaming giant to invest 2% of its income from subscriptions in Flanders into Flemish content. Netflix will provide 40% of the total budget of Mortier’s series.)

Mortier hopes to make a TV series after finishing his current independent feature, *Skunk* – “I haven’t been approached to do TV. I would be open to TV if I would write it myself. But I’m not sure how commercial that would be. My idea is after I to develop a TV show, it will be nice to tell a story that can stretch six, seven hours. To have that character development over a longer time, that could be interesting.”

He would like to see more variation in the kinds of series coming out of Flanders – “it felt the same as with literature, they killed it with

all these stupid police stories. And now they are killing TV with these stupid police and crime stories. It all feels the same. We need evolution.”

Especially after the success of *Queen of Hearts*, Danish director May el-Toukhy says she is luckily “in a position now where I can actually focus solely on my own ideas if I want to.” But it’s important for her to also collaborate on stories she didn’t originate – such as working on the acclaimed DR series *Cry Wolf*, or currently serving as one of the directors of season five of Netflix hit *The Crown*. “I enjoy serving someone else’s vision. It keeps me fit and keeps my skillset up to date. And it inspires me moving about on different productions. The inspiration can come from a showrunner I work with, an actress I never worked with before, an arena that sparks new insight, even a location recce can spark a new idea, that has nothing to do with the actual show I am working on. Being a hired gun can benefit your passion projects.”

Mehta was very much a cinephile before he made *Delhi Crime*. For him, the series started organically just with the subject matter needed more time to explore, which was the police investigation of a 2012 Delhi gang rape case, inspired by true events. “I was writing this massive project that I just thought of like an eight-hour film, which became *Delhi Crime*. I didn’t know how to do series. I was just writing a spec script, and that script ended up being 420 pages long, which lends itself obviously to a series format.” He first started working on that script in 2013, “and that was when HBO was really the only global player at the high end, nobody else was really doing that. *House of Cards* had just premiered on Netflix. And by the time I finished writing the scripts in 2016, there was this explosion around the world for limited series.”

In a riskier movie, he financed and shot *Delhi Crime* independently, and then took it to Sundance, where it sold as a completed show to Netflix (and became one of their first successful series made in India, also winning an International Emmy). It was especially important to protect his vision for the series because of the sensitive nature of the subject matter and the promises he’d made to the subjects during his research. “If there had been a financier who said, ‘We have to go in this direction, or we want to show the crime this way,’ if we crossed that line I would have had to back off. I couldn’t cross those ethical lines for myself or the subjects.”

Mehta still likes to work in a speculative way to keep his independent mindset, “I’m going to keep spec writing a new series, and figure out ways to subsidize myself during that time.”

He had been approached to direct TV before “but it was more like being hired to direct season three, episode six of some mediocre sci-fi

story, and I didn't want to go into that route. It was really important to me that if I got into the TV world, it was on my own terms creatively. I don't know how to take somebody else's series Bible and say, 'I'm going to add my stamp on your show.'"

As the feature film business is increasingly driven by franchises on the studio side, the episodic world still has plenty of room for original stories, Winger finds. Both the shows he will shoot in 2022 are based on original ideas, not existing IP. "When I think about my top 10 favourite shows they are mostly based on original ideas. I would hate for the TV or streaming industry to become what the biggest feature films are – franchises or a canon of characters and known IP and not taking risks on original ideas."

Mehta is still a fan of independent films, and will return to making cinema one day, but another benefit to episodic work that he sees is that a series "can become an experience for an audience, rather than just watching a film for 90 minutes and forgetting about it. If somebody is giving seven or eight hours of their life to this story you want to tell, that's really special." He has one project now that he thinks could be 20 hours of material. "If it works, it will be a life experience for people, they will literally take up a chunk of their life when they watch it."

As a writer, Mehta also enjoys those moments in episodic work that might be trimmed out of a film. "I enjoy exploring complex narratives and having character digressions, that don't necessarily have to do with the main thrust of the plot. It excites me to take on bigger subjects. You don't have to distil an epic idea into 90 minutes, if you have more hours, you can include more complex facets. For *Delhi Crime* there are five or six major themes."

Despite not yet working in episodic, Östlund says he is being approached several times a month to consider ideas or script for TV or platforms. "I think I would be open to doing something episodic, but it would depend on the artistic freedom and on how much a streaming service would be involved (on the creative side). I'm so used to having the luxury of being in control of my films, so at Plattform (his own Sweden-based production company he runs alongside producer **Erik Hemmendorff**) we try to be very careful with that. We always protect that director's cut even with a big co-production. It would depend on the artistic control and of course very much on the content. I often think it's hard to find a topic that motivates you to do a certain number of episodes. I don't want to make something that is just trying to keep the audience watching over a certain number of hours. I don't want to do something that is just running on and on."

Renck said previously he "had no intention to take steps into TV"



The Young Pope



Cry Wolf



Deutschland 83



What Will People Say

but was persuaded by **Vince Gilligan** to direct three episodes of hit US drama *Breaking Bad*. “Vince said to me, ‘While you’re waiting to make your next movie, this is an opportunity to work with some great actors,’ so I reluctantly went and I found that I enjoyed it. It is a limited space for your holistic filmmaking experience – the cast is already there, the locations are there, the script is written. But still it was a good exercise in directing.”

He became interested more in limited series “which felt more like a long-form movie,” he says, such as with *The Last Panthers* (he directed all six episodes) and then the groundbreaking *Chernobyl* (he directed all five episodes).

Renck definitely felt burnout after working on such a huge limited series. “Great work can come out of that, but it’s so taxing, it’s 120 shooting days, years of work, nine months of editing. It can feel too big.”

That overload is leading to burnout across various production roles, not just for writers and directors. In summer 2021, 415 people in the Danish film and TV industry signed an open letter to the country’s production companies warning that volume and timelines for the work they were being asked to do in this content boom was leading to “harassment, bullying and threats to smash people’s careers”. The letter, signed by people across various production roles, continued, “People who are just doing their jobs should not have to report sick with depression and stress, or leave the industry altogether just because the lemon just needs to be squeezed a little more.”

The pace can also be grueling even if not directing all the episodes – Akhavan says, “The time crunch, and the workflow can get a little soul crushing at times [in TV], even when you’re with the best possible network the best possible talent to work – it’s a fast pace in a short period of time. But sometimes the money is so much better than in film.”

Akhavan adds, “it can take over your life the way it takes over your existence – even on *The Bisexual* this happened, with a small shoot and a relatively modest profile [the six-episode comedy was made for Channel 4 in the UK and Hulu in the US]. The nature of making television is just inherently very, very different, and on a really different timeframe. It’s like doing three features in a row and I can’t imagine a season that goes beyond six episodes, which I know is nothing in the grand scheme of things.”

She compares boarding a show to direct an episode or two to acting. “It’s being of service to a showrunner. You come in and ask, ‘how can I enhance this?’ and ‘how can I support the person at the helm of it?’ I don’t view every show as my thing, I view it as someone else’s and I’m a hired hand to support the ship moving as seamlessly as painlessly as possible and making the quality as high as possible.”

EVOLUTION OF THE INDEPENDENT FILM WORLD

Despite the content boom, earning a living just as an independent filmmaker is more precarious than ever. Akhavan says, “I grew up at a time where you could make a living as a filmmaker, when it didn’t seem insane to want to just make movies. Something happened in the past 10 years where all of us are now working in television, and none of us get paid a livable wage to make movies. I think movies are suffering because TV is where our auteurs are going to tell artistic stories, and where they can make a living.”

She feels this situation very personally as she is trying to work on her next feature, a Farsi-language feature set during the Islamic Revolution, but needing to fit in TV work to pay her bills. “I’ve been trying to make my next film for four years, but I keep getting sidetracked by paid work and thinking, ‘this is a tangible thing in my pocket.’ Either I am investing in my future self, or investing in actual work.”

Even when being paid a solid rate, job security is an issue especially in features. El Toukhy says, “I can get a pretty decent salary out of being a director, the problem is that every year you have months when you’re not working, when you’re in between projects and that’s when you’re not getting paid. Getting paid when you’re developing is the big problem for most directors. A steady income can be hard to maintain even for the established. It’s more feast or famine.”

On the film side, because it is such a fight to get a film made, el-Toukhy sees a silver lining artistically: “You don’t do a movie, unless you really want to tell that story, because it’s so much work. It can make you 10 years older.”

Östlund fears for the future of the communal experience of watching movies together. That’s become fragmented not just with cinema culture diminishing, but also within the home – “We don’t even watch things together in our own homes anymore, in Sweden the only thing you watch together as a family is the Eurovision Song Contest.”

He would like to see stories told in a way “that is rich and joyful to share with other people. With my past films and my next film too, I feel like that’s a big part of my job, to show the film to a big audience... It’s important to share things together – you start to process what you are watching. If you want to make films that provoke a discussion, the cinema is the best place.”

Film Festivals are also changing in this content boom, with festivals like Berlin and Toronto starting sections devoted to episodic work; and festivals like Cannes not screening auteur-driven films released by Netflix because of theatrical windows issues.

Mehta was accustomed to doing a festival tour with all his feature films, with *Delhi Crime* he did one festival (Sundance) and then Netflix

bought it and there was not a chance for him to personally take it to more festivals as it released globally weeks later. “So I didn’t do that dog-and-pony festival dance – which I can really enjoy.” He is hopeful that even with the rise of the platforms, that “festivals could have another influx, especially the ones getting smaller communities to engage with independent film.”

He adds, “the festival world is so important to me because I love going to different countries, hearing different languages, engaging with people. You get a different level of audience engagement [in cinemas].” That principle even stands in the macro level of paying attention for 90 minutes – “The thing I hate most about series is the drop off, a fraction of the people will stay with it. But in the cinema, people will sit there. They don’t walk out.”

Östlund sees film festivals as still crucial to launch a film – “That’s where I first meet the audience and that is a big deal for me. What I love about film festivals, about Cannes for example, is that it’s a meeting point for the film world, everyone has this knowledge of films and this ability to appreciate your work.”

He hopes that festivals and platforms and cinemas can all coexist – “I want people to watch my movies. And the great thing about movies is that they have different periods when they are presented to the audience at festivals, in the cinema and then later on platforms.” (His personal online film watching is mostly on MUBI, where he appreciates the curation.)

Renck sees a shift in the film world – “the cinema world has experienced a lot of issues over the last few years,” he says. “The middle films died out, you still get the very small indies or the blockbusters. But that middle section of quality dramas disappeared because they weren’t commercially viable. But the streamers came in and can work well at that level. So I don’t fear for independent cinema, even if that’s in the world of streamers also,” he adds.

Coming from that more auteur, director-driven history of cinema, writers can sometimes struggle with their role in the making of films. In the TV world, it can happen more often that a writer works closely with the producer before the director is hired and they can have more of a voice in the making of the project. “I started out wanting to write feature films and I still do want to write feature films, that was my first love, really,” says Grisoni. “With *Red Riding* [a trilogy of three feature-length episodes for the UK’s Channel 4], I was crossing over to writing TV, I enjoyed that because I got greater responsibility. I couldn’t be switched out so easily.” He continues, “The whole way of funding films is to make the director the main element. That seems to isolate them and, in my opinion, give them too much power. I think

what works is a healthy triumvirate of producer, writer, director. You don't want to disempower any of those elements."

Mortier worries about the lack of film culture or film history at some of the platforms. "I don't see any interesting arthouse movies when I scroll through Netflix. There is a demand for the content, but I would say it's not intellectually deep. I don't see it as a platform for real arthouse movies. There is big gap when I look at my DVD collection and what you can find on the platforms."

Mortier is also disappointed that you don't find cinema culture or history on TV anymore, either. "I remember as a child watching all black and white movies on TV from a lot of countries, French or German films. But now you don't see them anymore on TV. How did this happen? It's not the same with music or literature. There should be a discussion to protect European culture (on TV and platforms)."

He continues, "In Belgium, most of the cinemas are big complexes so they show the Marvel films, and before COVID this was already problematic." He would like to see festivals play an even greater role in an independent film's life. "I think festivals can help – they can make cinema move again. If you have an arthouse movie, nobody's interested. Unless that's during a festival, then it's interesting and at least they watch it then."

Another growing problem is that many of those festival movies don't find an audience later – Netflix and Amazon have scaled back acquisitions of finished films at festivals to favour their own commissions. For example, Amazon bought big at Sundance 2019 – paying a whopping \$46m for four features (*Late Night*, *The Report*, *Honey Boy*, and *Brittany Runs a Marathon*) but by the online Sundance 2021, acquired no films from Sundance. So even a hit festival film can struggle after the festival world. As Mortier puts it, "There is a big gap around festival movies – even if they do get released later you, most of them won't get a cinema release. And Netflix isn't buying those movies. So, if it's not in the cinema or on Netflix, where do you find them?"

Akhavan also worries, "With films the streamers are greenlighting (rather than acquiring), they are making them hoping for success, and they become far more formulaic and far more paint by numbers."

Yet Renck is enjoying his current project, a one-off film for Netflix. He says, "I'm strongly feeling that this format and process is something that I like." Firstly, he gets one financier without having to raise the typical patchwork of financing in European film with potentially dozens of funders and partners. And instead of a huge project like *Chernobyl* which might be 300 minutes of content, the feature length "is much more precise. And it's a much more manageable format to shoot for 50 days rather than 150 days."

Östlund thinks that cinemagoing needs to be encouraged in new ways. “With *The Square*, we brought the Palme d’Or (trophy) on a tour of Sweden, and showed the audience, we made it possible for the audience to meet the people making the film, that was that a help for the cinema owners, especially those in the countryside. The cinema world should work more like live music, stand-up comedy, live performances, we have to go out there and build our reputation and build connections with the audience. If we do that, we are going to create this feeling that it’s worth going to the cinema.”

That magic of the cinema experience, and the communal feeling, might just be what saves cinemagoing post-pandemic, el-Toukhy hopes. “Maybe this is the beginning of a new era of going to the cinema, people now understand the quality of being in the same room, putting away your smartphone, experiencing the life of others, having like a cathartic experience with characters where you forget everything and enjoying that moment with other people.”

Winger hasn’t yet made a feature film but does have ideas he wants to explore. With the overproduction on the episodic side, funnily enough, the independent feature film could be ripe for exploring with more original ideas, now that it is seen as somewhat “out of fashion.” Winger as an audience member and a creator is bullish on that idea of “needing to watch something that starts and ends on the same night. You know you will get the end of the story, you’re not worried how many more episodes there are or will there be too many seasons.”

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Like all industry experts, none of the writers and directors we interviewed knows exactly what the future will hold, but they have some personal ideas for the way forward at least telling their own stories.

For non-blockbuster cinema to survive in the era of the platforms, the industry needs to entice younger audiences. Östlund suggests, “The challenge is dealing with the next generation like my daughters – they can watch what they want at home, we need to create a good reason for them to leave their homes. The cinema has to be better at inviting the audience, and making them feel like they are participating with something when they go to the cinema. We have to start training that next generation quite early. Look at theatre, they are working actively to bring the audience, like by working with schools and teachers. Not just sitting back and hoping the audience comes.”

The future can be more inclusive of society as well. Not just in terms of race and gender but of global geography too. Mehta says, “What I

do hope happens after this pandemic is that there's a bit of more of a levelling out that places like Africa and Asia have more of a say in this global independent market. I hope we see more than just the films that are coming from the West."

Akhavan agrees that non-English-language work could find bigger audiences. "After seeing what happened with *Parasite* or *Minari*, I think some doors have been opened. My dad is an Iranian immigrant in America and he never watched anything in a foreign language, including Farsi. But now he says, 'Because of *Narcos* [on Netflix], I'm used to reading subtitles.'" There are dozens of other examples of local-language fare making a global impact such as *Lupin*, *Unorthodox*, *Dark* or *Money Heist*.

The streamers have redefined the world of content, but some creatives see this as not a calculated plan for world domination, but as "just making it up as they go." This could be an opportunity. Grisoni would love to encourage more experimentation across the industry. "I would love it if the streamers were to do something very, very experimental. If we think of those shows from TV's first 'golden age,' HBO's *The Sopranos* and *The Wire*, they came out of a kind of experiment. Even something like *House of Cards* probably felt experimental for Netflix at the time because they didn't know what was going to work."

Grisoni's own personal hopes are for "absolute freedom to do anything, and to explore anything, and to find an audience somehow."

He adds, "I want freedom to be able to experiment and try things out and make mistakes. You don't want a bunch of people behaving themselves – that's the kind of fear of some by-the-numbers productions. Some of it just feels competent. I don't want just competent. Being just competent is a kind of failure."

He speaks for other storytellers when he says, "For me, I want to be less worried about whether the audience is 100 people or a million people, and still be able to work. That's all I want to do."

Winger hopes creatives can protect themselves from being pulled in too many different directions. "People are overworked, so I try very hard to focus on a very few projects." It is a shift of mindset – "after years of wishing for someone to say yes to something, I'm learning to say no to people. That's very important. Doing a show that is pretty good is not enough. You have to try to create something truly excellent to stand out because there are so many shows, there are so many talented people. The danger is spreading yourself too thinly."

Haq thinks that the future landscape will offer something for everyone. "I think people who like independent films will take the time to watch them. I sometimes feel like Netflix is just eating a big bag of chips instead of taking your time to eat a good meal and enjoy the food."

Of course, there are things in between. I think some people will have different priorities, and there is a place for all of it in our lives.”

El-Toukhy says that with more content being produced than ever before, that can mean more opportunity to tell very specific stories. “I think what excites me is being able to tell stories that are determined and distinct. Now there is an opportunity to tell stories about the corners of the world that we cannot explore through the mainstream. The more intricate and true to the given arena and the people that occupy it, the better,” she says. “If you wanted to tell a very complex and nuanced story about a family with Middle Eastern background in the suburbs of Copenhagen, there’s probably now going to be room for that. I think the big platforms understood very early on they should offer different types of content to different types of people instead of creating something generic for the masses.”

Quality will mean different things to different audiences. “I think audiences are going to start demanding even higher quality and originality, because there is so much to choose from,” el-Toukhy continues. “Personally I only want to give my attention to well-made fiction. Life is too short. But then again, there is an audience for almost everything, and it’s all about finding that right audience for a film or a show. If there is an audience for it, I guess one could argue that’s enough reason for the piece to be produced and exposed in the world, even though the story that is told, or the way it’s told, is not for me. Who am I to judge?”

Herrero says as an audience member “I don’t want to be diluted by too many stories” and finds the number of films and series available now overwhelming. As the cinema industry recovers from COVID, she says, “I hope there will be some space for original and auteur cinema, and more peculiar stuff, and not as global. Sometimes the global market worries me, and I know that’s a contradiction because I work for Netflix.”

Mehta sees creative freedom in that way he’s working with scripts on a spec basis rather than commissioned. “Certainly one of the trickiest aspects for storytellers is can you incubate yourself with enough time and energy to conceive of relevant, unique, original idea, and not just be grasping for the next work coming in...I think some of the best work comes from speculative endeavors. I hope that can continue. There is a danger that if every decent writer is being snatched up for some mediocre content, then they don’t have the time or the bandwidth to think of their own original ideas.”

Those fresh, original ideas can help keep storytelling relevant. Mehta warns, “a lot of platforms and broadcasters will try to mimic the successes they’ve had in the past. Yet oftentimes it’s the speculative work that redefines their edginess. You don’t want this army of people

with unique voices just doing interchangeable work for hire.”

Original voices can't just be fed through a machine, either. Renck hopes that there continues to be a bold human voice in commissioning. “What concerns me is the algorithm-based processes that are becoming more sophisticated in mathematically testing the market value of everything. That's concerning to say the least. With algorithms there is always the problem that you are measuring history to guess what is viable in the future. But as we all know, in all art forms, what is new and fresh can be the winner. Look at something like *The Queen's Gambit* – it's lesser-known actors and it's about chess. That would have never been made in the studio system but it became a hit for Netflix. If that had been judged only on algorithms maybe it wouldn't have even been made.”

Renck thinks there could be a market correction for the boom. “There is so much content being made that no human being can be in the loop in a reasonable way. So maybe there is too much stuff being made, and some money wasted on stuff that's not being seen. Maybe that will balance itself out.”

Akhavan is trying to be platform agnostic when thinking about how future audiences will view her work. She says, “I really don't think it's my business how or where the audience sees the work; if someone is watching on a TV and it's not enough to hold their focus and they won't put their phone away, that's their prerogative. We all choose the way we ingest things. I watch a lot of content on my phone, and if I love that content, I can shut the world around me and have a great experience watching on the phone...I just want to give my work a fighting chance to have exposure.”

Akhavan sums this brave new world: “I don't want to fight natural shifts in the culture. The Internet has changed things, the pandemic has changed things, and I don't want to be precious about the way people get content, I think that will always be shifting.”

CONCLUSIONS & FURTHER DISCUSSION POINTS

The intention of this report was never to present a monolithic approach to storytelling in the modern world; no two writers or directors have the same ambitions or career path.

Yet some interesting commonalities emerged from our disparate interviewees, and we present some key talking points for future discussion:

- There are more opportunities for paid work than ever before for writers and directors. Yet more content being created or distributed

than ever before doesn't mean creatives are getting to tell the stories they are most passionate about.

- Even before the pandemic, independent features were struggling to make an impact on a wide audience at cinemas, compared to the reach that platforms can have.

- The potential to reach audiences and connect with more of them globally is much greater than in the past, but for writers and directors, trying to envision a 'global hit' can be a dangerous game.

- Even cinema-obsessed creatives do also enjoy the opportunity to delve deeper into stories and characters in episodic work.

- This boom of content can be beneficial to opening the industry to a wider range of voices and giving new talents more opportunities to break into writing or directing.

- Global audiences are responding more and more work from across the globe, not just their home territories or English-language projects.

- Holding onto intellectual property is never easy, and can be even more challenging when a show is greenlit by a global streamer.

- While appreciating the range of content available, creatives hope that viewers can recognise and seek out quality, authentic storytelling amidst the many thousands of hours of content available at their fingertips.

- The US tradition of the showrunner is starting to become more commonplace in the UK, Europe and beyond, giving writers more power.

- Episodic work usually offers more financial stability for writers and directors, compared to truly independent film work.

- If writers and directors are busier than ever in the current landscape (and indeed many can feel burnout), they need to remember to jump off the hamster wheel sometimes to reconsider what their passion projects could be and protect the development of those more original ideas.

- The cinema audience should be nurtured, protected and encouraged especially to appreciate independent feature films not just blockbusters – film festivals can be one place to start this appreciation.

- Even the global behemoths are seen as “making it up as they go along,” so audiences and creatives all have some power to shape the future of films, episodic works, cinemas and platforms.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEES



Desiree Akhavan is a New York-based producer, screenwriter and actress based in New York. She has directed the feature films *Appropriate Behaviour* (2014, Sundance), *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (2018, Sundance Grand Jury Prize Winner); created and directed the web series *The Slope* and Channel 4 TV series *The Bisexual*; and has directed for TV's *Hacks* and *Ramy*.



May el-Toukhy is a Danish-Egyptian film director who has directed the features *Long Story Short* (Bodil Award winning) and *Queen of Hearts* (Sundance 2019 and Danish submission for the Oscars). She has directed several episodes of Danish Broadcasting Corporation's drama series *Ride Upon the Storm*, *The Legacy* and *Cry Wolf*. She is currently a director on season five of Netflix's *The Crown* and plans to shoot her next feature, *The Lioness*, a biopic of **Karen Blixen**, in 2023.



Tony Grisoni is an award-winning, BAFTA-nominated screenwriter based in London. He has co-written with **Terry Gilliam** on projects such as *Fear & Loathing in Las Vegas*, *Tideland* and *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*. Tony's film work also includes *In This World*, *How I Live Now*, *Lives of the Saints*, *Death Defying Acts*, *Queen of Hearts* and *Brothers of the Head*. Grisoni's TV work includes *The Red Riding Trilogy* for Channel 4, adapted from the **David Peace** novels; **Samantha Morton's** directorial debut, the BAFTA-winning single drama *The Unloved*, *Southcliffe* for Channel 4; serving as co-writer and executive producer on *The Young Pope*; *The City & The City* for BBC2; and *Crazy Diamond* directed by **Marc Munden**. He has collaborated with artists including **Brian Catling**, **Oona Grimes**, **Dryden Goodwin** and **Marcia Farquhar**. He has also directed a number of shorts.



Iram Haq is a Norwegian-Pakistani actress, screenwriter and director based in Oslo. After an active acting career, she directed the short *Little Miss Eyeflap*, which had its world premiere at Sundance, followed by making her feature directorial debut with *I Am Yours*, which was Norway's submission for the foreign-language Oscar in 2013. Her second feature *What Will People Say* won four Amanda Awards and screened in Toronto's prestigious Platform programme. In 2020 she directed three episodes of the Danish TV drama *When The Dust Settles*. Her next project is the female-driven action adventure series *Palomino* produced by Left Bank for Netflix UK.



Koen Mortier is a Belgian film producer, director and screenwriter. His past films include *Ex Drummer*, *22nd of May* and *Angel*. He is now

working on his first series for Netflix, the documentary project, *Voices of Liberation*, as well as currently finishing his next feature, *Skunk*. He is the co-founder, with **Eurydice Gysel**, of Brussels-based production company CZAR Film.

Fanny Herrero is a French actress and screenwriter, and the creator of global hit *Call My Agent*. Her other TV credits include *Un village français*, *Kaboul Kitchen*, and *Les bleus: premières pas dans la police*. She is now working on a new series for Netflix, *Standing-Up*, about young stand-up comedians in Paris.



Richie Mehta is a Canada-born, Europe based writer and director with close ties to India. His first feature was 2008's *Amal* (Toronto selection and Genie Awards nominee), followed by *Continuum*, *Siddharth* (selected for Venice Days) and documentary *India in a Day*. He directed the acclaimed Netflix series *Delhi Crime* (International Emmy winner) and has several episodic projects in development.



Ruben Östlund is a Swedish filmmaker who made his feature directorial debut with *Involuntary*, followed by *Play*, *Force Majeure* and *The Square*, which won the Palme d'Or in Cannes and was Oscar nominated. His next film *Triangle of Sadness*, his first project mostly in the English language, will debut at Cannes 2022 with a cast including **Woody Harrelson** and **Harris Dickinson**. Östlund founded the production company Plattform Produktion with producer **Erik Hemmendorff** in 2002.



Johan Renck has worked across film, TV series, commercials, music videos, theatre, photography, art and music in his native Sweden and around the globe. His films include *Downloading Nancy* (Sundance 2008) and the forthcoming *Spaceman of Bohemia*. His TV credits include directing for *Breaking Bad*, *Bates Motel*, *Bloodline*, *Vikings*, *The Walking Dead*, *The Last Panthers* and all five episodes of the BAFTA and Emmy-winning *Chernobyl* for HBO and Sky. He will direct the first two episodes of *Dune: The Sisterhood*.



Jörg Winger is the co-creator and executive producer of the Deutschland trilogy: *Deutschland83*, *Deutschland86* and *Deutschland89*; his other credits include *Hackerville* and *Leipzig Homicide*. He is one of the managing directors of Berlin-based Big Window Productions, an UFA Fiction label concentrating on German- and English-language high-end drama. Winger is currently developing the French-German series *Ouija* for France Télévision.



