



ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΟΥ

48ο ΦΕΣΤΙΒΑΛ

ΚΙΝΗΜΑΤΟΓΡΑΦΟΥ ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΗΣ

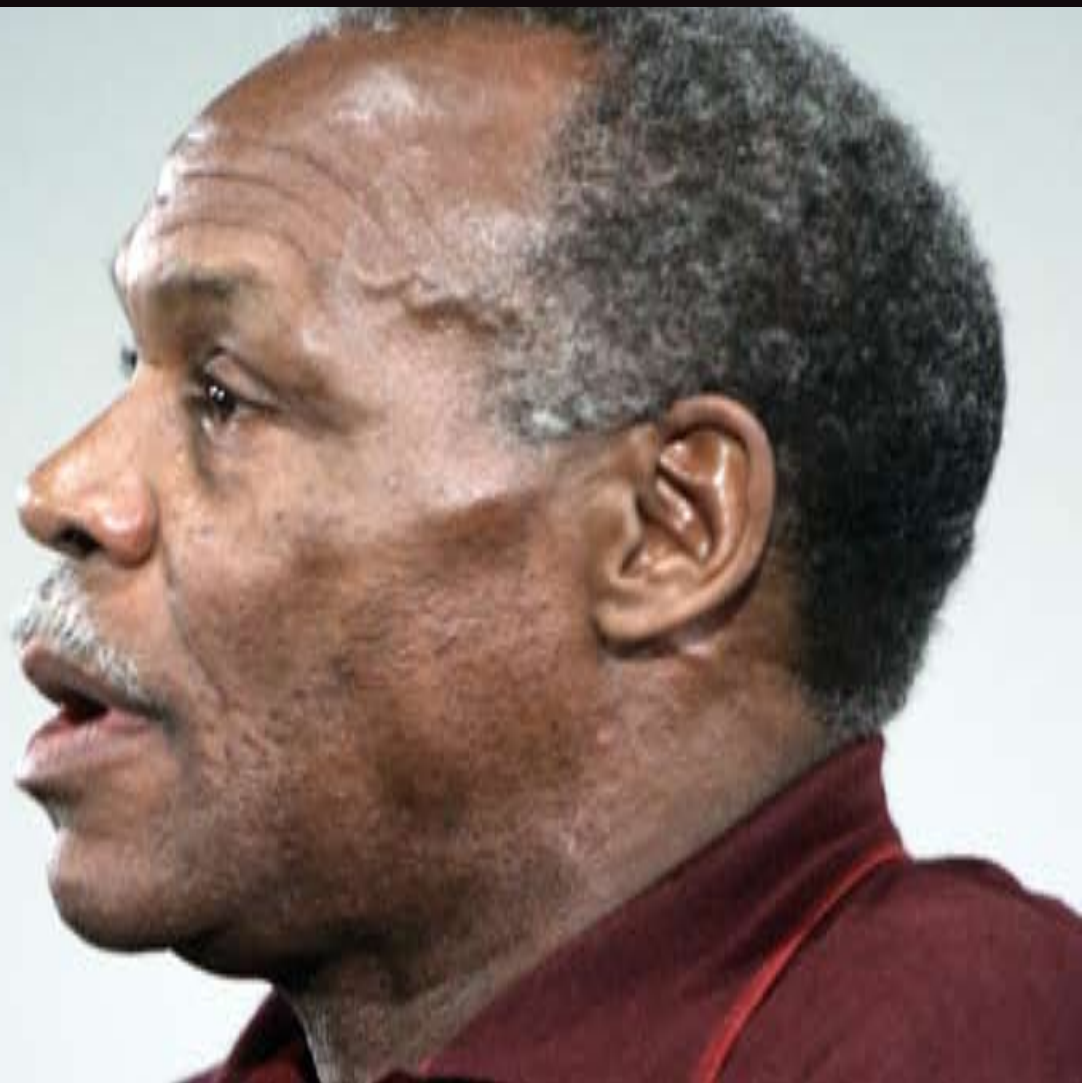
16-25.11.2007

MINISTRY OF CULTURE

48th THESSALONIKI

INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

MASTERCLASS DANNY GLOVER



Introduction by Despina Mouzaki, TIFF's director, and George Krassakopoulos, film critic and discussion's moderator.

George Krassakopoulos

Καλημέρα σας. Καλώς ήρθατε στο masterclass του Danny Glover, ενός σπουδαίου Αμερικάνου ηθοποιού. Πριν ξεκινήσουμε, θα ήθελα να δώσω το λόγο στην Διευθύντρια του Φεστιβάλ, την κ. Μουζάκη, για να πει μερικά λόγια για τον κ. Glover.

George Krassakopoulos

I'm going to speak in English, so you probably won't need this for a while. I hope the Festival is not tiring you down; I see you drinking vitamins.

Danny Glover

Vitamins are part of my regiment. Under most circumstances.

Παρουσιαστής

You're here for "Honeydripper", the film you did with John Sayles. Do you mind that a lot of people that know you from "Lethal Weapon", for instance, won't see it or don't even know it exists? How do you feel about that?

Danny Glover

Certainly, there are wonderful reasons why it's great to have "Lethal Weapon" as part of your résumé. It certainly gives you an entrée into audiences, like this audience here and audiences from the rest of the world. So, I had the opportunity to step in the living room of families by virtue of doing a film that has mass appeal.

Even if you look at "Lethal Weapon" seriously, there are inherent certain values within those series. First of all, you look at the fact that it is a genre action film. Also, each film focuses on a particular issue. The first one on the proliferation of drugs, and illicit drugs; the second one on the issue around Apartheid -we're proud to say that the movie was banned from South Africa at the time of its release; the third one was about guns and the proliferation of weapons and also the community, the violence in the community; and the fourth was one around immigration.

So, each one has some relationship outside the genre of an action/comedy film. I think that it is also important to know that, from the vanishing point of images, you have an African-American family with a set of their own values, one which has middle class aspirations, his profession etc. So, it counters often the other images which you see projected of African-Americans in film.

George Krassakopoulos

Is that an important thing for you? To seek even in your commercial films some values that you feel strongly about and you want to project them through your work?

Danny Glover

Well, I've been fortunate to do films that are often about redemption and love, films with a character as a specific arc, and most often what I consider an emotional arc. So, the films that I enjoyed doing were films that are governed by a sense of emotional danger as well.

George Krassakopoulos

But I suppose that there are films that you had to do, that you felt it was necessary to do in order to advance your career as a commercial actor as well or because one has to survive, I suppose.

Danny Glover

I never think of the films saying that I should not have done that film; I can't look back at what I did in the past but they are certainly films that I've done and certainly those films have paid me well and allowed me to do films that I would not have done. For instance, a film that I did and produced

called "To Sleep with Anger" was a film that was done and the money -only about 1.4 million dollars- to do that film came as a result of the popularity of "Lethal Weapon 1".

Another film I did, which I also produced, called "The Saint of Fort Washington" with Matt Dillon, a story about two homeless men, for that we were able to gain a leverage; money we got from the UK and money we received from Warner Brothers -because Warner Brothers wanted "Lethal Weapon" shot at a particular point and in order for me to be available, they gave me 3.5 million dollars to match the other 3.5 million dollars I got from the UK- so I was able to do that movie because we had the resources to do the film. So, I think that in some ways it is good as well to be able to do the films that I think are important for me.

I feel that what has happened to me in my career is that you have a set of ideas about what you want to do and how you see yourself in relationship to the rest of the world. My theatrical background is nurtured in the work of primarily Athol Fugard, the great South African playwright, so it gave me a sense of how you can use art as a medium, as a vehicle for transformation -not only one's personal transformation but also collective transformation.

So not only did the work that I did, whether it was "Sizwe Banzi is Dead" or "The Island", theatrical work that I did, or "Master Harold and the Boys" or "The Blood Knot" reflect a kind of growth for me, but also provided me an avenue on which I can say what was important for me in the world and whose side I was on in the world. Those plays happened to coincide with the work that I was doing with the anti-Apartheid movement from the late mid '70s through "Master Harold and the Boys" in 1982, 1983. So, I was able to say, "This is the work that I'm doing as an artist, a cultural worker and this reflects the work that I do as a citizen as well".

George Krassakopoulos

You've been an activist as well as an actor, but do you think that change can be made through films or theatre or art in general in the society?

Danny Glover

I think that there is something that happens with art and it engages and involves collective memory. I think there are all different possibilities. There's always the realm of possibility with art if we create the scope and the framework to allow imaginations, to grasp the possibilities of what and who we can be individually and collectively. Of course, there's always the opportunity to change, but art stands at the preface or at the apex of when the change occurs. And we've seen that through history; we've seen art in some sense reflect our imaginative capacity to change and often shift attitudes as well as the way we all see each other.

I think it's very dangerous. Very dangerous for those who have power and those who want to maintain their power; art has become a very dangerous seed of power. And when I say very dangerous, I mean that those who have power want to control our imagination and ideas and by controlling our imagination, they often control our ideas. And they do that through films; you can see what stories are told and from whose point of view these stories are told, who are the protagonist and the antagonist in it, what the attitude that just developed through the images created is.

Right now in the world we see this attempt by people to reinforce their own identity through their imaginative capacity, through art. You see it through films, you see all these reflections. This film festival is an example of men and women coming together to validate themselves through their imaginative powers or through their own capacity to search for identity. Who am I in the 21st century as a human being? Who am I in the 21st century as a citizen? All those are encapsulated in how we reframe our artistic lives and how we see ourselves; that in relationship to a collective memory and the collective idea of what we can possibly do and who we can possibly be.

George Krassakopoulos

So, would you say that working in film is, in a way, a continuation of your activist self through an-

other medium?

Danny Glover

It always has been and I think the first time I stepped on a stage I was 20 years old and I remember we had invited Amiri Baraka out to San Francisco State -where I was a student- to start a community communication program. Amiri Baraka walked in the Black Student Union, which I was a member of, and on the central committee of this Union in 1967 he said, "I want some of you so-called revolutionaries to be in these plays". I had never been on a stage before and the first thing I felt was that I could be of some use.

So, the idea of being of some use, of SOME use, as an advocate or a vehicle of change was the first image of what I saw myself as an artist, and as an actor. So, I did these plays and ultimately I didn't think I was going to be an actor. I majored in economics and then studied economics and I worked for 6 years doing community development in the Hispanic and the African-American neighborhood in San Francisco. Then, I came back to art and decided at 30 years old that I wanted to be an actor. So, it's always been at the forefront, I mean I didn't always have the opportunity to do the things that I wanted to do, but it doesn't take a great deal for actors and people to get together and create their own world as well.

George Krassakopoulos

Speaking of change, would you say that the representation of African-Americans in Hollywood films has changed from when you started working?

Danny Glover

It's often hard to assess what we mean by change and certainly change is reflected not only in what is visible to us, but often in what we don't have the opportunity to see and understand. So, I'm very careful with the word, when we say change. Of course, you probably see more African-Americans playing a variety of different roles and in various movies, which is good in some sense, but that's assuming the fact that films really tell us a true story, or give us a sense of who we are at this particular point of time in history.

So, when I think of change, do we in some sense simply implant ourselves and re-change the existing paradigm? I don't believe that the existing paradigm has changed: the empire or the power decides it wants to tell certain stories that reinforce its own image of itself and validate its own power, so it tells our stories. If we become an adjunct, then we become part of that process. So, I'm very careful to use the idea of quantity, as we see more actors, when we reflect on where the change has happened.

There's a quality that's changed that I'm not so sure of. When I look around my country, I see young people who are criminalized in their schools, there are more African-Americans who are killed, who die by violent means, there are more African-Americans per capita in jail and incarcerated, young men and young women. I see the neighborhoods that are often associated with an expression of community devastated by deindustrialization; all those particular things that I see, those have to be reflected in some vision of the world.

I saw something very interesting on TV when I recently went to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. When I looked at the trailers for the upcoming movies, I saw that in this audience, which was primarily black, the only movies that were previewed to them were comedies and black movies. So, I'm thinking that maybe this is a re-segregation of what is happening, a re-segregation of the industry in some sense.

My brother who works in the industry behind the camera says that over a period of time there are fewer and fewer people of color behind the camera. My brother who is a cameraman and does video assist is saying that there are fewer and fewer people of color. So, this is perhaps a re-segregation. Black movies are here, white movies are there.

Yes, I'm concerned about that. When we as students went on strike in 1968, almost 40 years ago, we went on strike for an ethnic studies program. I learned the real value of coalition politics at that particular point in time because not only were there black students who were involved in the ethnic studies program, but also there were Hispanic students, Asian-American students, Native American students, African students, white students, there were teachers involved in the program and involved in the strike itself, which in a sense empowered us all.

If we can have the art that reflects the real complexities of who we are as human beings and is capable of challenging us to find some sort of way in which we make the world work for all of us, that's the art that I want to be involved in, not the art that segregates us or delineates one group whose story becomes primary and the other group's story becomes secondary.

George Krassakopoulos

Speaking of all these issues, I think it's a good opportunity to see a clip of one of your films from "The Color Purple".

(screening)

Playing a character that is bad, is it more challenging, you would say?

Danny Glover

I'm not judgmental about a character I'm playing, I don't see if he's good or bad. That's not a choice for me to make. I think you try to inhabit the character in what you think the character's needs are. If I assume that Mister wanted to be loved, which is the highest form of human expression, how then does this attempt to be loved is truncated or how is it unfulfilled in some sense and his behavior becomes a reaction to the fact that it is unfulfilled?

And as always, you are choreographing a performance. Of course, Mister has this extraordinary love or desire -whatever you want to see, he sees love- for Shug Avery, someone who can never inhabit his space. And anyway, because of who he is and because of who she is, this becomes an obsession for him and anything short of that becomes a denial of some place that carries him in a particular arc.

But "The Color Purple" was more than about Celie's redemption or path to growth; it's also about Mister's path to growth. Mister learns to begin to love himself. So, you begin to choreograph or find the range of the arc of the characters and the characters are as far as the relationship in a story with the story's arc as well, so that in any situation where people are repressed there's a kind of symbiotic relationship. The person who is oppressed is liberated and the person who is not oppressed is liberated. So you see both kinds of oppression happening within this story and I think this is the value of it.

I remember I still get comments from mothers and men and women primarily that they hated Mister, but it's a story that I think has values. And there is another thing: what are the values that we want to elevate within the story itself? What do we want to leave the audience with? How do we want to bring the audience closer to these stories and, in some sense, there is a revelation for the audience as well. And I think that in Mister's arc, in Mister's growth, as in Celie's, you find that.

George Krassakopoulos

Do you remember this film as one close to your heart? Do you think it was an important film in your career or in your growth as an actor?

Danny Glover

I think that one of the things that were important about the film for me was the kind of discourse and discussion that happened within the black community. We had an opportunity to create a groundswell of dialogue about this film, about images of black men, images of ourselves; often,

because racism is so pervasive, we live in a state of denial. We say "There ain't no incest or spouse abuse in the black community". And we see ourselves in a different way.

But there was this extraordinary discussion that happened in churches, in community centers, people got together; they still talk about this film! 22 years after the film was released and they still talk about it! So, I think the important element of the film, the outcome of this film was this enormous thrust in that we began to look at ourselves and really see ourselves. I think that people collectively have to have a sense of self-criticism. They have to be open in some sense to look at their own self in an honest way.

Perhaps the people, because it was so popular, because it was a film that drew a great deal of attention and because it was a white director who directed it, perhaps those were the kind of things that galvanized the community around discussion about this film. And I thought that was important. In fact, I would have been more upset or it would have been more interesting to me, I would have been puzzled if there had not been such a discussion.

So, as the film was about to be released, I was preparing myself for this kind of discourse. What are we talking about? What are we trying to do? What are we trying to say? And I think we have to be prepared to say that. If there is value in our work -and I believe that as we see ourselves as conscientious workers- then we have to understand ourselves, what we're doing and what we're saying.

George Krassakopoulos

You talked briefly about the director being white and I would like to discuss about the film you did with Charles Burnett, "To Sleep with Anger". Do you think that being a black director makes it more difficult to get your message across even to black audiences?

Danny Glover

It depends. I had the most interesting conversations and comments from people about "To Sleep with Anger". First of all, the comments I received on its movement; its movement was methodical and slow in some sense and I found that very interesting. I think "To Sleep with Anger" is a great film and all of us who've seen it would attest to the fact that it's a very special film.

George Krassakopoulos

And it's a very special director.

Danny Glover

It's a very special director, a director who thinks out of the box and doesn't often ascribe to the kind of paradigm that's often a frame for us to do our films. In terms of storytelling, the story is in a sense not linear and there's a metaphor within the story, which is in some way how you have to look at the story.

I decided to do "To Sleep with Anger" because when I read the script, all of a sudden, there was this whole idea of what I consider -maybe I wasn't able to articulate it at that time- this whole thrust of what I call historic memory and psychic memory, which is a part of all cultures. This thing has some sort of memory that extends beyond our existence at that particular moment. And what was that about?

I had a very interesting life as a child. I spent a great amount of time, even though I was born in San Francisco, California in 1946, with my mother, my grandmother, my mother's mother, and my mother's father. And in fact, at 3 years old I was even embraced by my great-grandmother, my maternal grandfather's mother, who was born in 1853. So, if you took my psychic memory or the historic memory that I was a part of, it encompasses and includes her as well.

So, what I began to flush in my mind were all the sub textual things that happened that you couldn't figure out. You try to understand this and that and all of a sudden Charles Burnett captures something that resonates in the deepest sense of yourself. And you say, "What is this? What are the feelings that I have here? What is this story?" I remember the stories as we sat around in the country as

a child. You are in the country, in rural Georgia, my grandparents were poor farmers, rural Georgia, and it's dark outside.

What are these stories, the stories that you hear and all these stories that you can't translate and bring to San Francisco but they have a resonance of what you are in the South? I wanted to find out, to immerse myself in a place where this allowed me to find some other place, somewhere in the back of my own collective memory and my own historic memory or psychic memory. And the reason why I took that role was that because I didn't understand or I only understood something and I was trying to touch it. The search was to find something that resonated in my own soul.

That was essentially the reason for that. When I read the script, all these kind of feelings came over me and I remember I still had my grandparents and they were in their mid 90s, so I was able to have a reference in that story in a sense; and the things you hear about the Tabbies or the other stories you hear about. For instance, my aunt, my mother's sister, had closed veins and always had leg problems. My grandmother who was a midwife said that the reason she had this medical problem was because one day all the children were playing house and someone put something in my grandfather's boots and my aunt put them on and from that day on she had problems with her legs. What they put in the boot was designed to harm my grandfather but at the same time not harm the child, not kill the child.

She firmly believed that. She would tell you that story. She wouldn't believe anything else happened and this was the kind of world that I saw inhabited, that was a part of my experience and a direct part of my experience and I was able to find that vehicle; the film itself was the vehicle to explore that in a sense.

George Krassakopoulos

Would you say that in this lies your interest in working with directors like Sissako? You produced "Bamako" and you had a part in it. Is this a way of searching your heritage and your racial past?

Danny Glover

After I did "Mandela" in Zimbabwe in 1986, I was trying to create a relationship with African directors. I had a relationship with a wonderful actor, Sidiki Bakaba, and we were trying to work on a project together and I had a relationship with a director who lives in Paris from Mauritania, Med Hondo. I had a relationship and tried to find a way to work with Osmane Sembene. So, I always tried to find a way to service -and I underline the word service-, this idea that African films were important, how Africans saw themselves and not how we saw them, the images projected of them, the ones we incur; how these images and how they saw themselves were very important for us in order to understand what's happening on the continent.

And it's an extraordinary period. One, the period of colonization, two, neo-colonization, and whatever comes with that -the globalization idea. And that was very important for me. When I was a student, I had the opportunity as a student to read just about everybody, whether it was Kenneth Kwanda, from Zambia; I decided I wanted to major in economics because I had read Julius Nyerere's "African Socialism". I read Franz Fernand and many others. Those were the kind of writings that we read as young students and, mind you, these were primarily men, leaders of the first generation after colonialism.

So, I was always fascinated and interested in what we mean by development. This is the reason why 10 years ago, I accepted the position as Good Will Ambassador to the United Nation Development Program; because I always wanted to understand and be a part of the discourse around development. What do we mean by development? When I went to the Community Development, this was a way to fulfill that need or desire to understand that.

So, I met Abderrahmane in Amiens, we were on the jury together 3 years ago at the wonderful film festival there, which Jean Pierre Garcia has been primarily responsible for, and we began to talk -I

had seen his work about migration, "Waiting for Happiness", and I was blown away not only by the work but by the way he uses color, just like Zhang Yimou uses color, cloth and fabric and all that. It was really beautiful.

So, we began talking and the conversation led us to his next project. And he told me this amazing story about growing up in a courtyard, his father's courtyard in Bamako where there were always 25 people living in this courtyard. And these 25 people were children, men and women who were students or unemployed, people who were displaced and migrated. And even today, there are still 25 people living in that courtyard despite all the changes. I thought that was fascinating! And he wanted to put the IMF and the World Bank on trial in this courtyard.

So, in some sense, what he did was frame a story around the impact that structural violence has on people's lives. This structural violence is the violence that happens in people's lives where they have no control over their lives because the decisions made above them reflect and change their lives -and often the way we say lives, change is certainly to displacement, disease, etc.

I found that a very interesting concept. So, we began to talk about it and I decided that I wanted to not only support the film but also invest money in the film. So, it's a special collaboration. The film was 20 years in the making, with them trying to find a person within a working relationship to allow them to tell their story. I think we're here in the 21st century talking about how people tell their stories and we can only imagine how we want to see the world that we live in by the way in which people imagine and re-imagine themselves. And I think it's critical; I support world cinema and think of myself in relationship to world cinema, not the kind of myopic and exclusive cinema that happens in my country.

George Krassakopoulos

Speaking of American cinema, we can see a small clip from "Lethal Weapon", a film that has nothing to do with "Bamako" but has a lot to do with you.

(screening)

Is it fun making pictures like this?

Danny Glover

I'll tell you what. Doing an action film is a lot of hard work. There's a lot of night shooting because most action films partially take place at night. Yes, it was actually fun. I found the collaboration between Mel and myself and Richard Donner, the director, really wonderful. The director would always say "Give me something, give me something" and we did a lot of improvisation and "Give me more, give me more, give me more". So, we did a lot of improvisation with Mel, but that came probably from a place where we could trust each other in a way.

As I look back on that period in the mid '80s, I think of it as very special. I always think that the dynamics that are happening in society determine the artistic expression to some extent. "Lethal Weapon" was preceded by "The Cosby Show" which was the first show on television where you would see African-Americans -really!- who were professionals in some sense, a weekly show in which they were playing a particular role and they had another image that was created.

I think that the way people embrace a film is by the new assumptions that determine the way we see people; and "Lethal Weapon" came into that particular point. I won't say it's relevant now but it certainly had some kind of space within that time and I think it's the reason why people embraced it. I think the first one did just about 70 million dollars domestically and the second one did 145 million dollars when it opened. So, it became a franchise, but it also allowed Mel to expand his audiences and his career in a different way and allowed me, relatively speaking, to do the things that I wanted to do.

George Krassakopoulos

And another thing it did is that it allowed a black person to become a major movie star together with other films of that period, it made it easier for African-American actors to get work in big Hollywood films, I think.

Danny Glover

I don't know. It's certainly the movie itself. I mean, if we look at the actors who were visible at that period -this is the first one-, so Denzel was just about to embark on his career and his career to take another leap. Morgan Freeman was just about to do the same. So, it provided some space.

I'm often very careful in determining and saying and establishing what we see in front of us and what is really happening behind the scene. This relationship was marketable. You placed this in the market and main audiences responded to it in a way. So, I think, in some sense, it's a pretext. What is the pretext for this film? And the pretext for this film is market forces. If there are other advantages to come as a result of that, then the other advantages come as a result of that. And that's a testimony to how people reflect on their own lives as audiences and perhaps what Mel and Rick Donner and myself tried to bring to it and add to the story, was another dimension to it.

So, I'm very careful to say something like that, because most people come to me and say "Lethal Weapon had this impact on me", but does "Lethal Weapon" change the course in which we look at cultural production? I don't believe it does. Let's be honest. It was a good film; it allowed Mel to do what he wanted to do and allowed me to do some other things I wanted to do but it doesn't change the course. I don't think that power allows you to make that kind of investment. It doesn't invest to shoot itself in the foot.

George Krassakopoulos

At this point in your career, do you ever think about your popularity and the box office results of your films or is it something that doesn't concern you?

Danny Glover

What happens in a very unpredictable and volatile business is that, I think, we all try to find an opportunity in which we can use whatever leverage we have to do the work we want to do. For me, the question becomes what kind of work I want to do so the opportunities to work with someone like Wes Anderson in "The Royal Tenenbaums" or Michel Gondry or John Sayles or Lars Von Trier, were exciting for me because I had the opportunity to work with people who have another world view and who weren't caught up in a kind of system.

I did a film with Omar Sissoko who did "Guimba" and "Genesis" and is now Minister of Culture in Mali. The idea to be on the set with Abderrahmane Sissako or to do a film like "Boesman and Lena" with John Berry or "To Sleep with Anger" with Charles Burnett, those are the kind of things that I know I want to be most remembered by and certainly it's not to diminish the importance that "Lethal Weapon" played in my career, not to diminish the value of the film itself. But if I were to think of the kind of library that we would establish in seeking to move and to push forward an agenda, the movies that I just mentioned are the movies I would reflect on.

George Krassakopoulos

I would like us to see a short clip from one of the films you mentioned, "Manderlay" by Lars Von Trier, which was a big success in Greece even though I'm not sure it was in the States.

(screening)

Danny Glover

It's a way in which -in my country- we refuse to understand what the pathology of the system is. What was the result of that pathological system? How do we look at it? When I mentioned earlier that my great-grandmother held me in her arms, she was 12 years old with the emancipation population. There's something there because in the South where she grew up and came from, the

emancipation didn't change a great deal for African Americans. In fact, in looking at a book by Jeremy Rifkin, he said that "It was not the emancipation that freed African Americans from the land, but it was the invention of the cotton-picking machine". So, technology actually freed them. It wasn't the great ideas around change, but technology was the force that freed.

So, the period that we see in 1935, in the middle of the Depression, is not far from the post-civil war period and post-reconstruction for African-Americans. W.B. Dubois wrote "The Souls of Black Folk", which was published in 1903; it's 12 stories that, in some sense, are parables of this experience of African-Americans marching out of this period of darkness. I remember his reference that African-Americans often looked at Lincoln as the coming of the Lord, as if he was the one that rescued them from this period of darkness.

For me, to work with a Danish director who challenged himself to understand this relationship in the context of power, democracy and freedom, it was a revelation in a sense. He is someone who is outside the dictates of how we normally look at this institution; and the institution of slavery has an impact even on our psyches today, even on our sense of ourselves today, all this country is framed by it.

So, I found it very interesting to work on this project. Certainly one of the things that we fail at, that we have a difficult time talking about is slavery and until we do it in some sort of honest and open way -which we have not-, we will always continue to live through the same kind of experience, unresolved in some sense. But we haven't done that and perhaps the reason for this kind of pathology that we experience today, as I mentioned, is the fact that this country criminalizes particularly the youth of color, it incarcerates young men and women at such a high rate -the highest rate in any industrialized country per capita- and the translation of this experience we see in New Orleans and cities and urban areas around the countries.

So, there's something about this experience, I think, and, of course, the press in the US was very critical of this film. Of course it would be, because they express the power's point of view, that this madness of slavery has no residual impact on what is happening to people of color, and African-Americans and others too. If we look at slavery, if we look at all human development around an adjustment of relationship, whether this is the movement from slavery to wage workers, the movement from Apartheid to another system or the movement from one system to another, then all these in some sense are repressive conditions.

We are often induced or seduced to believe that these changes reflect some sort of real change in relationships, but there is an alteration in the change as well. You can be without health care in a modern society, be without education in a modern society, be without enough to eat in a modern society, be without a roof over your head in a modern society, but it's the same in a society that has the law that supports slavery or some kind of repression.

George Krassakopoulos

I suppose opinions like this do not bring you many friends in the States; the same with this announcement I was reading in the press that Venezuela would be funding a project you're working on, partially at least. You're friends with Hugo Chávez, is that right?

Danny Glover

Hugo Chávez is my brother, my friend and he's concerned about the same issues that I'm concerned about. I have been working on the project of the Haitian slave revolt for more than 22 years. It's a project that's had many lives and finally I met an extraordinary woman and we formed a relationship to write the script and then we began to try to do the film. We began to try to find resources to do the film; we cast a very wonderful cast. It's a film in which there are no sales estimates or any comparables and if there were comparables that were suggested, these were based upon the composition of the cast.

Certainly, "Hotel Rwanda" is not comparable to slave revolt. Certainly, "Amistad" is not comparable to the film that I want to do. Maybe it's the comparables that we're talking about, of "Lawrence of Arabia", of "Braveheart", of "Ghandi" and so on; those are the comparables. But we live in the 21st century, imagine, the most amazing story to happen. There were three revolutions that happened within 15 years of each other. First it was the American Revolution in 1776, then the French revolution in 1789 and the Haitian Revolution in 1791.

We know about the other two but no one talks about the third one, though it was the first victory for Africans against the institution of slavery, an institution which is condoned by the church, an institution which is supported by all those new emerging countries in this enlightening period and an institution in which the basis of capitalism is built upon; the basis and the foundation of the first capital was slaves.

So, the difference is that this revolution actualizes the ideas of the other two revolutions. It was the first one that said that all men and women are free and maybe that's a very dangerous precedence even today to do a film such as that; maybe the people who will see that film will understand the relationship between the emergence of that empire 200 years ago and the emergence of the empire that we have in the 21st century.

So, maybe it's that but I found it very disheartening that you see movies that are made and lose money; there's no guarantee that movies are going to make money. This is why I say that it has value; this cultural work has value in a sense that maybe some director or some artist somewhere or some writer somewhere may be inspired to even tell the story from another framework, from another vanishing point inspired by this challenge and I believe that is a challenge to empire.

The Venezuelans in Latin America understand the relationship that this slave revolt had to their own liberation. They see this slave revolt as a precursor to their own liberation. Simon Bolivar came to Haiti in 1811 and received money from the president Pétion to lead his own expedition to liberate 8 countries in Latin America and they understand the relationship they have to this heroic event.

There's another relationship that even Americans have. Had not the slave armies defeated Napoleon's expedition force led by his brother-in-law, Leclerc, maybe they would not have the advantage of purchasing the Louisiana Purchase for 13 million dollars. But we don't see that. When we look at history, we never look at the integrated parts of history and the complexities around history itself. So, I thought this was a very important film.

I first read as a student C.L.R. James's "Black Jacobins", which was written in 1939. C.L.R. James is a Marxist historian from Trinidad. When I read that, I was fascinated because I didn't know this story existed; we're talking about how something is wiped from collective memory. At the beginning of the 19th century, at the beginning of the 20th century, you could talk about the Haitian slave revolt and people knew what you were talking about. You could mention Christoff or Jean-Jacques Dessalines or Toussaint Louverture and people knew whom you were talking about.

When José Martí, the great liberator, the Cuban freedom fighter, talked about the Haitian Revolution in the 1890s, he understood the relationship of the Haitian revolution to his own revolution. He understood that very clearly. Or when Frederick Douglas in a speech at the 1893 Chicago World Fair talked about the Haitian Revolution, in a dissertation, he said "We as Africans and African descendants owe so much to the Haitian revolution". So, how could this enormous thing be forgotten in our history and be systematically excluded from our memory? That's what basically has happened.

I think it's important for our collective memory to understand that and what will happen with such a film is that we'll have a dialogue. There will be a discussion. Some people will oppose to it, will disagree with it, some people will agree to it, some people will be angry by it. What I know is that every time I see a Haitian cab driver in New York, they say, "How's Toussaint coming?"

George Krassakopoulos

At this point I would like to open up the conversation to the audience.

From the audience

Hi. This festival is featuring a full retrospective of John Sayles and you are going to be a headliner in one of his films tonight and I wonder if you could talk about your work with him. I believe you'd done another film together before.

Danny Glover

No, this is the first time I worked with John.

From the audience

First time?

Danny Glover

Yes. I think you mean "Matewan".

From the audience

Yes.

Danny Glover

But that was about 20 years ago and I remember that certainly, I was hoping to be asked to work with John Sayles at some point, in all honesty. I consider John Sayles one of the greatest filmmakers in the world and I was hoping I would have an opportunity to work with him. I think the first time I took notice of John Sayles was -and of course for a number of us- "The Brother from Another Planet". That was the first time that I really took notice of his work.

But there is something amazing about how you can take a story and shape it around music, but also embellish the story with all the kind of social dynamics in conflict that happen within a moment. And I think that's the brilliance through language and through relationships. I found that at this point in time, in 1950, an extraordinary point after the end of World War II and three years after the desegregation of armed forces -the US armed forces weren't desegregated until 1947.

So you have this extraordinary transformation that essentially John has been able to situate not only in the change or retranslation of music and pop culture, but also in the change that is happening in a movement. So, this musical movement is right at the apex of the societal change that is happening. And you have Tyrone Purvis, a black entrepreneur in the South. So, you have all these kinds of dynamics that are historic and sociological and political, which wove this story that focuses on music.

Very few writers, very few of us understand the interconnection and the relationships between all those things. And certainly it's an extraordinary wisdom to create a script in a story that is not bogged down in some didactic approach to it, but it is immersed in what I call the "emotional danger" of the characters themselves; not only the emotional danger of Tyrone himself but the collective emotional danger that happens within a community. It's an extraordinary wisdom that brings that about.

I was taking notes when John had his lecture yesterday and he framed it in a different way: you invest yourself, you are investing in what is happening to the characters in that moment as opposed to the exterior forces playing the primary role, the eternal emotional forces, the fear. Tyrone's past comes to light in that particular moment as he goes through his own catharsis as well.

I thought that it was quite an experience working on that. I just love language; you may want to say actors love language. And when the language allows you to situate yourself or immerse yourself to not just the time but the character itself as well, this is a beautiful thing. It's a wonderful thing and that brings us to what I said about how we resuscitate memory and how we find our space and find ourselves and invent ourselves through that mission as well.

From the audience

You've also worked with Spielberg. I would like you to comment on how it is to work with directors as different as Sayles and Spielberg.

Danny Glover

It's hard to say. We're talking about 20 years in between them and 20 years in which I've grown to my own cultivation and my own period. So, it's a different story. I would say that if John Sayles had written and directed "The Color Purple", it would have been a different film. And as Alice Walker always said, "The book is always open to various interpretations". She said "I have my interpretation and even my interpretation doesn't often align itself with the book".

So, it would have been a different journey, a different film, with John's unique sensibility as a writer and his unique sensibility of reflecting on the human dynamic; those are unique qualities. You see it in all his films, whether it is "Passion Fish" or something else. I loved "Lone Star" because "Lone Star" is something else -I remember this whole dissertation the character creates when he talks about Black Seminole Indians. Very few know the history of Black Seminole Indians and the relationship that the Black Seminole Indians had and that the people had revered that kind of heritage. He captures that in the story.

I think that there is a way in which -John talked about the story arc and the character arc- the arc was realized in it and it's not in any way to diminish what Steven Spielberg brought to "The Color Purple", but certainly I would -as you brought up the difference, I would not compare the two, nor describe the differences between the two- I would have loved to see how John Sayles would have handled "The Color Purple", or in that case, "Beloved" would have been even quite a bit of a different film.

From the audience

I was wondering if you ever considered using different mediums to express social concerns and I'm talking to you more as a producer. I recently watched a documentary about the black community somewhere in Pennsylvania and I thought it was great in terms of texture. It didn't have a dramatic arc as you described, but it had a great ethnographic value. I was wondering whether sometimes you come across these challenges, for example how the plot is undermined by your desire to show something cultural or vice versa.

Danny Glover

When you say other mediums, what do you mean?

From the audience

A documentary, for example.

Danny Glover

Yes. I have a documentary that we are producing on the music of the Civil Rights movement in order to introduce people to that music. The documentary is not only interviews of men and women -Diana Ross, Harry Belafonte - but also the music by some contemporary artists -Kanye West, Alicia Keys, Erykah Badu, Wyclef Jean- as well as some by those artists who sang that music at the time -Richie Havens, the Impressions and others.

I have a documentary that we completed -it's in production right now- and is going to be distributed in February; it's about the celebration of Bob Marley's 60th birthday. It's a youth empowerment film in which the youth come together in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and have a symposium using Bob Marley's music as a platform to discuss the issues of Africans and what is happening with Africans -young people from 15 to 22 years old. So, it's a documentary that I co-produced and co-financed with the Marley family, Rita Marley and all the children.

So, there is another documentary that we are producing on Fela Kuti, the Great Nigerian musician. He was such a dangerous political voice in Nigeria that they threw his mother out of a 5-storey

window and persecuted him. We're also doing a documentary on Angelo Davis, or a documentary on emerging technologies. Documentaries are definitely a medium in which we talk about issues. There is another documentary that we executive produced that is going to be at the Sundance Film Festival this year, called "Trouble The Water", another view, another vanishing point of New Orleans by Tia Lessin who was the line producer for "Fahrenheit 9/11" and also for "Bowling for Columbine". So, documentaries are another medium that we've used in order to explore ways.

From the audience

Who is we?

Danny Glover

My company. All these are produced by my company. "Louverture Films" after Toussaint Louverture. So, I make no apologies of how I explain who I am in this world at all and whatever forms I can use to do that, I will use them. All of my adult life from the time I was 19 or 20 years old has been as an activist, as a citizen taking responsibilities and not abdicating my responsibilities because I happen to be a visible artist.

So, yes, I do documentaries and I do feature films and on occasion, when somebody gives me a story that I think is worthy, like John Sayles, I do work in that. But I particularly wanted to set up a company, to express my own viewpoint or how I see the world or how many people see the world and of how I see myself as a child of an extraordinary movement. To be born in 1946 and then to be able to see what I've seen in terms of struggle for liberation whether in Africa or in the Caribbean or in Latin America and to be able to see the Civil Rights movement and see all that.

I have a film that we're producing and developing now with Oren Moverman, a writer who wrote the film about Dylan, on a relationship between Paul Robeson and Albert Einstein that no one ever knew existed. So, those are the kind of stories that I want to tell and I'm at the point of my life and "career" where I'm meeting the kind of storytellers and the filmmakers and perhaps meeting the people that want to fund those things in which they would desperately feel that some sort of change has to happen.

John Sayles

You said that growing up, you didn't expect to be an actor; you didn't want to be an actor. Talk a little bit about growing up, what movies meant to you, positive or negative in the '50s or '60s, the movies that you saw as a kid.

Danny Glover

I remember the first movie I really noticed as a kid were movies like "Sky Captain", "Stormy Weather" and particularly black movies, movies that were certainly were made for a particular demographic. I didn't see movies made by Oscar Micheaux at that particular point of time but I remember seeing those particular movies. Often, the movies and the images that I saw were images that came through looking at Tarzan or images that came through Dexter Fletcher and all the other images that were caricatures, I think, of who African-Americans were. When I looked at the movies about the West, the one person I didn't want to be was the Indian in those movies. I wanted to be the other person in those movies.

So, the greatest impact for me was when I was 9 years old, at the time of the Montgomery bus boycott and that came across to me on television. Not only did I become cognoscente of that, of what was happening, but I saw people who were different than the images I saw in films; I saw people who became the architects of their own liberation.

But not only did I see that vicariously through my mother's eyes and my father's eyes -my mother born of poor farm workers into the deep South and the first one to graduate from college, my grandparents sharecroppers and tenant farmers when they were married in 1915- and all of a sudden all these images come to me. My mother who chooses to leave the South and come to San

Francisco, all these marked important steps in my own maturation and growth.

So, the first real movie that I saw which I was just delighted by was a movie called "Carmen Jones" with Harry Belafonte and Dorothy Dandridge. I saw these two beautiful people in a film. I had never seen anything like that! Then, because I have my own form of dyslexia, when I was a teenager, I would go and see foreign movies, like "Black Orpheus". And when I saw "Black Orpheus" that was another revelation that other people of color know our side of my experience. So "Black Orpheus" was a movie that had an extraordinary impact on me.

Or even the movies that I saw in the '60s -or wherever I saw images of people of color from their own vanishing point- had an enormous impact on me and fervently even now reshape my own concept of myself inadvertently. They reshape my own idea of myself in some sort of way. The images started at 9 years old, when I saw these men and these women march and be attacked by dogs; I saw these images of men and women who were beaten and I said to myself "I want to be like those people. I want to do the same thing as those people. I want to make the same statement as those people". It had an enormous impact on me and one that I only come to understand -at my 61 years on this planet- more and more in terms of shaping what happened to me as I move forward in life and it also shaped what I consider to be the cultural production that I wanted to be engaged in.

The only reason why I am an actor is essentially that I discovered the work of Athol Fugard. I had to feel that what I was doing was purposeful; it was a way in which it was useful. I discovered Athol Fugard's work -the great South African playwright- when I was at the American Conservatory Theatre in 1977, going to school at night and working during the day. It was a revelation.

So, I began to ground myself in that. So, the continuity between the Civil Rights Movement and what it provided me, us bringing Amiri Baraka to San Francisco State in 1970, doing the community theatre and the stuff we did with the community communication system that we developed -theatre, dance and everything else. All of that gave me a different reference point, so I can look at that art and look at cultural work itself. But certainly, all these reinforce the possibility of creating another image of imagining ourselves differently.

George Krassakopoulos

Probably, you're going to hate me for this but our time is running very short and we have to wrap this up now. I would like to thank you for being here. Mr. Glover, thank you very much.

Danny Glover

Thank you.

