Ido Fluk on learning how to navigate the system

April 21, 2017 - Ido Fluk is an Israeli-born filmmaker based in New York City. He traveled to Israel to write and direct his debut, the crowdsourced road film, *Never Too Late*. His first American film, *The Ticket*, was released this year.

As told to T. Cole Rachel, 2141 words.

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Your first film, 2011's *Never Too Late*, was a small independent feature while your most recent movie is a more conventional Hollywood film. How did the experience of making *The Ticket* feel different from your first film?

I came into it wanting to preserve as much as I could from the way that I like to make films, the *Never Too Late* way, which means the least amount of people around, the least amount of additional staff in the production. I like to say that we approached every scene in this movie as it if were a sex scene. You know how in movies they clear all the unnecessary personnel from set when they shoot a sex scene? It was like that. That was my little spiel when we had our first production meetings for *The Ticket*: "In order to create the authenticity and intimacy that we need to achieve, let's shoot every scene like a sex scene." Only the most necessary people hanging around, and I asked all the departments to be as small as they could be. I was lucky that I had collaborators who were willing to accommodate me.

For me directing is all about creating these safe performance spaces for the talent to make choices and to create the electricity or the experience that then brings a scene to life. Especially when you're working with this caliber of talent, where you have an actor like Dan Stevens who is not just a good looking guy who can be really normal and charismatic in front of the camera, but is also an incredibly smart collaborator. Working with good actors is not about puppeteering. It's not about 'walk to the mark, look at her, say your line, be sad.' It's more about, what can I do as the boss of the this endeavor to create conditions for them to deliver what they want to deliver?

***Never Too Late* was crowdfunded and you raised all the money yourself. *The Ticket* is a more traditionally funded film. How did the funding aspect affect the process of making the movie you wanted to make?**

There are so many more constraints you have to jump through and so many more hoops in the conventional studio model. When you crowdsource, you get the last word on everything. You get to make every decision the way you want it. When you're dealing with a bigger budget production, then it becomes a conversation with a lot of people. It's a challenging role because as a creator and an artist, you are also put in a position of diplomacy and statesmanship and you have to be able to collaborate and also turn other people into collaborators. There's definitely a learning curve to doing that, especially in a film where there's so many different people involved at the financing level. This film has something like 18 different people with some kind of producer credit.

Filmmakers face unique challenges. You have this vision of the thing you want to create, but there are all these other mitigating factors that you have to sort of deal with in order to make that thing become real. So many people involved. It seems so complicated.

It is, but it's not unique to filmmakers. In the world of public art commissions you deal with a similar thing. There are committees who pick a public sculpture piece and then there's the town hall meeting about whether the sculpture is right for the town. I was just reading an interesting article about a sculpture in Long Island City called, "The Sunbather" by Ohad Meromi, an artist that I think was originally born in Israel and has been living in New York City for a while. I met him a couple of times. There is an interesting story behind the sculpture and how it was selected by the board and then the community pushed back against it and then they had hearings in which he had to explain himself. It was very complicated.

I think in almost every situation, the moment big money is involved, you start getting more voices. I'm imagining some composer who had a royal patron in old world Europe and when he presents his composition to the king, who is paying him, the king says, "Sure, but can you make it a little bit sunnier? Can you take out that sound over there? I'm not sure that it feels right." When it's your project you just bow your head and you listen and then you try and work those comments into your own vision. I think it's an issue that has always been there—as long as there was someone who paid someone else to make art—and sometimes these constraints can maybe help us or can do good things for our work.

Having made two feature films under different circumstances, how does it affect your view of what you might make next? Does it affect your creative process?

As you grow as an artist I think you start understanding the end game better. Ten years ago my dream was to make a film that was distributed theatrically. Nowadays, everybody's jumping ship with movies and thinking about television. People are saying, "TV is the new art house." There are a lot of conversations about what brings people out to movies that are not just giant explosions and disaster movies. Sometimes people choose to see the other kinds of movies at home, which is equal parts tragic but also maybe liberating. Then that opens up the discussion of what is the next movie—is it an inside TV? Is it a streaming experience? As of a decade ago, this was the dream. I made a movie and it was in theaters. As you move forward in your career, you're like, "Oh wow. Now I have all these *other* dreams and there are all of these other new kinds of mediums I want to work with and am interested in trying out."

So much of the narrative around filmmaking is that it's difficult and expensive. So much of the conversation is focused on challenges. When you were a young filmmaker, what is the most valuable advice someone could have given you?

It's something people have said before, but I can't say it enough: The real currency in this field is people you can work with. It's the people you meet and who you can collaborate with, or the people who can help you get your work to the screen. I remember in film school they said, "Look around you." While you're busy thinking about how to get your film in front of an agent or some famous producer, they are telling you, "No, look to your left and to your right. *These* are the people who, down the road, five years, seven years from now, they're going to be the ones you're going to want to collaborate with. They are the people you're going to want to show your stuff to."

I remember my reaction to hearing that back then was really dismissive, but as you get older, you see that it's really true. It becomes a real currency in this business. The ability to work with other people and to collaborate with other people without getting angry and walking out of the room or getting someone else offended—that's a really big deal. Because at the end of the day, filmmaking is a collaborative art form. Everybody in this business is spending their days looking to have an interesting conversation and find someone they can work with. It isn't only about money.

Lots of filmmakers seem to always have multiple projects in development, the idea being that you need to have many irons in the fire and that eventually, hopefully, at least one of them will come to fruition. Do you multi-task projects in that way?

Business-wise, it's better to have those different irons in the fire, but it's something that I'm not very good at. I'm usually so invested in the one thing I decide I want to make next, that it takes away a lot of my creative agency. I have a few things in the works, but there's always that one main thing I'm working on and that is going to be my next project. So far, it's been working out. We'll see. I've heard enough stories of these people who went around New York or LA chasing this one project they're trying to get made, and years and years go by and they grow old and eventually it's no longer the same project. They're no longer the same person. And yet, they persevere. Whether that ends well or not, I don't know. I've been lucky enough to have set pretty humble goals and eventually get them made. Again, it comes back to the currency of meeting people and of meeting other artists and collaborating.

Hearing about the currency of relationships and organic collaboration sounds good, but those notions are frustrating for a young person who just wants to know how to get from *A* to *B* to *C* career-wise.

Absolutely. I remember myself and my peers going to these meetings with important people and now, looking back at it, I'm thinking to myself, "Oh my god. What was I thinking?" What could this person have given me at that point and what is up with the brazenness of being a clueless kid asking someone who has accomplished so much for help? What is he going to do, throw a million dollars at you to make a project when you've never made anything at all before? It just doesn't happen that way. It took me a long time to understand it. Maybe there were years at first where I pretended to understand it, but I didn't truly understand it for years. It takes time, I think, to get how the professional art and film worlds actually work. Establishing relationships with people is something different than just networking. Nothing happens overnight.

As you move further into your career, do you find that the way that you define success and failure has changed?

Yes. Every single day. One of the things you learn pretty early on is that, no matter where you are in life, there's always going to be someone behind you looking at where you are right now saying, "Oh my god, if I could only get *there*." At the same time, there is also always someone in front of you who you are looking at and saying, "Oh my god, if I could only be that person. If only I could get there." The fantasy is that you just keep working that way, further and further up the chain, until eventually you're Scorsese or Bergman or something. For me the feeling is something like the slow drudgery of crawling through the mud and getting bloodied up in the process of trying to get to the next station. Then, when you finally get to that next station, being told, "Oh no. Actually, you have to go to the one that's right down the hill over there." That's the process of work. [*laughs*]

When you have that realization—"Oh, there's always going to be another puddle of mud that you have to wade through when you get past this one"—does that make the work easier in some way?

It's supposed to be liberating because it gives you perspective. If you could just climb up on the tower and look down from above at all these people crawling in the mud, probably in a big circle, you'd have a different feeling about the whole thing. Maybe when you get to the top, the only thing you want to do is a nice crowdsourced project where everybody's in it for the right reasons and nobody does it for the money. That should feel liberating and freeing but the truth is, when you're crawling in the mud, you tend to not be able to see that perspective, even if in a cerebral way you know it's true. You still look at the next station and are like, "No, when I get there! *That* is when I get the chilled wine and the blanket and I can rest and someone will hand me something to eat." Of course, it's not like that, but it doesn't matter. You can't internalize it. At least, that's what I find. There's always another station to be reached, another puddle of mud that needs to be crawled through. You just do it.

Ido Fluk recommends:

Blue by Derek Jarman

Damnation by Béla Tarr

The Book of Job

The work of composer Julius Eastman

Name
Ido Fluk

Vocation
Filmmaker

Fact

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