



**GENDER PARITY IN THE AUDIOVISUAL INDUSTRY:  
BECAUSE IT'S 2016**

**REMARKS DELIVERED BY CAROLLE BRABANT,  
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

## *50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CORPORATE VIDEO PLAYS*

*Amor.* Love. True love. Mad, passionate love. A great love.

From its beginnings, cinema has always portrayed this profound, intoxicating, transformative emotion in all its many variations. This short video, which celebrates the 50-year history and passion of Telefilm Canada, testifies to just that.

Unfortunately, though, whether romances, dramas, comedies, action or fantasy films, the majority of the audiovisual works have been directed, written, and produced by men. And women have more often found themselves on the other side of the camera.

Which brings me to the subject of my remarks today: Telefilm's action plan to foster gender parity in Canadian feature film production.

*Bom dia, meu nome é Carolle Brabant,* and I am the Executive Director of Telefilm Canada, a Canadian Crown corporation whose mandate is to foster and promote the development of the audiovisual industry from coast-to-coast-to-coast.

Thank you for your presence today.

IMPROVISED SEGMENT – first interview as a CPA

IMPROVISED SEGMENT – Professional path

This is why this issue is so close to my heart.

## ***Introduction***

Canada is a big country. Slightly larger than yours. It has a population of more than 36 million, six times smaller than Brazil's. Although women account for more than 50% of Canada's labour force, and just as many women as men have a degree in film, they hold no more than 35% of the three key positions of director, writer and producer in our financing portfolio.

In concrete terms, from our most recent data, women represent 25% of directors, 35% of writers, and 45% of producers.

My aim today is not to dwell on the causes underlying this disparity; I think we all know very well what the causes are. I'm here to share with you my experience and the solutions that Telefilm Canada has put forward to achieve gender parity by 2020.

The thought process, the reflection, that my team engaged in over the last year has been made easier by the fact that a real momentum existed within the industry itself. More and more stakeholders and media outlets were speaking out against the persistence of gender disparity, and were asking that permanent remedial measures be put in place immediately.

Among those calling for such measures was Anna Serner, CEO of the Swedish Film Institute, who in 2014 became a pioneer in this area by announcing the goal of distributing funds equally between male and female filmmakers—a goal that was surpassed last year. I'd like to take a moment to thank Anna for her commitment, she is an example for us all.

In its five-point three-year plan, entitled *Gender Matters*, Australia, for its part, stated that its goal was to fund an equal number of projects directed by women between now and 2018,

with this goal linked to a number of practical and financial measures.

Great Britain and Eurimages have also followed suit by adopting gender parity guidelines.

In Canada, since the arrival of a new prime minister who pushed for gender parity within his own Cabinet, the cause has garnered much more attention.

“Because it’s 2015,” said the prime minister by way of explaining why he had appointed a Cabinet with women accounting for half of its members. His words made headlines around the world.

For us at Telefilm, the prime minister’s explanation—voiced as an obvious statement of fact—was particularly timely. It gave

weight to the demands made by interest groups, confirmed the relevance of the reflection we had already undertaken and, above all, supported our firm desire to create an equitable environment for women creative talents everywhere around the country.

All for the simple reason that it was 2016!

Before I present our action plan, I'd like to take a few minutes to talk about the process that led to its development.

### ***The process***

I won't lie: it was a difficult process, chaotic, and, most of the time, highly emotional. A process in which representatives from across the industry were invited to take part because, in my opinion, they all have a stake in finding a solution to the problem.

And, what's more, I believe that when you are a partner in the solution, you will own it, and will be responsible for its longevity and success.

Telefilm Canada is an investor.

At no time do we interfere in the choice of directors, writers or producers associated with the projects we fund. That responsibility lies with people in the industry itself. However, as a Crown corporation, we also have a duty—and especially a willingness—to support the values that Canadians hold dear. And that includes gender parity.

IMRPOISED SEGMENT – behind-the-scenes look at the process

It was in this context that, last fall, I invited representatives from across Canada's film industry to participate in a discussion on gender parity. Among those who sat around the table—two-thirds of whom were women—were participants from associations representing producers, directors, writers and actors, from both the English- and French-speaking communities—our two official languages.

Also represented were women's groups such as Women in View and *Les Réalisatrices équitables* (which you could loosely translate to "Directors for equality"), some of whom have been advocating for more than 20 years to assert their rights to gender equity. These were women who are exhausted by the struggle and sadly disillusioned with an industry that, they say, has for so long shown such little faith in them.

In other words, a group made up of professionals drawn directly from the film industry, but presenting a diversity of

interests, goals and opinions. Individuals who sometimes had opposing views and often contradictory impulses—a clash of wills. Some of the participants were even skeptical that women had the potential to produce films with mass appeal. Others wondered whether a real talent pool actually existed. In short, a mix of views, ideas, interests—what I would call a challenging combination, looking back!

#### IMPROVISED SEGMENT – One-on-one meetings

I walked into the consultations knowing that it would be challenging, to say the least.

The group met twice, for four hours at a time. Telefilm's position was clear: 50% of our financing portfolio would be dedicated to “women-led projects”, and by this we meant that two of the three key roles of director, writer and producer were held by women. We hoped that people in the industry would

quickly come on board so they could adjust to this new policy as quickly as possible.

The reality was very different. As I've already mentioned, the sessions were marked by very heated discussions and intense moments.

The main impediment to achieving consensus was the fact that the new measures would have a different impact depending on the industry association. So, among directors—a sector where 75% of positions are held by men—the policy would have a much greater impact, especially given that no new money was available, than among producers, a sector in which 55% of positions are held by men.

Every time a suggestion was put forward, therefore, someone at the meeting said the policy was unacceptable because it would have a negative impact on their members.

At a certain point, I didn't think we would make it, that an agreement was even possible. But I also couldn't imagine getting up from the table without having reached a consensus.

So, we took a break.

IMPROVISED SEGMENT – what happened next

And that's when I had the idea of proposing a new objective: to achieve gender parity in our financing portfolio in each of the key roles of director, writer and producer by 2020; recognizing that each role is of equal value.

The proposal was immediately adopted.

And because of the importance of this moment, because of the weight of this decision, some people began crying. It's a sign of just how tense the discussions had been and what a huge relief it was that we had finally reached an agreement. This was an once-in-a-lifetime moment. For some, it was 20 years of pressure finally beginning to lift as they started to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Once we pulled ourselves together, we decided to immortalize what I like to call, if I may, this "moment of grace."

Here's the group photo, taken after the storm had cleared...

A news release announcing the agreement was issued last November 11, one month after the discussions had started.

Open-mindedness, transparency, inclusion and flexibility are the guiding principles that governed every step of my approach. They played a key role in its success.

### ***Action plan***

Let's talk briefly about Telefilm Canada's action plan. We have a five-point action plan.

One – To achieve, by 2020, a balanced production portfolio that reflects gender parity in each of the key roles of director, writer and producer.

Two – For projects of equal quality, we will favour projects directed and/or written by a woman.

IMPROVISED SEGMENT – definition of “of equal value”

Third – Telefilm will assess the achievement of its objectives on an ongoing basis and make adjustments as needed.

#### IMPROVISED SEGMENT – explanation of Privacy Act

The fourth point of our action plan aims to increase the level of promotional activities to raise the profile of women producers, directors and writers.

#### IMPROVISED SEGMENT – importance of promotion

The fifth and last point aims to support an ongoing conversation on gender parity through the funding of research projects that will stimulate reflection and propose new solutions. There is, for example, a need to study women's occupation of other roles, such as cinematographer.

Furthermore, Telefilm will continue to provide financial support to professional development initiatives, including mentoring internships.

We are in constant contact with people in the industry and are eagerly awaiting the initial effects of these new measures. I look forward to mentioning as many women's names as men's names when I have the pleasure of speaking about great Canadian filmmakers...

Women like:

- **Ashley McKenzie**, filmmaker from the Atlantic region whose first feature, WEREWOLF, was met with rave reviews and awards
- **Anne Émond**, whose third feature NELLY was a critical success

- **Stella Meghie**, whose film *JEAN OF THE JONESES* was recently nominated at the Independent Spirit Awards

While Telefilm's action plan is a recent initiative, the organization has had a longstanding desire to support women working in the film industry.

### ***Previous initiatives***

In this regard, several initiatives are worth mentioning. Since we can't be here all day, I'll limit myself to three. But I could go on and on...

**MICRO-BUDGET PROGRAM (IMPROVISED SEGMENT)**

**NOT SHORT ON TALENT (IMPROVISED SEGMENT)**

The third initiative that means a lot to me is the **Birks Diamond Tribute**. For the last four years, Telefilm has partnered with Birks, a prestigious jeweller in Canada, to honour Canadian women working in the film industry. The event is held during the Toronto International Film Festival. On this occasion, 12 female actors, directors and scriptwriters are selected by a pan-Canadian jury of journalists and bloggers covering the world of arts, culture and entertainment. The Birks Diamond Tribute receives extensive media coverage. The photo you see behind me appeared last year in the magazine *ELLE Canada*, which reaches over a million readers.

One of the issues surrounding gender parity concerns women's visibility—we don't see women enough and we don't see them **often** enough. That's why the Birks Diamond Tribute is such an excellent platform.

A number of awareness campaigns are also produced on a regular basis. There are campaigns, for example, organized by Women in View and *Les Réalisatrices équitables*. Furthermore, outstanding training programs for women starting their career or in mid-career have been launched by various organizations, including Women in the Director's Chair.

Telefilm Canada is a proud partner in all these initiatives. And it was thanks to these great organizations that we were able to rally the industry behind our objective.

Despite these great initiatives, and the many others I don't have the time to mention, I believe that not enough is being done to ensure women's visibility in all areas of the audiovisual industry.

The film industry in general, and Telefilm more specifically, haven't reached a critical threshold in terms of activities that

enable women to benefit from the high profile and visibility due to them because of their talent and achievements. Many other initiatives will need to be launched, and we're more committed than ever to ensuring that a level playing field exists for women in the industry.

### ***Indigenous talent***

Inequity in the film industry doesn't just affect women. A significant portion of Canada's population identifies as Indigenous, and Indigenous people as a group are also under-represented in our feature-film portfolio.

In the wake of the adoption of its gender parity measures, Telefilm Canada announced, last February, that it would increase the feature film production and marketing financing for Indigenous creators to \$4 million annually for the next five years.

We also decided that the jury process for project recommendations would include Indigenous representation, and that we at Telefilm would hire staff from Indigenous communities. These are decisions that do justice to Indigenous people's outstanding talent.

IMPROVISED SEGMENT – same approach

### ***Concerted action***

Changing mindsets, transforming attitudes, fighting prejudice—because that's exactly what we're talking about when we talk about the place women occupy in the film industry—is a long-term process that requires concerted action.

I am proud that Telefilm has succeeded in forging solidarity among its partners, proud to know that we are now working together, for parity.

In Canada, three other organizations with mandates that complement our own—the *Société de développement des entreprises culturelles* (SODEC), the Canada Media Fund, and the National Film Board—have also adopted gender parity measures.

Their actions are joined by those undertaken by Women in View, Women in the Director's Chair, Women in Film and Television (WIFT), *Réalisatrices équitables* and others, all of which have been fighting for decades to advance the cause of women.

I salute their perseverance and thank them for their outstanding commitment. We would not be where we are today without their tirelessness and fearlessness.

It should be noted, that several other countries have already started putting policies in place to address gender equity; while others are still exhibiting a wait-and-see attitude.

Nothing can justify excluding the talent that women bring to the table—their creativity, their expertise, and their point of view. To achieve parity, we shall have to work together, men and women, shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand. Of course, we'll need a lot of good will and a great deal of concerted effort. I hope these efforts will ultimately fall into place like the pieces of a puzzle that we've finally solved.

And I don't want to brag, but I'm pretty good at solving puzzles.

## ***Audiences with evolving needs***

Telefilm Canada's efforts in the matter of parity don't only take into account the need for fairness: they also answer to audiences' new expectations, to Canadians' growing hunger for content that is varied, original, daring and surprising!

Like many countries around the world, Canada is a mosaic of ethnic groups and cultures – something that we are really proud of. Over the centuries, women and men of all origins, having diverse identities and multiple reference points, have settled in our country. These Canadians, with roots in South America, Asia, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere, expect to recognize themselves in the images they see on screen and in the stories that are being told.

By better supporting women, by recognizing and fostering a diversity of Canadian voices, Telefilm is not only correcting an

injustice but responding to the current needs of its audience—  
for a cinema that looks like them.

### ***Conclusion***

I hope that this presentation has provided you with material to answer the questions you've been asking yourselves. That it has convinced you, despite the inherent difficulties associated with the push for parity, to continue your efforts.

For my part, knowing that I would be with you today, I wanted to go a step further and issue an invitation. I invite you to organize a Canada-Brazil coproduction meeting at the upcoming Cannes Film Festival. At this meeting, we could talk about projects directed, written and produced by women from our respective countries. We already have a wonderful history of partnership, and I'm certain that these projects could only enrich our respective feature-film portfolios.

I would like, in closing, to reiterate the importance of gender parity, a fundamental value that, unfortunately, still isn't a given in today's world.

A lot of work remains to be done, and it won't always be easy. Perhaps our daughters, or, in my case, our granddaughters, shall be treated on an equal footing if they decide to participate in the wonderful world of filmmaking one day. To make this happen, we must start, right now, to implement consensus-based solutions that have a chance to outlast us all.

Thank you for your attention.

*Obrigada pela atenção*