

IT'S TIME TO SUPPORT UKRAINIAN FILMMAKERS CALLING FOR A BOYCOTT OF RUSSIAN CINEMA

From Stéphane Hueber-Blies and Nicolas Blies, filmmakers

With this statement, we want to show to the many Ukrainian filmmakers who, in the last few days, have been forced to explain why the boycott of Russian cinema is a necessity despite the defiance of a - consequent - part of the European cultural world, that they have been heard in spite of everything. To show them that the light still shines in the face of adversity and that it will never be extinguished, that they are not alone despite what it seems. It is important to us that the European filmmakers and artists who support the boycott today also make their voices heard, voices that are still too few. If you support the boycott, say so!

Indeed, we have repeatedly read and heard that it takes "*courage*" not to give in to the emotion of Ukrainian filmmakers calling for a boycott of Russian cinema; others have gone even further and spoken of the unacceptable "*blackmail*" of the latter. Of course, as we already knew, courage is a variable-geometry concept, but courage is not on our side, despite what some people may think. Courage is only found on the side of the Dnieper, two thousand kilometers from our home (and it's comfortable that way).

Some people, sometimes the same ones, speak of *solidarity* with the Ukrainian people and their filmmakers. But while they explain that their hearts go out to them, they nevertheless reaffirm that the boycott remains philosophically unacceptable. As Ukrainian critic Serhii Ksaverov recently said, this "*solidarity*" is only a comfort solidarity. And he is quite right. We are unable today, as a civil society, to stand fully and unambiguously with the Ukrainian people. We are unable to sacrifice our own convictions, to make concessions on our way of seeing the world. But the bombs are not falling on Paris, Luxembourg, Vienna, Berlin or London.

It is distressing to imagine these great filmmakers, with their sensitive and intelligent cinema, having to urgently write tribunes to try to make us understand why this boycott is part of something bigger today, why this boycott is one of the stones of an edifice dedicated to fighting against an invader of unheard-of violence. One stone, just one. We are sad to imagine them having to find the right words to avoid hurting our egos too much, despite everything. Sad to see them waste this precious time trying to convince our little community of artists to support them, when they would certainly have much better things to do, as we can easily imagine.

Because if the cultural world today has difficulty taking the step of boycotting, it is because of the conviction that the artist has a special place in civil society. Like a red line that must not be crossed, there is the belief that the artist must be protected and that consequently, for the good of humanity, they must be untouchable. That they are ultimately part of a special caste. Yet, whatever the cultural world may think, it seems to us that artists should never be a separate caste, disconnected from the real world. Just as art is always political, so is the artist. In this sense, they are as much a part of the city as anyone else. And when the innocent baker in a district of Vladivostok suffers the consequences of economic sanctions, as a citizen/consumer but also as a professional in his trade, the artist must also, symmetrically, suffer the consequences. He cannot be treated differently. It is a question of collective responsibility. The artist should not be excluded from this responsibility that affects the

community. We can also imagine that the cultural world finds it difficult to stand together because those affected by the boycott are sometimes our friends or people whose work we admire. However, the boycott does not seek to target individuals, but rather to put up a barrier, to change a policy with the means at our disposal. The cultural world should be no exception.

Others tell us that the boycott is pointless. That may be so. But today there is only one "right" posture. That is to stand by the Ukrainian artists and do what they ask us to do. Quite simply. Besides, what would we have done if our children were under the bombs? Wouldn't we also have called for help in any way we could? Wouldn't we have called for a boycott of our aggressors? If these filmmakers consider it essential to limit the influence of Russian culture in these exceptional times. Then let us consider it too. The question is not about the effectiveness of the measure, but about the unwavering support of the oppressed people and the uncompromising struggle against the Russian aggressor. And this is all the more true because these filmmakers intelligently point out to us, and it is important to remember this, that these measures of solidarity are temporary measures of solidarity. Temporary. We are at a precise moment in history. And this moment calls for a total and unambiguous stand alongside an aggressed country, for a time limited to this aggression. No country in Europe or in the world will send its army to fight alongside the Ukrainians. They only have this type of weapon to defend themselves. It is our duty to support them with all the means at our disposal.

In this sense, the cultural world must take the measure of its collective responsibility and assume it! For let us not forget, Art will survive anything.

Stéphane Hueber-Blies and Nicolas Blies
Filmmakers