

Cinema studies class of 2020, congratulations! Graduating from college is always a wonderful achievement, but graduating in the middle of a pandemic, well... even just the sound of it is unbelievable.

At first, I didn't want to bring the topic of the pandemic into our celebration. It should be *your* celebration, and no virus should have the right to interfere with it or get the spotlight. However, it's undeniable that the unprecedented circumstances surrounding the past few weeks did have an impact on our lives, and ignoring it during this ceremony and during this address in particular would be like ignoring the proverbial elephant in the room - a very tiny elephant, and yet incredibly bulky at the same time. Acknowledging the circumstances in which you closed your college career is necessary and fair, insofar as it is an acknowledgement of your strength, endurance, flexibility, and hard work.

Some people, many people, have used the expression "the new normal" to define the immense change in lifestyle that the pandemic has brought on. Physical and social distancing, remote teaching and learning, Zoom ceremonies: this is all new, but this is not, and will never be, "normal." Nonetheless, whether we like it or not, this new lifestyle will stay with us for a long time; the good news is, I don't think there's anyone more equipped to deal with it than film people. The act of film-watching itself is an exercise in emotional connection while being physically distant, in space and in time.

There's a connection with the screen, with the people that move and live in another dimension and yet are so close to us that they even have the power to move us to tears. Jean-Luc Godard gave us a breathtaking example of this power in *Vivre Sa Vie*, when Nana, played by Anna Karina, walks into a movie theater that's showing Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*. The close ups of Joan are cross-cut with those of Nana to show the same emotional turmoil on the face of the saint that's about to be executed and on that of the prostitute that was strolling the streets of Paris until just a few minutes before. Cinema brought them together in their act of crying, and us with them as we watch them and are touched by this unlikely connection.

The same connection also happens with our fellow spectators. The movie theater is and will always be the sacred space where this collective emotional energy is released: it's the space where we can be alone together. However, like praying, movie-watching is something that works even when done individually. It's not the same experience, and it will never be, but looking at the same images moving on different screens can foster that kind of emotional closeness with our fellow humans that we all have been longing for during our time in isolation. Loving films, watching films, talking about films, is the best way to be together even when we're alone, while we wait for the day when it's going to be possible to be together again in a movie theater - and then we'll go back to booking a seat as far as possible from other people to avoid kids screaming or loud pop-corn crunching or rude texting in the dark. I hope that cinema brought some joy and togetherness to the time you had to spend by yourself, and I'm sure that that feeling made you realize once more how important what we do is. Cinema is more than just an industry or a past-time. Cinema can be a medicine for the soul, and I'm sure that many people understood this during these past few weeks. Whether you make movies, or write about movies, or teach movies,

you're doing something incredibly important. Never forget that, especially during hard times like this.
Congratulations, and thank you for being who you are.