

## Paul Greengrass: David Lean Lecture sponsored by The David Lean Foundation

18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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**Nik Powell:** Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name's Nik Powell, I'm the Chairman of the BAFTA Film Committee and it's my very great honour this evening to introduce our guest to deliver BAFTA's David Lean Lecture tonight. As you know BAFTA is committed to sharing the insights of the crafts of our business, of the people who work in television and in games, and we stage more than 250 public events a year across the UK and beyond. One of the key initiatives is BAFTA Crew and it's back and it's wider than ever before, and for the first time applicants in Scotland will be able to participate in BAFTA Crew. Well, up until independence anyway. But the David Lean Lecture of course carries the legacy of the great David Lean. You know he was one of the founders of the British Film Academy as it was then called in 1947, and he's a continuing inspiration of course through his exceptional body of work, and this lecture is generously funded through the David Lean Foundation, so thank you David Lean Foundation.

Our guest this evening has made many films, of course, but I think it's really appropriate that tonight's guest should follow last night's guest, Lenny Henry, who delivered a really impassioned plea for change in our society to make more films and more programmes that really reflect the society that we all live in today. And our guest has made films that not only mirror society, but have changed society. I mean there's no better example than his explosive film about the Steve Lawrence tragedy which still goes on today as a major issue in our society. I could go on but I'm not going to because we're going to hear from him about that, but for me he's one of the bravest filmmakers working throughout his career in the UK film business. But he hasn't deprived us either of his ability and his talent, his other great talent which is to entertain us with films of wit and wide appeal.

I did say when we gave him a Fellowship at the NFTS that it was okay to put money in the bank, but I think it's fantastic the width of the work that he has done, and to do it both with courage and to entertain a wide audience is a real achievement for me. Just to mention one thing, not a lot of you might know this, but he was actually born in Cheam, which is in Surrey, and is very near to Croydon where David Lean was born. So let's not slag off Surrey because I was born there too. Our guest of course is very famous for his distinctive handheld style. You know I want to apologise to him because all our cameras are actually on tripods this evening. But you know it's very nice because he said he started filming in that style because he couldn't afford tripods. I would, so what I'd like to do now is just take a look at the range, width and depth of his work before I introduce him and invite him onto the stage.

[clips play]

Wow, what a body of work. And so it's my very great privilege and honour to welcome Paul Greengrass to the stage to deliver the 2014 BAFTA David Lean Lecture which will be followed by a Q&A by Simon Mayo immediately afterwards. Paul.

**Paul Greengrass:** Thank you, thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you, Nik. Makes you tired looking at all that stuff. Well, as one of life's sort of inveterate scruffs and mumblers, this is kind of not really my normal mode to give lectures so I better sort of start by thanking you all for coming out tonight to listen to me sound off, and I hope not pontificate too much.

When BAFTA first asked me I must say I was a little bit anxious, because delivering the David Lean lecture does feel a little bit like you're tiptoeing towards the establishment a bit. I hope that's not the case, because for sure



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---

there's one thing I think about directing, and that is whether it's true or not you have to start and you have to continue and you have to always believe I think that you are an outsider. That you're a contrarian, I think you've got to be singular, and if necessary you've got to be unutterably difficult. A word that came to my mind was, you've got to be prepared to be arsey. There's no two ways about it, if you're going to direct you have to be a bit arsey.

But anyway, after a bit of anxiety I felt of course a great sense of pride because BAFTA is our flagship and it's obviously doing vital work at the heart of our industry at a crucial time, and doing that work for all of us so I was very proud. And proud also because David Lean is for me a towering figure, someone who made an incalculable and profound contribution to the industries I've been lucky enough work in these last 35 years. I'll just say that again to myself, 35 years, that's a bit frightening.

I don't know how many of you know this, I didn't know it until tonight, David Lean himself donated half of his royalties for *The Bridge Over The River Kwai* and *Doctor Zhivago* to BAFTA. To establish BAFTA, that's the reason we're sitting here tonight. Without that extraordinary contribution there would be no BAFTA, and the Foundation continues to this day to endow students at the National Film School. So that's an extraordinary contribution that goes on to this very day.

David Lean of course was without doubt one of the arseiest directors of all time. You only have to look at that photograph as you come in to know that you would not mess with him. He was difficult, he was mercurial, he was unyielding, and he was legendary of course for not tolerating fools or knaves or any kind of interference. He also directed some of the greatest, greatest movies ever made, and we are all and will always be forever in his debt.

And not least for casting Alec Guinness in all his best films, because without that of course he would not have been ready to play Obi Wan Kenobi. [laughs] Oh dear.

My earliest memory of David Lean is as vivid now as, nearly fifty years later, as it was the day my dad took me to see *Doctor Zhivago*. My father was a merchant mariner; his was a solitary and a tough life. He was ceaselessly travelling; he was very often away from home, most of my childhood in fact. He left school at 14 and he educated himself on the far flung oceans of the world. Truth be told, he found returning to small children pretty hard. He was never remotely interested in stuff like pop music or football. He had the austere, intellectual horizons of the self-educated man. But he loved classical music, preferably Wagner. He loved theatre, preferably Shakespeare. And he loved films by David Lean. And he introduced me to all of those with a wonderful instinctive belief that it didn't matter how old you were, if it was good you would respond. And in that he was absolutely right.

So one day when he was home on leave, he took us all up to the cinema to see *Zhivago* in its first week of release. And not at the local flea pit, we went up to the West End to the giant screens of Leicester Square and there I had the privilege of watching one of the great masterpieces of cinema unfold in front of my childish eyes. Now there's a scene in the film where Tom Courtenay's Bolchevik activist, Pasha, Strelnikov as he becomes later in the film, leads the factory workers to petition the Tsar. They march through the snowy streets of St. Petersburg at night, the bands are playing, women and children, and around a corner, unbeknownst to them, the Cossack cavalry waits.

And it's a supreme example of Lean's brilliance. He sets the scene up on classical



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18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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parallel lines. He draws the contrast; childish things, adult things, the swords, the brass band, the horses, the physicality of the street. Until the workers turn the corner and realise what lies ahead. And at that point Strelnikov, who's callow and young and foolhardy but also passionate about the cause, leads the march on and the action starts. And of course Lean is reaching back to the great master Eisenstein, and we see the charging cavalry and the women and children running and the swords flashing, people falling screaming and running. The death, the oppression, the injustice and the horror of it all, and high above is Zhivago in a gilded Petersburg palace on a balcony looking at this scene. And he watches it unfold pitiless, and we know at that moment as sure as anything in a movie, that this scene will be avenged. The revolution will soon come and it's Zhivago's destiny to be tossed on the storm waves of breaking history.

Collision. Conflict. Character. That to me is the essence of Lean's brilliance. And Lean's Zhivago spoke to me as almost nothing else had. This was cinema and it was also, so far as I was concerned, the way the world is. And that's really where my journey began. My childhood was a pretty mixed bag I have to confess. I grew up in, well I was born in Cheam in Surrey as Nik said. I grew up actually in Gravesend in Kent in those sort of endless vacant estuary estates by the grey marshes immortalised by Lean in *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*. School wasn't so good; I was expelled from one, I went to a better one then I got excluded from that, narrowly avoided the scrap heap and ended up much to my and everyone else's, certainly my dad's, surprise going to University. But it was a close-run thing and it wasn't pretty, because being lost and incredibly bolshie really isn't very pretty, especially if you're the one being the pain in the arse.

But, and it's been the saving grace of my life in more ways than one – I loved football, and I loved the movies. Saturday matinees in North Cheam where my grandmother lived, watching Tony Hancock movies with a Knickerbocker Glory running down your legs and you just don't care because you're laughing so much. Or weeping at *The Sound of Music* in the Gravesend flea pit, and you know you're being a big girl's blouse but what else can you do? And then Film Club at school, run by a great and visionary teacher, to whom I owe a lot, who introduced me to all the films today, 40 years later, that I still love the best. The three great films of politics and revolution – *Battleship Potemkin*, *Battle of Algiers* and Costa Gavras' *Z*. The jagged cool brilliance of *A Bout de Souffle* with Jean Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg, who when you're a teenager seems like a woman you would without a doubt beach your life, or still seems like that to me.

And then later when I went to University it became a daily smorgasbord of movies. That's a hell of a phrase isn't it? Every night, every college played movies, and at the Arts Cinema, you had the Odeon, and there I discovered often two or three times a night the brilliance of American cinema of the late 60s and 70s. Scorsese, Coppola, Pukula, and encouraged I restlessly sought out Griffith, Ford, Welles, Kubrick, and to me the greatest master of all, Kurosawa. There's nothing so essential to a filmmaker I think as having a familiarity, a deep, deep reverence, a desire to return again and again and again to the old masters.

But the point is, movies. Moving pictures broadly. Movies, television gave me a world to explore, a way to be, a language to use, something to aim at. And the most precious thing of all, once I'd been lucky enough to get into the television industry, a community within which to grow, hopefully gain a little maturity,



18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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and eventually and fitfully to find my own voice. And admit what was for many years a very secret dream, and one which I actually kept hidden for fear of being laughed at as I took my first baby steps in adult life. I wanted to be a director.

But why do directors direct? The job is never advertised, you can't apply for it. I don't think anyone in the history of movies has ever been standing on the street corner when a producer comes up and says 'you look just exactly like a director. We're shooting next week, would you like to start?' It just never happens. It has happened to actors, and I think maybe it happens to movie executives. I think people in charge of giant media corporations trawl the streets of London and Los Angeles looking for guys in sharp suits and a fast line of talk and carefully coiffed hair, which of course would explain why so many... No, let's leave that one.

No the fact is, the fact is you choose to direct movies. They don't choose you. And you need ambition, you need ego, you need vanity of course, not that I've got any of those things obviously. You need drive and stamina and a vaguely persuasive manner, and some technical skills. And all of that lot will get you somewhere, they may even get you a movie. But on their own they won't let you make a good one, and they won't let you develop over time as a filmmaker. Because one thing's for sure, history is littered with great scripts that directors made into poor films, or great actors that started working with directors in hope, and ended up in absolute turkeys, in despair. No, you need something else. You have to have something to say, and you have to burn with a great inner desire to say it. The kind of desire I think that David Lean had when he conceived of a story about a British prisoner of war in charge of building a bridge for his Japanese captors over the river Kwai. A strange and compelling story of obsession and

the struggle for mastery and self-betrayal. That film required all the qualities that a director needs, but mostly a field marshall's determination and an ironclad will to prevail against all the odds. The kind of madness and obsession, in fact, that Alec Guinness himself played in the movie. I've always thought myself that it's one of the great films about being a director.

So where does the desire to direct come from? Where is that inner well spring that all filmmakers must draw on if they're going to survive in this brutal creative race of the fittest? Well I've got a theory, it's pretty obvious when you think about it but I think it gets to the heart of it. I think the roots of making films lie in childhood loneliness, and childhood experiences of domestic conflict. I know I experienced a lot of that as I grew up, and I've noticed a lot over the years reading about other director's lives that this is the common factor. And what I think is also common is that for all of us, movies in childhood become a refuge, a place of safety, a place of escape. And the immense and overwhelming sensation of being engulfed in the darkness of a theatre has an effect on your imagination when you're a kid in a way that's more intense and more profound than almost any other experience. David Lean himself described it. He said that being in a theatre and looking at the projector light was being as a pious boy might react to a shaft of sunlight in a cathedral. It was a mystical experience, something to do with forbidden and secret things. So as you move towards adulthood the impulse to make movies becomes the attempt to recreate the power and the intensity of those childhood experiences; the attempt to literally conjure them up in order to relive them again.

And when I think of *Doctor Zhivago* I can see now, 40 years later, that the film I made about The Troubles, *Bloody Sunday*, has its roots in



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18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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that experience. So too *United 93*, that same sense of collision and conflict and character. But of course it's all ultimately futile, this adult attempt to recapture the past, because nothing, nothing can ever come close to the intensity of childhood experiences. No film you can ever make can possibly match the power of having been enthralled by movies at a young age. I'm going to have a drink now, cor blimey this is hard going. How's it so far? [Applause] Thank you.

I can still very vividly remember the first time I made a film. I was about 16. I explained earlier my school career was pretty patchy. Something about the sort of regimentation and clubbability of it all, it just never really worked, and I never really fitted in. But the one place I did like was the art room, the school art room, and I used to go there all the time. And of course there were days when a liberal education meant just that, you didn't have to cram for Michael Gove's endless bloody mind-crushing exams. Instead I was encouraged by a couple of trusting teachers to find my way. I was lucky, I've been very lucky in my life all the way along, but I was lucky then to have a wonderful English teacher and an eccentric but quite brilliant art teacher, who even gave me a key to the art room so I could stay late. And looking back, it's going to sound a bit corny but I mean it from the heart, it was the key to more than just a building, it was literally the key that unlocked my life. Because one evening in the art room, I can't remember what I was doing, I just vividly remember finding this old camera in a box somewhere. An old spring wound 16mm Bolex and a projector. I don't know how they'd got there, they'd certainly not been used for years, but anyway I pestered the art teacher and said 'can you not get some film?' And he did, he got some 16mm black and white stock and with a friend I made my first film. It was a horror film. We used the art room still-life dummies and some dolls, and some scissors, I remember

the scissors, and some black ink because it was black and white and that would look like blood. And it was a kind of teenage Bunuel I suppose, sort of, full of... Well, in my eyes it was anyway. Full of angst and very, very teenage, and well I won't even say suppressed, teenage lust, that's for sure.

The point was, I was intoxicated by the entire experience. Writing the script, getting the props, setting the angle-poses in the darkness, shooting, the sound of film running through a camera. Oh my god, the sense of purpose and focus. And I just remember it having this intense effect on me. Suddenly all the anxieties that I felt in life about girls, about being anxious, about being hopeless, about being needy, it all fell away. And I was kind of caught in this frenzy of excitement and a paradoxical inner peace.

Anyway, for ten days I could scarcely breathe for anticipating the return of my first rushes. Finally they came, and with trembling hands Pete and I laced the reel of precious film up and projected it onto the back wall of the art room. What a pile of shit. [laughs] Where was the masterpiece I'd seen in my mind? Where was Bunuel? Where were those astoundingly original images of terror and redemption that I'd imagined I was creating. And more to the point, where was the story? Now of course I know that feeling only too well, and everyone who has ever directed knows it too. It's called making a film.

And if you had to sum it up as I tried to do, it's a Sisyphean labour where you roll the rock up the mountain, all the while having your liver pecked, knowing the rock is destined every time to tumble down and crush you. And filmmaking like any creative activity, whether it's writing or painting or whatever, is essentially a cruel exercise in emotional futility. Because in your quest to find the film, you have to endure, in fact secretly you crave it, to have every



## Paul Greengrass: David Lean Lecture sponsored by The David Lean Foundation

18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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single flaw in your character, every single defect in your personality pitilessly exposed every single day, and every hope you ever have crushed and extinguished. And I'm sure there are some directors out there who will say that that is what it's like.

It's called the director's syndrome, because every film – and this is the serious bit – that you conceive of in your mind is rooted I think in the powerful unconscious dreams of childhood, and it ends in the catastrophe of adult rushes. And then if you're lucky, and if you have a great editor, you manage to crawl out of the deep abyss of self-loathing to a place where the result is passable, but it can never remotely be as close to the sense of wonder you felt as a child in a theatre watching the projector. And this of course explains why so many of our great directors are either megalomaniacs, psychopaths, or just stark, staring bonkers. It's true, isn't it?

And the only compensation, it seems to me anyway, is that the journey itself is the reward. That's the important thing, not the end product. The film you end up with is almost irrelevant, and the more you do it and the older you get the more you realise it's making the film that counts. That's the pain and the joy and the redemption and the point of it all, because that journey is and always must be your own painful journey, your own personal journey towards self-knowledge and towards finding your own point of view. And that ultimately is the difference between a director and a shooter. It's your commitment, the extent to which you commit to find in a story which only you can tell, a song that only you can sing, and a film that only you can make. I haven't done so much talking since I was on a film set.

I started at Granada Television. After a bit of local programmes I ended up on a wonderful programme called *World In Action*. And

neither Granada nor *World In Action* exists today, more's the pity. Granada was founded by a great champagne socialist, Sidney Bernstein, who'd made his first fortune actually in movie theatres, and then he moved on to open a truly great television company in the North-West. And *World In Action* was then a top ten show, the title bought actually from John Grierson, who was of course the godfather of British documentary realism. In trying to sum up *World In Action* I would say it was an eclectic mix of investigative reporting, documentary filmmaking, left wing politics, popular culture, being rude to Mrs. Thatcher, being rude to Mrs. Thatcher again, being rude to MI5, being rude to Mrs. Thatcher again at any and every opportunity, and expenses diddling. And I absolutely loved it.

To give you an example of how it was, and this is a true story, I remember in the early 1980s we were getting ready to interview Douglas Hurd who was then I think Northern Ireland Secretary. And Hurd was a patrician figure, remote and austere and headmasterly. And so there we all were with the crew getting set up for the interview, I can't even remember what it was about now, and the conversation fell to how much we would pay if one of us said when the august and distinguished Mr. Hurd arrived, would say "How do you do Mr. Turd?" And, it's a true story, and the bet was taken and money was put on the table on the basis that no Tory cabinet minister, and certainly not Mr. Hurd could possibly say to smelly, and to his eyes, very left wing oiks, "Excuse me, did you call me Mr. Turd? My name's not Turd, it's Hurd." No, he would have to suck it up, he would have to take being called Mr. Turd, and thus the revolution would be brought one step nearer.

So that was *World In Action*, often puerile, but I tell you those were the days. Those were the days because *World In Action* taught me how to tell a story. How to write, how to shoot, how



18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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to direct, how to cut against the clock, skills I use all the time to this day. And most of all it was where I learned about the world, the world of the 1980s. The Troubles, the miners' strikes, Reagan and Thatcher, Central America, The Falklands War, Apartheid in South Africa. Strike, war, revolution and famine. This is where I learned how the world worked and how, who has the power and who doesn't have the power and how the two are always in tension and how the world always is in action.

And that, I hope, has been my theme ever since. How the world works. Whether it's the murder of a young black teenager on the streets of South London, or a mass shooting on the streets of a city in Northern Ireland, or Jason Bourne on the run, or the events of 9/11 or the dirty dealings that led us to go to war in Iraq, or Somali piracy. Whatever the films are, I've tried to make them as real as I can, as truthful as I can, and I've tried to make them reflect above all my developing point of view. What I think about those events.

Moving from *World In Action* into the world of drama, which I did when I was about 30, was not easy actually, I didn't find it easy. How do you move from fact into fiction? How do you move from the world of observing reality to that of manipulating it, and how do you marry the two and still keep your point of view? And the answer I found only by practice over many, many years, and by the experience which I still think is absolutely any director; of utter and abject failure. And I'm going to tell you about that too.

After I left *World In Action* I spent more than ten years making a couple of small British films, but mostly in television drama. Writing my own screenplays and shooting them and learning how to use a dolly and cranes and how to shoot a schedule and how to set a scene. All the conventional language of dramatic

filmmaking. And the films were fine, they weren't disastrous, I always worked, but neither did they really stand out. More to the point, they never corresponded to the films I'd written, to the films I'd seen in my mind's eye. I remember I made a film about an SAS raid behind enemy lines in the first Gulf War, and I wrote what I thought was an intensely moving scene where one of the soldiers after a firefight was dying out in the desert, comforted by his colleague. The soldier's name was Dinger, and I climaxed the scene with a line that I felt as I wrote it conveyed the full measure of pathos and courage of both soldiers in equal measure, so much so that I repeated the line three times. And I've still got the screenplay. The line was, "Don't go down on me Dinger." [Laughs] Not bad. Listen it may sound funny to you, but when I wrote it, believe me, I thought it was just fantastic.

Until the rehearsal. When the actor lucky enough to have been dealt this Shakespearean zinger asked me in front of all the other actors without a trace of humour: "Boss, this line, 'Don't go down on me Dinger,' is that a like, 'Don't go down on me Dinger, not at a time like this'? Or is it maybe, 'Don't go down on me Dinger, I haven't had a bath in weeks'? Or maybe it's 'Don't, don't die now Dinger, I'm feeling horny, can you not just go down on me'?" There were a lot of options, but the point was the line didn't really work. Anyway, the point is not to dwell on my inadequacies as a writer, the larger point is that the experience of shooting my own screenplays led me to realise that for me, for me, films don't lie inside the screenplay, they lie in a realm beyond. A place beyond words, a place that is purely cinematic. But the problem was I lacked the knowledge and I lacked the courage to go and find that place. And a little while later I made what I think, well I hope is my only truly awful film. It was called *The Theory of Flight*, or *The Theory of Shite* as



18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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my kids very helpfully call it. This is turning into a confessional, isn't it really?

The story was about a young woman with motor neurone disease who wanted to lose her virginity before she died. It was a... it says here it was an interesting idea. It was an interesting idea, though not one you'd associate much with me. In fact, the long meandering and contrived script wasn't mine, but I had a mortgage to pay so I closed my eyes to the problems and signed on. But what was I doing making a film like that? Good question, and one I asked myself every night as the car wreck, or perhaps I should say plane wreck of *The Theory of Flight* unfolded. I remember vividly shooting the first scene out on a rainy hillside in Merthyr Tydfil, literally the first scene, and as we turned over it had been a pretty fraught prep, I was pretty disenchanted by the time we started shooting. Anyway, we started shooting and Ivan Strasburg who many of you may know, a DOP famed for chattering to himself or his focus puller all way through takes, we were on a long shot, and as the scene played I could hear him going "Oh, for fuck's sake. Oh for fuck's sake this is terrible. We're totally fucked here." And we were.

I could talk for hours, days in fact, and I did, about all the mistakes that I made on *Theory of Flight*. They were all mine. It was all my fault. For months I tormented myself, flayed myself for my own inadequacies. But when I'd analysed it all and finished beating myself up, I realised that my fundamental mistake was this: I had no point of view on the material. I didn't even, truth be told, like it very much, and I should never have been making that film. And because of that, rightly, I lost all control in the process, if I ever had any in the first place. And as Sir Alex Ferguson says in his autobiography, control is the key. Without total control, you're nothing. And I had to face up to the fact I had

allowed myself to become a shooter and not a director.

The period after *Theory of Flight* is the only time actually that I ever seriously thought about giving up the business. I didn't have any money. Writing and directing small films for television in those days was an absolute recipe for going broke, probably still is I'm sure. All my friends seemed to be making fortunes as writers or executives and enjoying security, and the future looked very bleak. I thought about teaching and in my spare time indulging my other commitment, the Labour Party. I just couldn't see a way out of the Marshlands. In my 20s, I'd had no doubts. I never doubted how to tell stories and I'd been given a language in which to tell them. But since I switched to drama, although I still felt, I still knew I had stories inside, I just couldn't seem to find a language to tell them in a way that worked. The truth was I'd become lost in a miasma of conventional filmmaking.

Bizarrely, in the next two films I made, *The Murder Of Stephen Lawrence* and *Bloody Sunday*, I found a way forward, and I was able to express I think authentically and fully for the first time – where before it had been fitful – the way I saw the world. The way it was to me. And that was actually when I first, I think, became a director. In command of my own screenplay, knowing how I wanted it to play, and able to convey that to the actors and to the crew. Having a vision I suppose is what you'd call it. And I remember I even started to stand in a different place. Before I'd always sort of stood behind the camera, hidden behind it, because I felt comfortable with it, I knew how to use a camera. Now I started to stand out front and be at the centre of it, which is where you must be I think to successfully direct. And the films began to correspond at last to what I'd written and what I'd seen in my head. How did this happen?



## Paul Greengrass: David Lean Lecture sponsored by The David Lean Foundation

18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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Well firstly, my rage and frustration at the mistakes I'd made on *Theory of Flight*, what I had allowed to happen, became transformed into an absolutely uncompromising commitment to control what I did to the last detail. And to choose, more importantly, to choose to make only what I felt deeply inside, what I knew about, what I was passionate about. And from here on I would make my film and only my film whatever the cost, and whatever the obstacle. And I think looking back, I found a kind of take no prisoners attitude that at the end is the essence of it, the core of necessary steel you've got to have or develop if you want to achieve in the messy, communal, industrial, expensive business of filmmaking. You've got to have that steel, you've got to find it.

And secondly I learned really for the first time just how vital the producer is to a director. Without a doubt the key relationship. My friend Mark Redhead, who's out there somewhere, produced both those films and together we weighted every jot and every comma of each screenplay. We walked the streets of South London and the Bogside. We considered every scene together, every shot, and then later in the cutting room every careful cut. We talked, we argued, we fought, we thrashed it out and we wrestled those films to the floor together.

But most of all, Mark gave me the confidence, he actually demanded of me that I make the film that I saw inside. Not to surrender to fear, not to surrender to doubt, not to go back, but to gamble everything on my vision. And because of his support and faith and protection, I was able finally to set myself and the films we made together free. Set the actors free to explore and improvise behind and beyond my screenplay, to find the kind of truth and humanity that can't be written, but can only be found by actors performing in the moment and exploring. And to find the messy

truths of procedure and reality, that a screenplay in its inevitable focus on acts and structures cannot possibly convey. It was one of the things Mark used to say every single day, "Just show me the mess, show me the mess of reality. Don't tidy it up. I want to see what it looks like when it's alive, not when it's a dead fish." And he was totally right.

In *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence* film and *Bloody Sunday* I finally found my way, my aesthetic. Handheld, first-person, stripped out dialogue, action-led films of collision and conflict where you're thrust into the action gathering fragments and details along the way, and where the very sparseness of dialogue paradoxically allows characters and theme to emerge more clearly. And I found my voice as a filmmaker I think, the way to make a successful marriage between the factual world I'd come from and the dramatic world I was inhabiting. In the end I found cinema.

Which brings me to why I worry for younger directors in the UK today, especially in TV. Now of course the success of British talent at the Oscars is as everybody says indicative of our strength and growing importance on the world stage, and it is, and of course many of our producers and executives – I'm thinking of Tessa Ross and Christine Langan at Film4 and BBC Films, and Tim and Eric at Working Title, and of course Nik at the Film School - are out doing magnificent work nurturing and promoting directing talent. But of the directors in the UK lucky enough to make a film, only a tiny, tiny percentage ever get a second chance. Or to put that another way, most British films, and it's well over 80%, are made by inexperienced first-time directors.

But to me, my experience shows that directing is a craft. It's not something you're just born with, it's something you get better at with time and with protection and with experience. So to me it's obvious. If we want to develop our industry we need to work much, much harder



## Paul Greengrass: David Lean Lecture sponsored by The David Lean Foundation

18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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than we are to develop UK directors over the long term. And the profound problem is that down below in the grass roots of television where I came from, and where many of tomorrow's directors are going to come from, the next generation, the lifeblood of our industry's future is being destroyed. Not being nurtured as I was, it's being destroyed. And it's not just about money, though that's a big part of it. I don't know whether you know that when the BBC brought back *Doctor Who* which by any standard was one of the BBC's great successes in television drama over the last I'd say ten years, the director who directed the first episode, the one who set that style, who contributed enormously to its success of course along with the writer and the producer and the executives, that director earned by a wide, wide margin less in residuals than the stuntman. That's a fact. But it's more serious than money; it's the alienation of the entire craft. Documentary directors squeezed out of the process so that many factual programmes today are now shot by a cameraman and edited by so-called edit producers, otherwise known as baby executives. So today directors in factual programmes are an endangered species. And in fiction, it's getting as bad. Directors are not being hired for their point of view, but under sufferance, and then being institutionally disenfranchised. When I first joined Granada, I remember it vividly, I went up the lift one morning with David Plowright, who then I think was the manager, he was certainly a very grand boss of bosses, and we rode in silence because in those days you didn't talk to the officers unless they spoke first. And as I got to my floor he said, "You're the new researcher, aren't you?" Except he said it in a Yorkshire accent which I can't do. "Yes," I said tremulously. He said, "Just remember your job is to make trouble," and he walked out and the doors closed. Do people say that to young people in television today? I very much doubt it.

Because television today has become a very, very, very hostile place for our directors, ruled over by powerful writers in what I consider to be an unholy alliance with over-mighty executives. And what that means in practice is this; it means that directors are routinely hired last after the script is locked and the casting is completed. They're expected to shoot a schedule they've had little input into, they're micro-managed in the most onerous and ludicrous way. They're often excluded from the cutting room or subjected to the high-handed notes delivered by email, rather than engaged in serious and respectful dialogue. And of course if you complain you're blacklisted.

Now all of this makes sense if you're interested in, if all you're interested in is TV product and a production line. But looked at it more broadly here, the problem is we're destroying the directors of tomorrow's precious habitat, their place to learn. You're slashing and burning and destroying the future of our industry, television and film alike, and that is why so many directors today don't see the UK as a viable place to work and go to the US instead. Because if you're working there, and you directed that first episode of *Doctor Who*, or you directed the first episode of *Downton Abbey*, you would share in the rewards of that success as a right, and that is the difference. So for me, we need to do far, far, far more in television to look after our directors, especially our young directors, to protect them and help them grow as I was helped. And I think that the executives need to prize and pay themselves just a little less. Because in the end, if we want original work, we can't get it with an alliance of writers and executives alone. We need our directors sitting at the creative table in terms of respect, and in terms of reward. That's the lecture bit over, anyway.

[Applause]  
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## Paul Greengrass: David Lean Lecture sponsored by The David Lean Foundation

18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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To my surprise, after *Bloody Sunday* I then started making commercial movies, which is not something I'd ever thought about, in the great, great beast of Hollywood. And before I went I was very worried. Well that's a lie actually, I was very, very happy to get paid properly for the first time. But I did wonder if it would be possible to work there and still be true to myself. Would I recognise the films that I made there as mine, or would I have to choose between coming home a failure or selling out? Now there's a fair amount of baloney talked about Hollywood, and sometimes I read the film pages and you'd think the place was run by, entirely by, cynical corporate hacks. Okay, there may be some truth in that, but only some.

In my experience, this is just my experience; it's also full of very smart people, very committed people. Studio heads who understand filmmakers and support them within a brutal commercial environment. Hollywood also has guilds and crafts and trade unions with power and a voice, unlike here. Which is why the studios tour the world looking for places that don't, like the UK, where it's cheaper to make films. Now I'm all for an economically progressive labour market. Our future as an emerging filmmaking powerhouse depends on it, but it does not, it absolutely does not require us to erect the kind of work experience, rip-off culture in the UK film and television industry today.

And it doesn't require us to collapse our crafts and guilds and trade unions. On the contrary, we need to rebuild them if we're to replenish our skills base and keep studios investing here. And we need to rebuild them so that our industry becomes less white; so it reflects the energy and diversity of the country we live in. And most of all, we have to use the priceless opportunity we have today to grow our film industry for the future. At the moment studios

are falling over themselves to bring movies here. You cannot get a stage in the UK. Why? Because we operate one of the simplest, most reliable and transparent tax breaks in the world, and because of it our film industry is booming and employing vast members of technicians and returning vast amounts of money to the Treasury.

All of which is good. But we have to use that historic opportunity to leverage the tax breaks we offer. Leverage them against the studios, against the studios in order to create opportunities for our own producers and directors to make UK-distinctive content, because that's where the problem is. To help generate more UK content, which in the end is the only sustainable road to growth. And I believe it can be done and I believe it can be done in partnership with the studios and with their active co-operation, because it's in their interest as well as ours that the UK continues to develop our own content as a front-rank film economy, because they want and they need our talent, but we need to get on and do it while the sun is shining.

The truth is, in my experience, Hollywood is a generalisation. There's the franchise business, which is creating global entertainment product; the Batmans and the Spider-Mans and the Bournes and the rest. And then there's the rest of movie production, which is largely dependent on franchise profits. And of course Hollywood is in the business of making money, it's always been in the business of audiences, and yes they do make a lot of dumb movies. Though, speaking personally, I think the scene in *Step Brothers* where Will Ferrell punches the guy in the face and says "lick my buttock" to be one of the finest moments in modern cinema. It's true. Right up there with *Citizen Kane*.

But jokes and franchise films aside, Hollywood has also always made films about the way the



## Paul Greengrass: David Lean Lecture sponsored by The David Lean Foundation

18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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world is, and has always been very serious about it. Anyone who doubts that has obviously forgotten *Godfather I*, and *Godfather II*, and *Apocalypse Now*, and the films of Kubrick, *Raging Bull*, *All The President's Men*. I mean you could make a list that could go on and on. And because of that commitment to serious filmmaking, my experience in commercial cinema, my ongoing adventure, has been almost entirely positive. In the Bourne movies I found I could draw on the traditions of 1970s Hollywood cinema that I'd so loved when I was at college and cross-fertilise them with my British documentary roots to create Saturday night popcorn movies that I was proud to make. Because Bourne has values, values I could relate to. He was oppositional, he was dissenting, he was profoundly moral in his way. And in the post-Iraq world with all that mistrust injected into the bloodstream, there was a huge audience I think willing to respond to a character whose fundamental proposition was: they're lying to us.

And as for my style, which Nik very kindly alluded to, the shaky-cam, or not being able to direct piss into a pot as my dad calls it. The truth is, when I started working out in Hollywood, I thought I was operating; I thought I was very old-fashioned actually. I thought I was sort of operating classical British social realist traditions. It was only later when we were shooting the scene at Waterloo in *Bourne Ultimatum*, and whenever we started filming you could see kids with their mobile phones shooting us shooting the scene, and that was when I started to realise that the images that I made were not, no longer old-fashioned at all. They were exactly the kinds of images that young people were making themselves; hurried, informal, fluid. But they weren't seeing those kinds of images in movie theatres. Because we have entered an era of infinitely more permissive image making, where the thirst to control your own images wraps

authenticity inside informality, and is itself a response to an increasingly complex, rigidly controlled, technologically driven world. All I did was take it into the cinematic mainstream. In the end the film's I've made, from *Bourne Supremacy* and *Ultimatum*, through *United 93* and *Green Zone* to *Captain Phillips*, have all been films I think about the post-9/11 world. These have been the years of piling up our wealth with leveraged money. Years of hubris and fear and lies and vengeance and miscalculation. The years of the Bush ascendancy and everything that's followed, and trotting on behind him his little tight-trousered friend, Tony Blair. And as I've made those films these past ten years or more, I've heard the unmistakable sound of chickens from the 1980s coming home to roost. Because to me it's clear that something of our security, our power, and most of all our moral authority, was lost in the journey from 9/11 to the sands of Iraq and Afghanistan. It went, and personally I don't think we will ever entirely going to get it back, which is going to lead to immense consequences for all of us.

So in my journey to marry fact and fiction, what have I learned? John Ford said famously, if you have to choose between the legend and the fact always choose the legend, and I agree with him up to a point. I mean this is cinema we're talking about after all which has always had its... more than its fair share of hucksters, and truth be told for all of us, that's part of its appeal. But of course there are some very real issues. We're living in an era where reality is being turned into a commodity, to be bought and sold. You've only got to look at the marketing campaign of this year's Oscar movies to see that. How many films based their appeal to their audiences and their appeal for enduring value on the fact that what was shown was in some senses real.

I know my film *Captain Phillips* did. So did *Gravity*, so did *American Hustle*, so did



## Paul Greengrass: David Lean Lecture sponsored by The David Lean Foundation

18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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*Philomena*, so did *12 Years A Slave* to name just those few. And I'm not criticising any of those films. It was by any standards an astonishing movie year, but I think we can all agree that this fashion, particularly when backed by the power of conglomerate studios carries inherent risks. It can lead to the twisting of facts and sometimes to distortions, and ultimately at its worst it can lead to propaganda. So it's right and necessary that critics are vigilant and hold us to account as they do, but more importantly I think we ourselves as filmmakers have to search our consciences while making our films to ensure that the liberties that we take, and that have to be taken with reality, are both fair and justified.

But in the end as I say, I can't say I'm overly troubled by the elasticity, let's call it that. The high claims and the low truths of the modern movie marketplace. It reminds me of the hawkers who stood outside the nickelodeon cinemas at the birth of cinema, shouting outrageous claims to try to get audiences in. And anyway, speaking personally, I don't want a cinema that sits somewhere between the National Theatre and the Royal Opera House. A cinema that wears a suit a tie and behaves itself. I want a cinema that's badly behaved, that sells its wares loudly in dirty, crowded streets filled with the voices of hucksters and prophets and tin pan alley catchers and penny dreadful sellers and exploiters and pornographers and propagandists, and somewhere in the gutter, true and profound artists. Because that for me is where cinema belongs, amongst real audiences, alive and popular.

And I'm not overly worried, because in the end I trust audiences to know the difference between the truth and a lie. Between *Apocalypse Now* and reality TV. I trust audiences because they're us. We live in a culture that is constantly blending and blurring

boundaries, and not just in cinema. Fact and fiction are blurred in reality TV, in newspapers where fact and comment and propaganda merge. And of course online where the phenomenon is even more pronounced. And the blurred boundaries between fact and fiction are just a small part of this. We all live in the explosion of experiences and perspectives that constitute our everyday life, where imperfect, intimate, hastily made images are grabbed self-made and shimmer and multiply in endless, dizzying, self-replicating patterns of light and sound. Where reality fact, fiction as well as identity, nationality, gender and ethnicity are constantly mixing and merging and in flux.

And of course these changes create fears and powerful reactions, powerful emotional desires to reconnect with an imaginary long lost past where things were clear and unambiguous, where boundaries were uncontested. And all of this, it seems to me, is an inevitable consequence of a fast globalizing world, and a reaction to what we can dimly see is an emerging global consciousness. And the point, or rather the challenge in all of this is how do we exist in that emerging world and still locate universal human values, timeless values of truth and identity and compassion? And what I believe and what I say is that cinema, one of the great global means of communication has a crucial role to play in that.

Cinema began in the post-cubist universe where man could suddenly see, through the power of editing moving pictures, a reality from multiple perspectives. It had never happened before and it was a kind of liberation. Today we're tiptoeing towards a new and even greater liberation. Tomorrow's string theory driven digital universe, where endless, infinite copying, cutting, pasting, riffing and lopping of images and sound in three dimensions will dictate and shape out reality, indeed is already becoming our reality.



## Paul Greengrass: David Lean Lecture sponsored by The David Lean Foundation

18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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It's becoming a new dimension all of its own. And what I think is happening here is in this change, a new oral, or at least non-literary culture is fast emerging with profound implications for all of us. It will bring us closer together as it drives us further apart. We will see the world simultaneously through the long and the short end of the telescope. We will record everything, have access to everything, and remember very little.

But without doubt, stories told through moving pictures will remain a vital tool for making sense of values in this new terrain, and particularly movies that take their inspiration from reality. Does it matter, I ask, that man's earliest cave paintings of reality made the bulls and bison's look like Peanuts comic drawings? Did it really matter that Shakespeare's *Henry V* was a load of Tudor propaganda? No. And neither does it really matter that David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* took liberties with the historical facts? Because in the end it was, as Steven Spielberg memorably observed, a miracle. A masterpiece of cinema filled with collision and conflict and character and all the complexity of what it is to be human.

And like man's earliest cave paintings and the plays of Shakespeare, and every bit their equal, *Lawrence of Arabia* is an example of man's unfolding engagement with the world he lives in. Because the space between the true and the real is, and always has been, uniquely creative. It's a place to hypothesise and to re-enact. A rich and sacred place where facts are bent out of shape and reimagined for good reasons and casual reasons; reasons always contentious, and for bad reasons. But out of that process, and only if we protect them, some of our greatest movies will continue to be made by the David Leans of tomorrow.

Thank you.

[Applause]

**Simon Mayo:** You can relax now. Did you enjoy that?

**Paul Greengrass:** Yeah, it was fine actually. It's a bit nerve-wracking, it's not your usual you know.

**SM:** You were introduced at the beginning as one of our bravest filmmakers. Is that how you recognise that description, is that how you think of yourself?

**PG:** Well obviously not, come on. Just trying to get a gig.

**SM:** But having assessed it and having gone through the speech and having seen that montage, I think most people in the audience, and it will be your turn to ask questions in just a second because that's what this bit of the evening is, there is some truth in that isn't it? Because there are very few people making movies that you are.

**PG:** Listen, I've been incredibly lucky. That's ultimately what it comes down to. Lucky all my life to be encouraged, to be nurtured and protected and given second and third chances, and to grow up in a system that enabled me to find what it was that I wanted to say. And that's why I feel so strongly about young directors. You know I'm involved with Charles Sturridge and others in Directors UK, and you know when you talk to young directors, young people in our industry, it's very, very hard. There are more opportunities; the business is more open now. We do very well at giving young directors first chances, we're very good at that to be fair. And I'm not saying that there aren't, as I said in my speech, lots and lots of people trying to help, but we're not doing the things that we need to keep our directing talent and encourage it and give



18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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people time to grow. Because it's a craft, it's not about genius, it's about learning your craft over time.

**SM:** Before I open it up for questions, can I just ask you about the word reality, because it came up a lot in your talk? You talked about show me the mess of reality, and you talked about your actors performing in the moment, and the truth is that usually your actors are performing with real people if we can use that term. Can you just explain a little bit about how *Captain Phillips*, *United 93*, what you get out of surrounding your actors with real people.

**PG:** I mean listen; I wasn't the first person to do it. Ken Loach really was the one, I mean before that even, but Ken really was the director who made that part, you know that, he brought that into television and films. I suppose I put it in a particular place and explored perhaps events more than Ken did, but the idea fundamentally is quite simple. In the end if you get the right mix of professional actors and non-professional actors, a magical thing happens. Essentially at a certain point, and it's always eggy to begin with, but if you create a good environment and a safe environment, what happens is the actors stop acting and the non-professional actors start acting. And they sort of mix and merge and something beautiful happens, and you just get a very different quality. Something without artifice and something that feels real. And in the end a lot of it is about observing procedures, but that's because that's something I've always been very interested in. I think that procedures rule our lives. Our procedures define our modernity. You know most of us don't get up and think about what happened to us when we were children. Most of us get up and think, I've got to get on the bus now, and then I've got to be at work at 10 o'clock, and I've got a meeting at 11 o'clock. So procedures, and if you can tap into that in

films you can actually develop a lot of emotional power, oddly. You'd think it would be dry, but it's actually not, because you get to a very rich place which is what happens when procedures start to be threatened.

**SM:** And the reason I mention that is that on the movie show that I do with Mark, the last scene in *Captain Phillips*, everybody wanted to talk about it, and they wanted to talk about it in a way that didn't spoil it for people who hadn't seen it. But that last scene with the nurse and Tom Hanks is truly extraordinary, and our hunch then listening to what you're saying is that you maybe would not have got that if you hadn't been determined to put a real nurse in that scene.

**PG:** Yeah I mean it was a, it was... The truth about filmmaking is, a lot of it is luck. You have to work for your luck, you know it's like football, you've got to work for your chances but it's luck when they fall. That was a case in point. The scene that we spent the day shooting was a scene all about Tom Hanks after he'd been rescued when he'd been cleaned up, that was the scene we had on page and he was all sort of dressed up in a proper uniform and he was taken up to the captain's quarters. And what actually happened, he was sat down, the TV was on, he was given a beer and given a phone to call his wife. That was the scene. And we shot that all day until about 5 o'clock, and when you're shooting a scene and you know it's a big, big scene you can tell when it's not working. And it was nothing that Tom was doing, it was just, it didn't have that reality about it you know. And we tried it sitting down and we tried it standing up and we tried it in this room and we tried it in the bedroom and we tried it every which way. And in the end it was like stones in a bucket, it just didn't live. And you feel at moments like that on a film, you know intense anxiety because you know that you can't come back, this is it. If you don't get it that day, that's it. There's no



18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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reshooting, we didn't have the money and we'd never have got the ship and that was it. And you know that your film is going to die if you don't get something. And at about 5 o'clock I was talking to the real captain actually, and he said "well actually he'd have gone to the medical room first of all." I was just trying to think of anything, anything we could do that was different. And I said, "well where's the medical room," and he said "well it's down the other end of a ship." Well anybody who's ever been on a warship, getting from one end of the ship to the other is a total nightmare because the corridors are about this big with bulkheads every 20 feet. So I said to Tom, "listen I think we should try down there. Are you up for it?" And he said "yeah, sure, sure." So I said, "Okay, DFI, everybody, we're going to go down to the medical room and we're going to try and shoot the scene there." Well what happens at that moment is a rather beautiful and creative thing. It's called blind panic. Truly. Because everybody starts running in opposite directions. "Oh my god it's all changed. Oh my god the director's mad. Oh my god. How are we going to do it?" And everybody goes down, and Barry Ackroyd and I race down there, and we were getting short of time and I said to the captain, "Will there be any medical team?" He said, "Yeah, the orderly will be on duty. Whoever's on duty, you can use them." So we got there and this young corpsman was there, Danielle, and I said, "Listen, do you mind if we shoot this scene?" I mean they knew we were on the ship you know. "What me?" she said. "Yeah," I said, "It's fine. Listen, it's just like a training exercise, it's just it'll be Tom Hanks." White as a sheet. This is absolutely a true story. And we're now in complete panic because Tom's got to get changed, it's a make-up change. My god, now it's five to six, what are we going to do? And she's panicking, and Barry's there and I said, "Listen, just fuck it, let's just turn over." And we turned over and Tom walked in, and Barry and I - it was a tiny room, it was about

the size of that table - and Barry and I sort of crabbed round to the left. As soon as she's clapped eyes on Tom when he walked in, she completely dried, she was going like this. Barry and I were sort of going round to the left and then Barry stumbled and I fell over and it was just chaos, and it all fell apart. But, there was something in the room, you could feel it, you could just feel it. It was... it had drama. It was the right place to be, and that was where the scene was going to be, and then we came out and I said to Tom, "Let's go out. Did you feel that?" He said, "Oh absolutely. I totally feel different. Now, it's something about the fact that she's a woman and I'm all this and I've got the blood all over me and it's just very strange, and I feel just very vulnerable." "Okay let's go again." And we walked in and that was it, the second take was the film.

**SM:** It's all about that.

**PG:** Listen, it's luck. You know what I mean. It's luck but it's not because it's about great actors... Great actors are like the guys who hold the crook sticks, and they feel, truly, they have an instinct. It's what actors do, they have an instinct for the truth. And they go, it's there. And then you know.

**SM:** Who has a question for Paul. If you can speak as loudly as possible so that everyone in the room... Oh, we have a microphone. Okay, we'll get the microphones to you as soon as possible. Gentleman in the beard and glasses.

**Question:** Hi, hello. Hi Paul, thanks very much for that. That was amazing that lecture. I'm a, I started shooting at Reuters and I'm onto my third feature documentary. I'm hoping to follow your path. I was just wondering what advice or what I should look out for when I move into shooting TV dramas, and then hopefully, or when I shoot feature films as well?



## Paul Greengrass: David Lean Lecture sponsored by The David Lean Foundation

18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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**PG:** Well, I think I sort of tried to put it there. I mean I made all the mistakes it's possible to make. The one mistake you must never make is to agree to make a film or sign on to film that you don't believe in. Most importantly because it's unfair on that. It's not about you, it's just not fair on that project because you're doing it a profound disservice because you're not serving it, you're uncommitted ultimately. So never make that mistake, that was certainly one I made. In the end, the difficult thing is to give yourself time to find your point of view, and develop the necessary steel without alienating people. It's a difficult mix because in the end, to direct you have to carry peoples' confidence. You know you can't sort of go around, I said at the beginning you know talking about being arsey. Well there's some truth, it is true, you've got to have that steel and you've got to be in the end prepared, you've got to... It's a communal business, it's a team game, it's a collective activity, it's an industrial activity and it involves lots of money. It's not like writing a novel or a poem or painting a picture. You've got to engage and carry peoples' confidence, but you've got to lead, and that's a paradox. It's a paradox; you've got to lead but you've got to listen. And that is at the heart, I remember, I'll tell you, the best lesson I ever learned was very early on when I was at Granada. I was a young bloke and I was put on my very first documentary, and the bloke who was making it was a chap called John Slater who's sadly no longer with us, who trained all of the directors at Granada and was a very, very great man. And I walked into the cutting room, and I was a young kid you know, and he was very posh and in those days it kind of wasn't as informal as it is today, and I walked in and said, "I'm the new researcher." It was a documentary about the Munich air disaster and he said, "oh yeah, okay yep." And he said, "what do you know about film," and I said, "Well I've only just started actually." And he said, "have you ever touched a piece of

film," and I said, "Well I've put film in a camera before." And he said, "well, touch it then," and you know we were in a cutting room, an old cutting room with a steam back and you know plates and all that stuff and trim bins. And I said, "well no," and he said, "Well go and pick up some film out of the trim bin." So I went over and I picked up you know AA461, which is about that long, went like that. And he said, "no, no, no, no, no, pick it up, pick it up." And so I picked up A4464 which is about that long. He said, "For fuck's sake," threw the trim bin over, "pick it up." So I picked up all this film which was then spewing all over the floor like this you know, and I'm standing there looking like a right old pillock. He said, "Excellent, you've had your first lesson of filmmaking and I'm off to lunch." And there I was, this is absolutely true. What he meant was, that film, you have to have a physical relationship with film. And it's a paradoxical relationship because you have to physically wrestle it, you have to be its master, you've got to force it to be what you want it to be. But at the same time it spews out all over the place and you have to let it find its own shape. You have to listen to it, and in that interplay between control and anarchy is where a film is made. And different directors sit on that spectrum, willing to tolerate more or less anarchy, but that is what filmmaking is, and what you will have to do is find out where you sit on that spectrum. Are you rigidly controlling and less likely to listen to the film, or more willing to listen to the film and less likely to be able to exert control. And somewhere you have to make sense of that, and that in the end is the great mystery and nightmare of making a film.

**SM:** It's that easy. Who else has a question for Paul? Just next to you, okay it's very convenient.

**Question:** Hi, first if I could just echo this gentleman's thoughts and say that was a fantastic lecture and thank you so much. I'm



18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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wondering what advice you would give to a young filmmaker - you spoke passionately about the challenges they face - about how to break into that first directing role, and how you go about doing that?

**PG:** Well as I say, I think we do really well in the UK at giving first directors a chance. I mean really well and by any objective international standard, we give a lot, a lot, a lot, of first time directors a chance. I think it's unlikely if you're a first time director and you've got a strong idea that you would not get a chance in today's... That's not where the problem lies. The problem lies if you make an okay first film, getting to your third or your fourth film where you might start to then be able to find yourself. I mean I would never have lasted in today's environment because it would have been over after my first film, and if I got a chance after that it would certainly have been over after *Theory of Shite* without a shadow of a doubt. Do you know what I mean? That is it, so the answer is identify the film you want to make and then identify the next one. And keep your eyes not on the first film, it doesn't matter if your first film doesn't win an Oscar, it's not what it's about, it's about making three or four films and learning your craft. Unless you're a nailed on genius which most of us aren't.

**SM:** There's a question at the back, a microphone coming to you sir.

**Question:** Aristotle and the poetics say fiction should be truer than truth, or truer than history, and you've sort of mentioned that a few times. And I just wondered if you might want to enlarge on that now that why you can actually make things that are realer than real and more expressive and more intelligent than the actual true story and what kind of tweaks you think are permissible, and all the rest of that?

**PG:** Well, I think the truth is in cinema there's wide latitude, you know. I mean I talked about *Lawrence of Arabia*. Funnily enough, when I was preparing the thing tonight I went online. There are numerous sites devoted, literally devoted to the historical inaccuracies of *Lawrence of Arabia*. Literally, entire sites, you know. But does it really matter? You know it's... it doesn't matter because what counts is the power of cinema and the truthfulness of humanity and the complexity of the characterisation. And the film when you experience it speaks to the human condition. And I'm not sidestepping the issues, and I didn't try to there. There's no doubt that turning reality into a commodity, which is I think a feature of today, and which by the way extends way, way, way beyond cinema. In fact I want to say that cinema is the least egregious, I would say when you compare it to newspapers, online, you know what I mean. I'm not minimising those issues, but in the end there is a thing called cinematic truth and everybody knows it when they see it. To my eye anyway.

**SM:** So did you know when you were making *Captain Phillips* that there would be some people that would crop up and go, "I was on that ship, he wasn't like that. That didn't happen."

**PG:** Now we're into an arcane dispute. That was one guy who you know, and there was a law suit, and that was before I made that film I went into all that and I'm 100% confident that the picture that we portrayed was accurate. 100%. Not even 1% of doubt.

**SM:** Anyone else with a question for Paul? Here.

**Question:** As a bolshie director, how do you maintain relationships with those that you're working with?



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18 March 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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**PG:** Well I don't think I am particularly bolshie. I hope not. I think I was a bolshie teenager. I'm capable of being arsey, that's for sure.

**SM:** What's the difference between arsey and bolshie?

**PG:** Arsey is sort of grown up bolshie. [laughs] But in the end, listen, I don't know if you went into the first floor, I walked in tonight and you see that picture of David Lean. You just wouldn't mess with the guy, would you? I mean you wouldn't, and why wouldn't you? Because he looked like a leader and he knew everything about filmmaking. He started as an editor. He knew everything. There wasn't one activity taking place on a film set that he couldn't do at least as well as everybody there. And he knew how to make films. He had enormous experience. He'd made films of many stars in many types in many times. And it's not really about being arsey and bolshie in the end, it's about carrying the trust of people who are going to give you a lot of money, and you don't do that by being foolish or picking fights. You do it by them believing that you know how to make the film, and you being able to make your film. That's it; it's as simple as that. And if you can do that in a way that's civilised that's better, but of course there are times when you've got to be tough and say this is how it's going to be, or not listen to... And you're not always right, incidentally. You know you can get yourself into places where... But one of the things about, this is what I was saying, it sort of pitilessly exposes your human flaws, but one of the things you do learn I think about directing is you cannot stand still. You cannot not say, that way. You can do it for a short while you know. There's Chris in the front who has worked with me on many films and in many tight places, and we'll go for a huddle, "what the fuck are we going to do now? It's all gone tits up." But in the end there's only a few minutes you can stand like that before you have to say, "we do this." And it's better to do

that and be wrong than it is to fuck around and not decide. You have to keep moving forward and your command and control depends on deciding, directing. Saying we go this way, we go this way and we go this way. And ultimately you can't be right 100% of the time, but you have to be right more often than you're wrong, otherwise you don't work. Simple as that.

**SM:** We have time for a couple more questions. Right at the back.

**Question:** Hi, I wonder if you would ever move back into TV now? A lot of people talk about this being the golden age of TV, a lot of film talent is on the small screen now. I wonder if that holds any appeal for you?

**PG:** Yeah, of course I would. Yeah definitely, I think about it all the time.

**Q:** What specifically? Have you got like some things in your mind or...

**PG:** No, nothing specific, but I think about it and I talk about it and I'm asked. I'm often asked in America and never here, that's the truth of it.

**SM:** Why would that be?

**PG:** I think that, well it goes to the issue about what we have to do to keep directors here. And it goes to the *Downton Abbey* example or the *Doctor Who* example. In America if the director who had directed the first episode of *Downton Abbey* or *Doctor Who* would have made, you know would have shared in the success of that programme, and rightly so. Because he or she directing that first episode would have cast all the main characters, set the look, set the tone, set the series up for its future success. And in America you would share, as a right, you don't have to negotiate; it's your right under the Directors Guild of



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America agreement. And now, you wouldn't share to the same extent that the writer would share because in the end television rightly is a writer's medium more than a director's medium. Or the producer because that is, they're more important to the process, fundamentally. But you would share in a meaningful way, and what that means is that that critical triumvirate out of which all films, whether they're in television or cinema are made, which is the relationship between the writer, the producer and the director. And the balance can shift or be different according to the personalities and according to the medium, but there has to be a baseline where there's mutual respect and parity. And that doesn't exist in this country, and what this means is that directors have to go abroad if they've got families and they need, and they do. A lot of them do. And a lot of them don't enjoy it, that's the other thing. They go and they don't really enjoy it because they're British, not American, and there are problems. So what we do is we find these hugely talented people whose careers are broken and damaged. Some of them succeed, some of them are lucky like me, some of them don't, some of them come back. But we're not thinking about how to marshal that talent for the future of our industry, and we can. It's just about sharing, that's all it is. It's a pretty basic thing. The weird thing is, you'd think in America they'd be the uber-capitalists. They're not; actually, it's here. This is the buccaneering merchant place right here. It's true, it's true. We have no trade unions, no crafts, no guilds meaningfully. Not like that over there.

**SM:** One more question, gentleman there. And I think that's all we have time for.

**Question:** Thank you again Paul for your talk. It's a question you kind of touched upon when you were saying you were moving into Hollywood and worried about selling out. I guess my question is, what would you identify

as the DNA of British filmmaking and creativity that are particularly worth protecting and nourishing on a kind of world stage?

**PG:** Just look at the Oscars, you know what I mean. I mean, Steve McQueen, just one of our most outstanding directors. *Philomena*. *Gravity* which was a largely British film, British producer, British visual effects. Alfonso would consider himself British by residency; he's been here many years. *Captain Phillips*, actually, in lots of ways. So, and then films like *Selfish Giant*. I mean there's a huge diversity of voices and talent engaging with distinctively British content, but also with global content, and that's fantastic, it's absolutely fantastic. And the issue is not where we are now; it's where we can be tomorrow by encouraging more people to get involved.

**SM:** One final question from me. You mentioned earlier in your talk about how you were told that a researcher's job was to cause trouble. It seems to be a mantra that you might have kept to. Do you intend to carry on causing trouble, in the best possible sense?

**PG:** Well I don't think I'm going to be doing any sort of petticoats movies quite yet, but you never know.

**SM:** Go back to that horror film maybe, that would be great. We thank the David Lean Foundation, but most particularly Paul Greengrass.

Thank you very much.

[applause]

