

## **Keynote Address at the Edinburgh Film Festival**

**By  
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**As Delivered**

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I'm absolutely delighted to have been prised out of retirement to have the privilege of addressing you this morning.

I only draw attention to my extended absence because much of the value of what I have to say in the next few minutes stems from the fact that, to all intents and purposes, I am now something of an 'outsider'; although I still watch a hell of a lot of movies (in fact possibly more than ever!) and, as I also hope to establish, I've lost none of my belief that cinema, at its best, remains the most powerful cultural medium of them all.

What's certain is that I'm not here to seek your sympathy, or to win any popularity contest.

Far from it!

I've too much respect for cinema, and far too much respect for you to do anything other than offer what I see as the industry's present (and future) reality – good and bad - in a digital age.

When my dad died and I was clearing up his stuff, pinned to the inside his desk I found a quote from a George Bernard Shaw play.

It read, 'Be true to the dreams of your youth.'

I've tried tremendously hard to stick by that; to the point of from time to time being told I should by now have gotten over my almost childlike infatuation with cinema. The truth is, for the most part, the exact opposite is the case.

I have to accept that I'm also here as a quasi-politician.

Long before I was appointed to the House of Lords, in fact as early as the mid seventies, I'd become deeply involved in the formulation of public policy, particularly as it concerns cinema; and indeed the broader digital communications industry of which it forms a part.

In fact, cinema has the capacity to be at the very heart of the vision of Digital Britain unveiled by Lord Carter in his Government report last week.

As I'll hope to explain, this is a report that moves the debate about the creative and digital industries forward in a very significant way.

It's a debate that, in policy terms, had got rather stuck – not least because many outside of the creative industries had continued to see them as, at best, fluffy and at worst downright irrelevant to the future of UK plc.

I believe the contrary to be the case.

That's probably why, for the last couple of decades I've been hammering home the message wherever I can that, as well as delivering huge cultural and educational value, our creative industries are fundamental to our industrial future.

For that reason alone, I was pleased to see the importance of film and of cinema specifically singled out.

As the report says:

"The emergence of digital technology in recent years has provided a vital opportunity to create a dramatic change in the cinematic experience."

You'll also have noticed that in among the suggestions made for amendments to the Channel Four remit was the welcome, and very specific reference to 'film'.

Digital technologies, including broadband, have the potential to transform the role of cinemas, just as they are already transforming the way in which audiences consume moving images of every kind.

The film industry and film culture generally have a fantastic opportunity to play a pioneering role in Digital Britain.

Over the next 5–10 years, digital distribution will obviously increase massively in the UK and around the world. Currently just 10% of UK cinema screens are equipped for digital presentation.

As Stephen Carter's report acknowledges, the UK Film Council's Digital Screen Network led the way, and has helped ensure that the UK is, at least for the present, the European leader in digital cinema.

The potential of what is in some respects a new medium is only just starting to be tapped.

A number of cinemas are already successfully showing operas, music and theatre. Increasingly that programming will be in 3D.

There are already opportunities to show sport, local archive material, educational and community specific material – and once cinemas have access to next generation broadband, all of this can be delivered quite literally at the click of a mouse. And please believe me, having seen it, 3D Sport could be a real ‘game changer’.

The sheer flexibility of ‘digital’ presentation offers the opportunity for cinemas to become incredibly valuable focal points, especially in smaller and more rural communities. A place where local citizens can share knowledge, experiences and learning, or simply enjoy friendship and share memories.

The UK's modern multiplex infrastructure has developed entirely over the last 24 years; believe it or not I cut the ribbon at the very the first multiplex which opened in Milton Keynes in 1985. The owners of those multiplexes are extremely well placed to seize the opportunities of digital technology.

The industry's transitional model - the virtual print fee – was designed and is most effective for the larger circuits.

Much more vulnerable of course are the smaller sites in rural and coastal locations, not least here in Scotland – serving communities of a scale which don't allow for a comfortable economic transition to digital.

If a means can be found to partially cover, or simply accelerate the mechanics of switchover for these smaller communities, then the potential exists for some really imaginative ‘civic trade off's’ by way of using cinemas, either ‘out of hours’ or at specific times of the year, for more obviously community or educational purposes. By way of example, it would be entirely possible to show the 2012 London Olympics, every day - in 3D – on every screen in the UK!

Why not?

The demonstrations I've seen of 3D, especially those involving sport, have been extraordinarily impressive, and I think its appeal for certain kinds of films, as well as for certain kinds of ‘live’ events, including sport, will very rapidly become all too apparent. What is driving change in Digital Britain is, above all, a growing number of quite fundamental changes in the behaviour of people; as audiences, as consumers, and as citizens.

Entirely understandably, they want to use digital technologies to access content faster, more conveniently, at home and on the move – in ways that were all-but unimaginable even a decade ago.

This poses some extremely tricky challenges for anyone involved in creating, distributing or exhibiting films. Certainly when I first became involved in the industry at the end of the

sixties, many parts of the sector were ill equipped intellectually, emotionally or organizationally to 'turn on a sixpence', and grab the opportunities made available by just about any form of change and innovation.

For the most part, the rather elderly men who then ran much of the industry fled from change, convinced that it would upset a comfortable lifestyle based on long lunches at *Quo Vadis* or *the Braganza*, lavish annual trips to the Hotel Carlton in Cannes, and weekly rounds of golf in Surrey on a Friday.

As a consequence, the industry became immensely inward looking and complacent; and British audiences voted with their feet.

Fortunately, spurred by the multiplex revolution – largely led by American investment – British cinema eventually woke from its slumber; Lottery monies, tax breaks, and the UK Film Council were put in place by successive Governments, all helping the sector to prosper once again.

But now, with the digital revolution already at hand, the film sector needs to equip itself for a new round of change.

That means some hard thinking about the best ways to maximise the value of both rights and real estate.

And here, as Lord Carter emphasised last week, it's really about getting the balance right.

The balance that is between making content easily accessible and maximising its value.

As a rights holder I entirely recognize the importance of maintaining and even strengthening the economic entitlement which flows from intellectual property rights.

As I made clear to the Lords Select Committee on Communications when I gave evidence to their enquiry into the film industry a couple of weeks ago, I, along with all the other participants in the films I produced, am the very happy beneficiary of a consistent, annual flow of revenues from a number of the films I produced.

That seems to me an equitable reward for success.

What enables those revenues to flow to those who made them is the notion that copyright is respected, and that public policymakers in the UK and around the world find ways to significantly reduce outright theft and online infringement – otherwise, over time, and in a world of high-speed broadband connectivity, revenues will be substantially diminished, leading to an inevitable decline in the appetite for investment in new content.

And that content, for the most part, cannot and should not be simply given away - without any return to its creators.

As an aside, it has always bothered me that the 'giveaway' DVDs that are used to promote the dwindling sales of our Daily and Sunday newspapers serve only to allow for the impression that we ourselves insufficiently 'value' our product.

But whilst I absolutely understand the importance of promoting and securing value from copyright, it seems to me that there is nothing like the same degree of energy and imagination that has yet gone into discussions around the use of rights to enhance access and diversity, understanding and learning.

The recorded music world has paid a very high price for its early lack of imagination.

What is at stake in relation to rights is not just 'revenues', but a far bigger prize; the whole realm of what I prefer to think of as the 'public interest'; and the chance to radically enhance and enrich the lives of people right across the Nations and regions of the UK - in fact across the whole of the developed and developing world. To really develop media literacy, or "digital participation" as Lord Carter's report calls it, among all our citizens – young and old alike.

But this isn't just an argument about traditional 'content' – it's also about 'data' or the 'power of information'.

One of the smartest things that the Government has done around Digital Britain is to ask Sir Tim Berners-Lee to look at ways of seriously opening up public access to public data. We've paid for it, we should be able to access it – unless there are personal or state security issues at stake.

And it definitely shouldn't be redacted!

Imagine a world in which all of us had access to the vast store of data and information held by the Government – all the material currently held under Crown Copyright for example.

This would represent an invaluable resource not just for content providers but for those wishing to create innovative online services of every kind.

And you certainly don't have to set up shop inside the M25 to do that.

In the UK we have a fantastic range of data that's compiled through the public purse. Whether it be data about voter turnout, transport use, changing weather patterns, or simply a check-list of what's already in the UK's national archives – there's an immense wealth of material simply waiting to be liberated.

We are, as I say, the people who've paid for it.

Every bit as much as we've paid for mortgages, moats, and chocolate Minstrels!

The Guardian's recent move to open up its data through its Guardian Data blogs initiative shows the way forward for the public sector.

The Government has even talked of creating a new system of 'Crown Commons' to enable access to, and use of, public information and data.

Tim Berners-Lee has been given a brilliant opportunity to unleash the power of data to the common good.

From what I know of him, he is nobody's push-over and I'm pretty sure he'll do his best to unlock it on our behalf.

We need to explore these possibilities in ways that are about far more than simply 'permitting' various forms of passive consumption; but rather by seeing them as a massive catalyst for the encouragement of a whole new world of creative collaboration, sharing and learning.

Here's a cautionary story, drawn from the archives of C-Span, the US public service broadcaster:

In 1994, a proposal from Christopher Dodd, the Democratic Senator from Connecticut, set out a thoroughly imaginative way to use the value of past intellectual property to support contemporary artists and scholars.

The 'Arts Endowing the Arts Act' would have added 20 years to the term of copyright protection, and used a portion of the income from those extra years to underwrite current creative work.

Under the rules then existing, U.S. copyright had protected an individual's work for his or her lifetime, plus 50 years; corporations with works 'made for hire' held rights for 75 years.

Under Chris Dodd's proposal, at the end of each of these terms, the rights to an additional 20 years would have been publicly auctioned, some of the proceeds going to build an endowment dedicated to the arts and humanities.

What's not to like about that?

You may well ask?

Tragically Dodd's proposal failed; and four years later Sonny Bono's proposal for the extension of copyright term by 20 years passed, but with none of the public benefits that Chris Dodd had attached.

This time around all the benefits from the Bono proposal simply accrued to the incumbent corporations and individuals.

You could almost hear Sonny Bono re-writing the title and lyric of his most famous song as – "I GOT MINE BABE"!

When reflecting on this missed opportunity, I like to remember that memorable moment at Robert Kennedy's funeral, when Teddy Kennedy said this of his brother:  
"Some men see things as they are, and ask why. My brother dreamed of things that never were, and asked - why not."

So this morning I'm suggesting that you likewise dare to take a fresh look at the possibility of an environment in which 'rights owners', when faced with difficult,

sometimes even challenging questions, look at each issue from the perspective of: Why not? Rather than -“I own it, therefore why on earth should I – after all, what’s in it for me?”

In reality what I’m suggesting is just a small shift; but it’s a tiny shift that could, over time, begin to make an enormous difference.

I am not so naïve as to believe it will be easy to achieve a defensible, let alone a sustainable balance between rights and access – if for no other reason than the fact that much of the debate has become so fractious and so shrill that it’s all but impossible to pursue a balanced and constructive discussion.

But when ‘public resources’ have been used to create that content, then the overwhelming objective should be to maximise the ‘public benefit’ returned to the people who helped pay for its creation in the first place.

And it seems to me that the Digital Britain report has the balance about right in this respect. Even if, by contrast, the Parliamentary Authorities got it very, very badly wrong when they released the blacked out expenses data a few days ago.

In the final part of my remarks today, I’d like to look at film, or ‘cinema’ from a rather different perspective – and to ask some questions in relation to the future not just of Digital Britain, but all of us, collectively, as individuals and as communities.

I’ve always believed that cinema has a significant political role to play at moments of ‘crisis’ such as those we are living through.

For at its best, cinema does retain a remarkable ability to speak to people of every age, from every background, and in ways that almost every other form of popular culture struggles to compete with.

This is why the economics of the film industry, the raw numbers, do not begin to describe the broader impact of the medium.

In fact it’s largely thanks to festivals such as this that the counter-argument gets any traction at all.

As will once again become clear this week, within the world of cinema there can still be found authentic ‘moral’ voices; which is why at its best cinema remains capable of that most valuable of all cultural gifts, ‘thought leadership’.

I look around at most other forms of popular culture; and the capacity of cinema to deliver this ‘moral vision’, to speak with this degree of compassion, to allow space for ‘poets and dreamers’ becomes ever-more striking.

Yet having said that, it’s also the case that contemporary cinema remains far too timid about using its ability to positively influence young minds in the way they see and respond to the world.

Cinema has historically played a role in enabling people to re-imagine the world at times of crisis – Italian neo-realism after the war, much of the work of the Nouvelle Vague in the sixties; films like *Rome Open City*, *Battle of Algiers* and *Le Weekend*.

I'm not naive enough to pretend that on its own cinema can cut through, let alone solve significant social or cultural problems; but through 'illuminating' the sometimes very different lives and experiences of others – most particularly those of the young and especially vulnerable - it can help create that vital 'context of understanding' within which the type of change that sometimes looks 'impossible' begins to look at least 'possible'.

And, as every one of us will have experienced, once you cross that frontier of doubt, trust begins to develop, and before you know it, the unthinkable becomes, not only thinkable - but maybe even achievable?

In fact if we ever cease to believe that we will also cease to make movies.

This is why cinema, and its relationship with history and the 'real world', matters.

Because of my work at Unicef, I get to see things that most people seldom see.

People, places and circumstances that I sincerely hope few of you ever have to witness, because when confronted with this stuff part of you goes into what can easily become a permanent spasm of outrage.

I take refuge in the fact that far and away the most important role of the individual film maker is to help illustrate and explain the ambiguities and complexities of life, and in doing so, help promote understanding and, where necessary, create narratives that support or encourage dialogue – leading, in some cases, to the possibility of difficult but acceptable compromises.

That's essentially the message Barak Obama was trying to get across a couple of weeks ago, during his tour of the Middle East.

In a tiny way it's what I was trying to do in the films I produced that dealt with factual or historical events; most obviously in *The Killing Fields*, *The Mission* and *Cal*, but also in their own ways, *Chariots of Fire*, *The Duellists* and even *Local Hero*.

In every case I tried to produce films that adhered to some definable concept of 'cultural integrity'.

Surely, as intelligent and responsible filmmakers, working in a free society, we have a duty to ensure that our chosen medium is a force for good in an ever-more complex world.

Just over two weeks ago, we saw the extraordinarily depressing spectacle of two British National Party 'politicians' – and I use that phrase very, very loosely, elected to represent the UK in the European Parliament.

Behind their suits and ties lurks something extremely unpleasant – I'd like to think no-one's deceived about that, but I fear, on the evidence of that recent election, that at least some voters are.

In fact, I sometimes think that the greatest danger to democracy is the degree to which it is eroded by stealth.

Or as a character puts it in that wonderful satire of the media, the film *Broadcast News*:

“What do you think the Devil’s going to look like next the he comes around?  
Nobody is going to be taken in if he has a long, red, pointy tail.

No.

He will look attractive, and he’ll be nice and helpful, and he’ll get a job where he influences a great God-fearing nation, and he will never do an evil thing... he will just bit by little bit lower standards where they are important.... just coax along ‘flash over substance’.

Just a tiny bit at a time.

And he’ll talk about all of us being really great salesmen. But he’ll get all the great women!”

Think about current events in Silvio Berlusconi’s Italy, and you begin to see that life can imitate art to a degree that quite beggars belief!

We desperately need some of our most talented filmmakers to find ways of helping to ensure that the insidious propaganda of Nick Griffin and his gang of thugs fails in its attempt to capture impressionable young minds in some of our more vulnerable communities.

Because if the BNP are allowed to get away with exploiting complex issues to their own God knows what ends, then we have stepped on to a very slippery slope indeed.

For make no mistake, the challenges that we as a society will face as a consequence of global warming alone will make today’s issues look like very small beer indeed.

To my mind, one of the ways in which the reality of global warming will first come home to us is through the impact of climate change migrants, and the desperation of refugees. That will be the first time this issue really hits home in a serious way.

How are we going to react when the situation explodes, either in Bangladesh or in sub-Saharan Africa, and we suddenly see possibly many millions of people moving through southern Spain and up through Europe seeking food, shelter and, most fundamentally, water.

Creating the fertile environment of fear and confusion which the extreme politics of the recently legitimized BNP will be only too happy to exploit?

This is where brave and committed political cinema could really come into its own – helping to both understand what’s happening and ensuring that we remain a liberal, inclusive and tolerant in our response.

We've already seen last week, in relation to events in Iran, how digital tools like Twitter can become channels for voices of dissent – it's crucial that cinema remains responsive to the political climate if it's not to look increasingly irrelevant to the really big challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Surely, the remarkable history of cinema makes it worth holding on to at least some kind of a dream?

Here's why; and it's a story that concerns the film that was unquestionably the most difficult, but most rewarding of my professional life – The Killing Fields.

In 1985 I was asked by the British Council to attend a British cultural week in Kiev; we'd just won a clutch of Oscars and they felt it was appropriate to screen the movie there. It didn't take long to realize that I'd been rather badly briefed about the Ukraine - I had no understanding at all of the tensions that existed: political, religious, economic and cultural.

We ran the film on a Saturday morning, in a huge cavernous cinema, to an audience of mostly young people - about 2,000 of them.

After the screening, in an otherwise terrific Q and A session, no-one mentioned Cambodia. All of the talk was of the Ukraine and its problems, and whether any such series of events could possibly happen to them.

Almost twenty years passed until one day, in a hotel in Davos, I was introduced to the then new Ukrainian President, Yushchenko.

He didn't speak particularly good English but I heard one of the interpreters mention that I was the producer of The Killing Fields.

At which point he grabbed me and excitedly explained that shortly after my visit the film had begun to circulate among their schools and colleges, he didn't actually say they pirated it – he didn't need to! Apparently lots and lots of VHS copies of The Killing Fields were shown in schools all over the Ukraine. In fact as far as I could make out, every kid in the Ukraine has at some point seen the movie.

He asked me if I'd ever noticed that during the Orange Revolution there was never any discussion, at any point at all, about the possibility of a civil war breaking out.

“Because of your film we understood all too well what civil war did to a nation. We saw what happened in Cambodia, and determined that it was not going to happen in Ukraine.”

For the first time in my life I had been brought face to face with the quite incredible power of cinema. I can't pretend that when making the film any of us thought for one moment that it might have that type of effect.

But the story perfectly illustrates what an incredibly powerful and important medium cinema can be, and what a lasting effect it can have on people's lives.

So we must keep faith with the dream of a distinctive cinema that really does 'dare to speak the truth to power' – and celebrates the privilege, the freedom, of being able to do so.

The dream of a British cinema that, both in its humanity and in its infinite variety, speaks to all of the communities represented here in the UK.

Whether it be the experience of Romanian immigrants in Belfast, or disillusioned working class communities here in Leith.

As I say, an inclusive and tolerant view of the world, one informed and shaped by understanding and empathy, not ignorance, fear and hatred.

The dream of a cinema that entertains, that engages, and that endures – a cinema that leaves its imprint as much on our hearts and our conscience as on our more easily reached emotions; an imprint that lasts long after the lights come up – in my case it was for a lifetime.

Why should all of this be so important?

It's important because, over the next few decades, we're going to need every exceptional person, and every scrap of talent we can find if we're to meet and see off what is almost certainly the greatest set of challenges the human race has ever faced:

Long-term economic stagnation.

Climate Change; and that consequent flood of refugees I've mentioned.

Ever widening nuclear proliferation.

The likelihood of mass structural unemployment.

The growing inevitability of global pandemics.

Ever more visible inequalities – both in this country and overseas.

The terrifying human and economic cost of obesity.

The list simply gets longer, and the consequences more potentially devastating.

What's certain is, should we fail to act on the all-too-obvious warning signs, should we fail to get to grips with these impending crisis, there'll be no need to ask 'for whom the bell tolls'; it will be tolling for just about every man, woman and child on this once beautiful planet.

If I may I'll finish with something I picked up in the *New York Times* a few weeks ago.

It's a very short quote from the book *The Great Gatsby*, in which the narrator Nick Carraway assesses the brutal world of the principal characters, Tom and Daisy Buchanan.

He says:

“They smashed up things and people, and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness ... and let other people clean up the mess they made”.

To me this passage brilliantly describes our present situation with regard to the consequences of the financial crisis which, at least to some degree, we've brought upon ourselves.

I can only say again: how much more serious will it be if, one day, this passage also describes the way in which the actions of my, of this present generation, have succeeded in entirely 'smashing up' our planet.

In every sense, what lies ahead will involve an unprecedented degree of collective responsibility; the ability to persuade people, most especially young people, into adopting an entirely new understanding of the consequences of each and every one of their actions.

The medium of Cinema, our medium, could and should be at the heart of this. Part of our job surely is to replace what's become an instinctive 'individuality', in effect amounting to little more than selfishness, with a far more generous and intuitive selflessness.

It's not going to be easy to navigate our way through the many and varied challenges that lie ahead, and any 'sunlit uplands' certainly won't be achieved overnight.

But if we could inform our work with a new found sense of responsibility; if our films could reflect the overwhelming benefits of a genuine sense of commitment to one another; then I sincerely believe there remains enough good in this world to allow for the possibility of at least some kind of a 'sustainable' future for ourselves, for our children, and for our children's children.

Thank you for listening to me.