

BAFTA and BFI Screenwriters' Lecture Series, in association with The JJ Charitable Trust

Tony Gilroy

29 September 2013 at BFI Southbank

Tony Gilroy: Alright, well that's exciting. All the writers get up here, they've never given speeches before, so this is, you're seeing a virginal experience here. We do lots of Q&As, but we never do this. My father is a screenwriter and my brother is a screenwriter. Most of my father's friends when I was growing up were screenwriters. I have a great number of screenwriters who are among my best friends.

Other than about a 10 year period of my life where I was deeply harnessed to the service economy, everything I've ever had in my life, that I've been given or that I've given to my family, has been the result of somebody making stuff up that people would play at in front of a camera. Everything.

I sold my first screenplay when I was 30. I tended bar for about five or six years, as I was figuring it out. I was changing. I'd been a musician, worked a lot of strange jobs, didn't go to school, but I sold my first script at 30 and in that time, since then, I've pretty much done every single kind of screenwriting job that you can do.

From sort of page one blank page all the way through to a premiere, to a one day dialogue polish for an actor you'll never meet and a director on the phone. Everything in between. Every now and then, something comes up that is some wacky permutation on employment, but the entire Kama sutra of Hollywood experience, I have assumed both positions as a screenwriter – top and bottom.

So, what do I talk about? What's worth it to talk about for half an hour? What do I know? I watched some of the other lectures from some of the other people that have spoken, and nobody knows anything. Everybody gets up and they don't know anything. Then they quote Bill Goldman, 'Nobody Knows Anything'. It's a slightly different context, I've known Bill since I was 10 years old; let me tell you for a guy who doesn't know anything he has an awful lot of opinions. Seriously.

But nobody knows anything. And so why do we do that? Why do we come up here? And I'm tempted to do the same thing. I think the reason that we do it isn't just because we've never given a speech before, but because I think we're so humbled by the limitations of our

own process that we so don't feel like experts every day, that we're very loath and suspicious to have you follow us.

I think anybody who makes it to this thing... Ronald Harwood doesn't know anything, Charlie Kaufman doesn't know anything and Abi Morgan doesn't know anything, nobody knows anything. Because if you get here I'm betting that you have a pretty good idea of the abyss that's on the other side of your desk every day, and how often we fail, and how often it's just an agony.

I think that that's probably true. It is true, for every novelist and composer and painter and anybody who really lives by their wits in a sort of heroic way like that. What's the difference? I think the difference is that maybe we get asked about it more, and I think that the difference is also that when we finish we don't have a beautiful 500 page manuscript, or a really gorgeous painting or a symphony to show for our effort.

What we have is a sort of strangled document that we've spent most of our time trying to get rid of things in, we've been trying to eliminate material from it. And it's also nothing but... you can't think this way while you're working, but in the end it's nothing but this sort of Frankensteinian monster on the table that the lightning bolt has to bring to life.

I think that's what the suspicion is about, and I think that's why we're probably very nervous about seeming bold or arrogant about our process. So what should we talk about tonight, in light of all of that? I've looked at the others, I think what I want to talk about tonight is, I want to talk about the original screenplay, because that's what I've spent the bulk of my life doing, and that's how I think of myself, and it's the thing I think I know the most about.

I'm writing an original [screenplay] now, I'm supposed to be finishing it, I've been on it vastly too long. I've ignored most of the things I'm going to tell you tonight, which is why this lecture is for me as much as you, to remind me of what an asshole I am for ignoring my own rules. And I'm serious about that.

So I'll talk, I'll try to be brief, and I'm going to try to talk about how to build an original

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screenplay, not in the pixie dust kind of way, and not too technical at the same time. I'll clarify one thing, I'm not really an adapter. There's been books I've chased over the years that I really wanted to be involved with that, if I'd ever gotten my hands on them, I would have been a very zealous protector of the books.

I've only done one book, *Dolores Claiborne* we did, and we significantly changed the structure of the book and the telling of it. But in the end I think it was a really successful adaptation, it really captured Stephen King's world and the character, and it really is faithful in a really molecular kind of way. I've that Stephen King, it's one of his favourite ones, and so in that sense we were very responsible.

The rest of the adaptation credits I have are, quite honesty, fig leaves. I've never read a Robert Ludlum novel, ever. I did a movie called *Extreme Measures*, it was a deal, it was like 'we have a medical thriller that we have money for a re-write on'; 'well I have this original medical thriller and we like each other', and we never clarified the paperwork.

Devil's Advocate probably qualifies as a Hollywood adaptation for someone who's in my position, if you end up doing rewrites. *Devil's Advocate* was really an adaptation of the eight versions of that script that had existed at Warner Bros. for a decade. That script had floated with many writers at Warner Bros. for many years. So I don't really consider myself an adapter.

I'm sure there's a novelist that I'm going to really need in a year from now, and a book that I really, really want and they're going to watch the tape that we made tonight and I'm going to take back every... and I'm going to come cap in hand, and I'll want them to ignore, and catch the first part of what I said. There's a benevolent adapter in me somewhere.

So, the original screenplay, I don't know how many I've written... 15, 20, I didn't want to count because I didn't want to be depressed about how many of them hadn't gotten made. That's really the reason I don't want to count. So, here we go, I'm trying to think how to do this, we're sort of in this together. So there's

nothing, there's absolutely nothing and there has to be a movie. So what do you do? I mean there has to be, from the sheer directed force of imagination something has to happen, and if there's any single theme from tonight that would be of value, I would want you to leave here being reminded, or confirmed, that this is imaginative work. We make stuff up and it's not magic mushroom ring, Stonehenge special, but we make stuff up, there is a level of romance and imagination to this that is not found in any screenwriting book or in any seminar or in any class or anything like that.

The problem with all those metrics when you confront them, and I think you find writers in general, really successful writers, writers who are really threatened by all of it, because it's forensic. It tells you what happened when it worked, but it doesn't tell you how to get there. And I think that the other thing about it that's so scary is it's unteachable, you cannot teach someone to be imaginative. You can't. You can kill it, you can sure kill it. And it can be trained and you can magnify it and do all kinds of things, but you can't teach it.

So that's the bad news. The good news is we're making an original screenplay so we're building a house for the lot. We're building a house for a two hour, we're building a structure for a two hour experience. We're not trying to take *The Little Drummer Girl* and squeeze it into 138 minutes. We're not going to take something that doesn't belong in a two hour experience. So that's out big edge, we know and maybe we've written a couple of these before and we have a good metre in our mind about how the clock ticks.

But we need an idea, and you don't have it, I know. You have no ideas for me. We need anything, we need a spark, we need some place to start, and for me – for us, me will be us now – we need something really small. Small is good, small is really, really good for me. Something small and very, very specific. The big ideas don't work. It's death if you say 'I want to do a movie about class warfare' or 'I want to do a movie about corporate malfeasance or I want to do a movie about paradise... You'll just drown.

But something really, really small, something small that has access, that feels like it maybe

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has access to something larger. It can be a character, it can be a moment in time, it can be a situation between two people, it can be a point in history, it could be anything but something really, really small, something very specific.

Cutting Edge, the first movie I ever made. I'm desperate to get a movie made, the producer comes to me 'I want to do a movie about, I want to do *Taming of the Shrew* in the world of pairs figure skating'. Man, okay, I'm there. I'll do that. I can do that. I want a movie so bad I'll do that, I'll work so hard not to get fired off that movie. I'm going to suck it up for the whole way through.

A homeless guy crashes into an emergency room in Manhattan, completely anomalous symptoms, everything's all over the map. A young doctor can't figure anything out, nothing makes any sense, the guy's got a hospital wristband on his wrist, and he dies on the table. Like a morning's worth of sketching on an idea.

It can even be stupid technical... Steven Soderbergh and I when we started on *Duplicity*, because he was the first person I started talking about [it with], 'you know Steven, I always wanted to do a movie where there's a couple and they have three scenes but each time the scene happens it means something completely different'. Well that's a little bit [of an] odd place to start but it's specific, and it sort of keys off.

A fixer, I want to do a movie about a fixer, a fixer in a law firm, well that's a fascinating... that's a pretty interesting place to start. And then what do I do, what do we do? I literally play with it. I sit at my desk, I sit in front of the keyboard, and I just run with it. I write around it. The analogue is painting, really, with charcoal and pencil, and it's sketching, really, really sketching. It goes up for an hour, it goes up for a month, or I keep coming back to it [and] when it stops getting interesting I stop playing with it.

But it really is play, and it's almost entirely dialogue. It's stuff that happens, it's like chit-chat, and 'what if they do this?' but I'm really swinging free and I'm really playing with things. My office is just littered, my life is littered with...

you see the auto graveyard where all the parts of all the cars stretch out to the horizon, of all the broken toys. Well, that's what this is, you're taking this little piece of idea and playing with it.

And dialogue, because the characters have to rise. I don't know how you plot a movie, I've talked to people who plot movies and work on stuff where they write 'all this happens'. It has to be, the characters have to rise, and it has to come from dialogue for me. The fixer at the law firm I kept coming back to, I thought it was a really cool thing, and one day I wrote a scene.

This was years before I'll do *Michael Clayton*, I'll write this scene, and I probably went away from it and came back to it, and went away from it and came back to it, it leads to a whole long explore. But I'm going to show you a clip, and the clip I'm going to show you, and sometimes these scenes don't make it to the movie, but this makes it almost in its entirety. It probably had different names and it was in a different setting, but I had this scene that I wrote, this hit and run scene, where this guy comes out to... well you know what, we'll just show it. This is from *Michael Clayton* and this is a scene that pre-dates the film by a very long stretch.

Clip from Michael Clayton

TG: So that scene's going to kill me. I have that in my room and I really dig it, I really dig this scene, and I know it's rich and I know this character is really rich but as I said before, my room is full of a lot of things that have crapped out along the way. So, you know, I start to write into this and I start to write around the possibilities of this, and this project was interrupted many times by different things and different circumstances.

Bourne interrupted this project, and *Proof of Life* interrupted this project, but I make the biggest mess... if I told you the versions of *Michael Clayton* that I had written, that were architected around this scene. Outline versions, not versions of drafts. Chased down a version that's all about the sun and the fantasy fiction, chased down a version where there's a love story with a mistress of a corporate client, that he's trying to extract the client from. And a murderer within the word processing

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department, all kinds of things. This mad explore will go on for a very long period of time.

And really what has to happen is the mess really has to stop, it really has to stop someplace, and we have to say to ourselves 'where is the movie? What is the movie? I have all this stuff, I'm building this whole world, I need to know what the movie is about'. And at a certain point you cannot pass go without doing this. You can get, if you're in the system, you can get seduced past this because sometimes you're coming up with a bunch of groovy stuff.

I was on *The Bourne Supremacy* and we got way far down the road with all this great stuff in the beginning, everybody got all excited, but there was really no movie there. I was the only one who knew it, they were building the movie, a sort of design build, we were building it at the same time and finally I had to say 'stop. We don't know what the movie's about' and then a really great thing came out of that which was this whole story of atonement. I'm not going to talk about that. You cannot settle on this idea, you cannot settle on the decision about where your movie is about, there's no slip from the teacher, there's nothing like that.

We were doing *Proof of Life*, Taylor Hackford and I bought a magazine article from Vanity Fair about the kidnap and ransom business in South America. It was based on a very great article [where] a guy had been kidnapped. What was interesting about the article was that the kidnapping had gone sideways because the company didn't have insurance or pay insurance. So we took this article and we convinced the people the article was about that they were better served by having us make a fictional version of it, and we were now on the road.

So we had all the research from the article, we had all the research that we were doing, we were running all over the place in South American jungles and all this great stuff. We do not have a movie. We're actually here in London... we were flying on – I don't know who was paying for that, who released that movie? We were all over the place, we were in Germany, we're here, we're there, in London.

And actually we were sitting here and we were talking to a guy who has a kidnap and ransom

boutique business and we're talking to him about his whole thing and the cases that he's handling, and he's this gorgeous guy, charismatic, Oxbridge, MI5, just this total stud. And he's telling us, 'not only can I give you the research you need, but you're going to need kidnap insurance when you make the movie, I can underwrite the policy'.

And we leave and we go to the elevator and go 'Taylor I got the movie'. He goes 'what?' I go 'if we get kidnapped making this movie I do not want that guy sitting with my wife for six months' and that's the movie. It drops, you go 'oh man, that's it, that's the movie'. On *Clayton* I don't know where the hell that happened, it happened like the last five days before I finished it, I don't really know.

Alright, so let's talk about *Bourne* for just a minute. I had a complete mandate to throw absolutely everything away, I said I didn't read a Robert Ludlum novel, no-one involved in the process has ever read a Robert Ludlum novel. I was given a script that was based on a Robert Ludlum novel, and in the course of basically telling them everything that I thought was wrong with it an idea came out and they go 'wow, we really like that'.

And literally, very quickly because there was a whole celebrity aspect to this, there was a lot of momentum to it, I was given a mandate to throw everything away and actually do what I understand is the opposite of what the book is. The book was about a guy, who's a good guy, who's used as a decoy to be an assassin for Carlos the Jackal.

I basically said to them... the idea of the movie came out of the very first meeting, was if I don't know who I am, and I don't know where I come from, I can only identify myself by the things I do, know how to do. What if I find out that all the things that I know how to do are bad. They were like 'oh my God, let's do that'. So literally, almost, very quickly after that, there was a very weird deal to take 12 days and try and re-block an entire story on that.

One thing I'll say is that, very, very sadly, all of us will work much harder for other people than we will ever work for ourselves. That's just a universal truth, I don't know why that is and I wish it wasn't so. It's a huge regret, I wish I

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worked as hard for myself as I work for other people. I think it's because most screenwriters want to be very good, we want to be the good guy, we're eager to please, I don't know what it's about.

But day one, literally day one, on *Bourne*, in my office waiting for Doug Liman to show up for the next day's craziness, I'm there sketching away, and a scene came up. This is unlike the scene from *Michael Clayton*, because this scene is absolutely germane to what I need. I don't know where it goes in the movie, I don't know... maybe I know who he's talking to, I'm not really sure. But this scene is where what the movie's about and this sort of lighthouse kind of scene co-exist together.

The movie that we ended up building, and the idea that there's that morning, and the idea that's underlying this scene is if I think I'm good I'm sort of re-born – *Bourne*, right there you have it, built into the name. I'm fresh, and dewy eyed, and I think I'm good, and everything I find out about myself is bad, and that's not who I feel I am.

God, that goes from everything from Joseph Campbell straight through to the New Testament and beyond. It's really the epic, crazy thing, and this stupid little scene – it's not dazzlingly shot, it's just a really simple scene, it's beautifully, simply acted. But this scene contains the genetic DNA that will ride all three Matt Damon Jason Bourne films. It maybe won't seem like much, but this I had first, and again it's one of these scenes you cling to, so why don't we show the *Bourne* clip.

Clip from The Bourne Identity

TG: Alright so we have an idea, we know what the movie's about and we've made sort of a mess, but we're going to make a much, much bigger mess now. And we're going to make a world, we have to make a whole world around all this, and that's what this is. And that's the sort of second unteachable part of this process. If you can't teach people to be imaginative, you certainly also can't teach them to know things that they don't know.

You hear all the time 'oh, write what you know'. I don't know if that means 'write what you've lived', which would put a lot of people in the

ghetto of their own existence, I think it's pretty limiting. You can only write what you know about, and what you know about will limit, or open the possibilities to everything. Science, history, how the world works, tools, jobs, occupations, are you interested in other people, are you a curious person?

Curiosity is just, for my line of work, to be me to try to move around, I like to work on lots of different things but I think it's great to be able to work on a lot of different things. Staying interested and being interested in all different kinds of things, my family will tell you that my general knowledge of the world is incredibly wide and very, very thin. Dinner companion thin. But I can go anywhere and it serves me, [and] it will serve you really, really well.

Because when it comes time to go deep on something you're ready, and you're interested. There's a huge amount of journalism that's been part of my life, and has been a really exciting part of my life. I've not been a writer who's stayed home, I've been a writer who's hit the road a lot and gotten to see a lot of the world and do a lot of interesting things, because I was interested in things.

But you're limited by what you know, so I have some writer friends who are brilliant writers and very, very successful, who come to me and they go 'how are you supposed to write a friggin' action scene, I'm supposed to write an action scene in this movie and I don't know what the fuck I'm doing'. It doesn't matter for them, they have, I'll get to what they have in a minute. If you know more you can go more places.

There is one thing that you have to know, that is a deal breaker on all of it. You have to know human behaviour, you cannot pass go, you cannot move forward, you are dead stopped right here, right now, if you do not know human behaviour and the quality of your writing is absolutely capped at your understanding of human behaviour. You will never write above what you know about people. The writers that I'm talking about that have made a great living, without writing action, are experts in human behaviour.

You have to be really interested in the incredible variety of the way people think, you

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have to really be curious about it. And the way that they hide, that is what dramatists do. There's no wriggle room on that. The notes that I'm not looking at, I have double starred 'the quality of your writing will be a direct reflection of your understanding of the contradictions and complexities of human behaviour'. I think I said that, but I want to say it again.

It doesn't matter if you're writing for Orcs, right, or if you're writing for Anne Boleyn. It doesn't make any difference. That's it. And it's more than understanding, you have to have empathy. You have to feel for these people, because you're going to have to live out – if you're doing it right – you have to live out the movie through every one of them. There's some really super minor characters you probably won't get inside in their head, but if somebody's there for more than a couple of scenes, what do they really want? What does that person want? What's that guy, what's it about? What makes it unusual?

Alright, so we've done all that. We have all this, we know what the movie's about and we're great at human behaviour, and we know all kinds of shit, and we're geniuses and it's all great. So now we have to write an outline. I've heard writers over the years say 'oh, I don't like to do outlines, coz it's too constricting'. I think they're completely wrong, if you go onto screenplay form and try to figure out your movie it's like putting on a tuxedo to go to a diner or something.

I don't know what you're doing, I don't want to be in screenplay form until the bitter end, and I'll get to that at the very end of this thing. I do not want to want to put on my tuxedo until the very end. I want to continue to make a mess, I want to write an outline now. I want to write the movie. The faster we can do it the better. I've done it in as little as four days, on *Clayton* it took like, I think I'm still not done on *Michael Clayton*. And you want to write it to the end, you want to write it to the end. And when you don't, you spend the year that I've just spent and what I'm coming off just now, where I've ignored my own rules.

Every time I've ignored my own thing, I have paid the price. So I'm finishing a script now that I didn't write the end on the outline and I wasted a lot of time and really messed around.

In the end you get panicked and finally I had to go back, I was halfway through a script, three quarters of the way through a script, go back, put that aside, re-block out a proper outline for the end. And you're swinging free. I mean, I want every cut, I want to go cut, cut, cut, cut, I want to go from scene to scene, and it's all dialogue.

These documents are 30, 50, 60, they can be 80 pages long, but it is the whole movie. I've done pretty versions where I've been supposed to present them, and there's value in that. As I said before, you work different for other people, but they're really ugly when they're for myself. They're in multiple fonts and they're from 40 different files where it's taken me like a week to collate back the stuff, thinking, 'Oh my God where's that scene I did with so and so and so and so...' I did that in Tahoma, and that's bold, this is italics, I don't care put them in there, whatever. But there's a document and it's like every scene, that's what we want. We want this loose, ugly, but really proper version of the movie altogether.

And you're making the film, you're making this world. And it's got to be real to you, as much as I said before that you have to know stuff, it has to be real. Every scene has to be real. Whenever I get stuck, and it happens all the time when I get stuck, I'm stuck because I'm not seeing it. I'm stuck because it's not real to me, I'm not really seeing it.

It just comes from sheer 'why am I three days on this next scene?' and 'why am I dreading going to work?' and 'why am I doing nothing but staying in line?' and 'why am I booking meetings and not sitting them?'; 'why am I avoiding what's coming up?'; 'why am I not writing this next scene? I kind of know what it's about, why am I not doing it?' Because I don't want to summon the energy to make it real, it's either too big a piece of meat and it's really going to take a lot of energy – I'm not willing to make it real, it has to be real. You need to be reporting on something, you need to become a journalist for the movie that's in your head.

And if you're not really on the scene and you're not really in it, you can't report on it. And every time I get hung up that's inevitably the case. And so we're plotting. Plotting a movie, it depends, if you're plotting *Dolores*

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Claiborne it's a different exercise, somehow there's a lower temperature to that. It's still the same process but it's an easier temperature for that. A human drama somehow plays out easier to plot.

If you're plotting a thriller it is an agony, it's really, really shitty, tiresome work sometimes. It goes 50 times faster if you do it with somebody else. If you're sitting in a room spitballing with somebody, and you're firing back and forth and you're doing it with somebody, it goes so much faster. You skip all the steps, your excitement builds on each other and you go back and forth and you save all this free time.

I've done that, I've done it with a lot of different people. I did that with Bill Goldman for years, sitting in Bill's living room spitballing. When I say spitballing I mean, you know, 'you be him and I'll be her, okay, now we're there, what do you say? Now we're there, and now we're doing it'. It's being nine year olds, it is making stuff up, it is role playing, it is 'what would I do?' I'm this character, 'hat do I do next?' If you're doing it by yourself, which I've done most of my life, I can't do it like walking around. You can have big ideas in the shower, but not typically about plotting.

I have to sit down, literally and it sounds so stupid, I was thinking about it today as I was going to describe it, I have to sit down at the keyboard and talk to myself. I have, I don't know, thousands of pages of files of me talking to myself in some sort of weird Socratic conversation about 'okay, if he does this, what does that mean? And what will ABC do? He can do this or that or this'. And then 'oh my God I'll write a scene and dialogue will push me forward for the plotting'. But it's not easy pickings, that, if it's done really well.

It's not the great fun, and there's times on *Bourne* movies, just getting everybody in the same friggin' place. There's a whole underlying other movie going on under every *Bourne* movie. If you could see it, it would be like tearing away the skin of a building where it's like all the work that went into just getting these people to have scenes together. You can't believe how hard it is to do something like that.

For people to know stuff in a thriller, 'so he know that and she knows this, but if they don't know

that, how does he find out?' There's no easy way to do it. You just beat it, you beat it through. So we have that outline, we're done with that, we have our 50, 60 page outline. And we know what the movie's about. God, We're really good, we're moving really quickly too. As I said before, this document can be ugly or pretty.

If you saw the document that I'm working on, for the script I'm on now, you'd be shocked at what a mess it is. But now it's time to write the script, we have this thing. Now it's time, for me, for all this freedom, everything else, and I know the ending, which is critical, because, I'll go back to that one last time, if you know the ending, and I'm speaking to myself, if you know the ending, you not only have the sense of completion and you have the sense of roundness and you have the sense of satisfaction and you know that it really works, you're also no wasting time.

Because everything writes into the ending. And all the pages that you wasted time on in the first 30 or 40 pages – and I don't know how many writers are here tonight but you know exactly what I'm talking about. Those 30 or 40 pages, the first 40 pages of the movie that you spent months on, well they are vulnerable by the time you get to the end, because they are just dead meat. Those 40 pages, they're going to be 15 pages, they're cooked, they seemed so important at one time as you were getting lost. They're not that important anymore, and you need to know that they're not important.

So we're at the end, and now it really is time, now I'll go to screenplay, now whatever Final Draft or Movie Magic or whatever it is, and now it really is fun. For me, it's when it's fun. It's when it's precise. The other great thing about having this document is when you go to work every day you can build up a momentum, you know what you're supposed to do today, and all you're doing it making it better than you had in the outline before. You're cutting things out all the time.

I like things to be very pretty, I'm obsessed with my scripts being exquisitely pretty, and I'm a crazy freak for how they look and how they lay out and how they're paginated. I use that as a way of editing and cutting. I use it as a way of keeping myself interested, but there are times

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when everything seems perfect and a speech breaks and I don't like the way it breaks into another page.

I know there's a line, I know there's three lines, something's got to go in that script. I'm not kidding you, I will edit it down. And if you do that 4 or 5, or 15 times, it's shocking what comes out. Everyone says 'your scripts are so... man I feel like I'm falling through your movie, it just goes so quick'. That's because you just stripped out every piece of bullshit that was in there, because there's always something on every page'.

That Clayton scene we were just watching, in the kitchen? I'm watching it right now and I'm going 'holy shit, he doesn't have to say that'. There's a line in there that's totally unnecessary. He says 'let me do the math on that' – we don't need that. That's like, 'really?' That's like, wow, I wish I'd cut that. There's always something that comes out. The more movies that you make the less dialogue that you'll write, the tighter it'll get. It's such a ride of self cruelty and egomania to do these, to do all this, to do these scripts.

This is the one phase where I really, really enjoy myself. I really enjoy writing the prose, I really enjoy making descriptions that are as concise as they can possibly be. There is nothing, and again, I think the writers in the room will confirm this, there is really nothing that feels any better than cutting out something that you don't need, that you thought you needed. Even if you spent 20 years writing it. It's like 'wow, I don't need that'. It feels so good and energised, and you really build up a head of steam in this final phase.

So I have this final pretty phase, where it's really making this prettified version, and what will inevitably happen in this prettified version, which is going to happen to me in two weeks, after I stop working on what I'm going to say tonight, I'm producing my brother's movie and get back to what I'm supposed to be doing.

I'm going to find on page 80, as I always find, or page 85, that I'm somewhere between 15 and 27 pages too long. You know. There will be that moment, it's that inevitable moment that almost never doesn't happen. And when the

fear outstrips your confusion at that moment I will make those cuts.

And I don't know how long I ran, did I hit my half an hour? Am I done?

APPLAUSE

Mark Salisbury: Well thank you very much. Now I have to cut all my questions because you answered everything.

TG: I didn't read my speech, I'm so happy. I didn't want to read it.

MS: It was fabulous, I'm sure you will agree. We have less time than I imagined. You'll get your chance to ask some questions. You mentioned earlier your Dad is a Pulitzer prize winning playwright, novelist, screenwriter, worked in TV and he didn't want any of his children to work in the business.

You're a screenwriter, your brother's a screenwriter, your other brother is an editor – obviously that didn't work. Is storytelling genetic, did you have conversations around the dinner table when you were young about storytelling?

TG: I guess so, it wasn't a conscious thing. He moved us to a random place when we were growing up so we wouldn't grow up in that, we grew up as far away as you could possibly grow up, so we had no connection with it whatsoever. I suppose if you grow up in a pineapple factory, you're going to know something about pineapples.

So we knew some, I guess. What made sense is living by your wits, if you live with someone who lives by their wits, I don't know anything but that. That's how we lived, and the tempo of a writer's life and the disappointments of a writer's life and the exultations of a writer's life, being really high on the hog, and being broke and every other thing. So, the life of it wasn't... I don't know about the storytelling, I don't know if it's genetics or not.

MS: What was the point where you decided to be a writer, because you went to university, you dropped out, you were a musician, you tended bar.

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TG: I was a musician. I was encouraged to run away from home at 16. I went to school, college for about 15 minutes, I dropped out, I was a musician, and I really wanted to be a real player. I realised the limitations I was going to [have] on that. I got into writing songs, I got more into writing lyrics, and by the time I was 23 or 24 I'd been doing that, I'd been in the vans for 10 years. I was really tired, I was very old at 23 and 24.

I thought I might be a serious fiction writer, and it was the days of Raymond Carver, so there was a lot of Raymond Carver emulation and bad short story writing. Then I thought 'I'll write a screenplay and I'll get rich, and then I'll finish this novel I was working on'. Then I spent six years tending bar while I figured out how to write screenplays.

MS: And how did you do that? You mentioned that William Goldman, you'd known him since you were 10, and you read some of your early scripts and you don't have slug lines in your scripts, it's very similar to how Goldman writes. So did you get some of his work, did he critique your work?

TG: My brother Danny and I were doing the same thing, and we were a writing team for a while, we wrote some scripts together. We were freaks for formatting though, and we just read every script we could get, we were very good, as bad a student as I ever was, we were really good students at this. We were just obsessed with formatting, and everything about screenplays, we were nuts about it.

I could go hours on this, this is inside baseball we say, this is so inside. We never really did Bill's thing but we took some of the things we liked from Bill's thing. There was a writer writing at the time named Eric Red, and Eric Red had this really wacky style. And John Hughes had a really cool thing that he was doing. We were just reading scripts all the time, and we just took what we wanted from the best, and what we thought was for ours. And Danny writes... he and I go back and forth on the formatting, I don't know, man, we just really want to do it.

MS: So you didn't have one particular... it wasn't like *Chinatown* was the kind of Holy Grail.

TG: You couldn't get stuff online, this is way before online. I had a whole stack of scripts, what were some of the scripts, I had Kurt Luedtke's *Out of Africa*, his draft for *Out of Africa*, coz they had the most beautiful stage directions, the most beautiful character descriptions, they were so evocative and so powerful.

Jay Presson Allen, her stage directions were so great. And Bill's way of telling stories, and my father's scripts, were so... The writers who came out of the post-war, who worked in the studio system, worked in TV, man, their scripts are like chiselled in stone, they're so sparse, they're so lean and mean and great and efficient. I don't know, just like all the different...

MS: Because your friend Brian Koppelman, who is in *Michael Clayton*, he's been publishing on his Twitter feed these six second screenwriting lessons.

TG: Oh really?

MS: And one of the things he says is the script that he holds up that every aspiring writer should write is *Michael Clayton*.

TG: Oh my God, go Brian! Wow.

MS: You weren't aware of that?

TG: I was not aware of that.

MS: He says 'for dialogue, character and plot *Michael Clayton* is the script....'

TG: I got to get on that. He only takes six seconds to say that?

MS: Yeah! He's on to like number 28 today.

TG: I got to get on this.

MS: Has being a director changed the way you write, because on the *Clayton* commentary you talk about how you will never write just before dawn again, because...

TG: I think the more films that you get made the less dialogue that you write and the more camera you write. I think that's true. I think you learn what falls off the truck, even more, in terms of scenes. I mean, Danny and I wrote *The*

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Bourne Legacy together. We wrote the script together. I did the story and then he came on to do, because we were prepping the movie at the same time.

Danny wrote a couple of scenes that were just exquisite, fantastic. I said 'man, this is fantastic but it's not going to make the movie'. He said 'get the fuck out of here, what are you talking about, man? This is what the movie's about'. I said 'we can shoot it, whatever, it's just not going to make the cut, it's not going to be in movie'. And it's not because I'm being a dick and I'm not going to put it in the movie, it's just not going to make the movie, we won't make the thing. It's not because they're not great scenes, it's because...

And he's directing a movie now; he starts shooting in two weeks. I promise you that two of the things that he fought most for, after he directs this movie, he'll come back and apologise for. So if you're watching this Danny...

MS: You said once that it was on *Dolores Claiborne* where Taylor [Hackford] got you in to watch dailies, and that was a real critical moment.

TG: Oh my God, we lived in... that was the greatest, I thought every movie was going to be like that, that was the great tribal Robert Altman... make a movie, the whole company moves to this great, exquisite, paradise of a place. We had dailies every night, film dailies. The whole company, and catered food, and this great, happy company. Dailies every night.

Taylor is a saturation bombing director. Coverage, coverage, coverage, coverage, everything's covered, multiple times. You sit in the room and you watch these small scenes of dailies and you just die, 'why did I write that? I can't believe she's going to say that again, oh my God'. And you're just suffering through, you know, seven takes in four sizes of the same thing. You just want to kill yourself, and you're like 'I'm never doing that again'. It was really incredibly, painfully educational.

MS: You talked about the process of finding an idea, it's digging a hole and finding the idea. And you said that you believe that there are

three days of inspiration that pay for the entire year, is that true?

TG: Yeah, I think that's really true. There's just nothing happens and everything just sucks and nothing's right and all of a sudden there's a day where like, 'oh my God, that's it, that's the whole movie', where the movie drops, where something epic really happens. And you're just like 'holy shit, that's the whole thing'. And that is the day that you'll build a temple around what you did, inspirationally, in that hour. You will now spend your next six months building the building around that idea, around that moment. But you have to be there, right?

You've got to be at your desk, if you're not at your desk and you miss the day... I was once with a producer, this idea came up... we had a dinner, a bunch of writers at a dinner table, and a producer came over who shall remain nameless, who we had all worked for, who none of us really liked that much. He came over and said, 'aah, what's going on guys?' and this whole thing.

'Tony says there's three days of pay for the whole year' or whatever. He said 'I only want to buy those three days, yeah, I'm tired of paying him, I only want the three'.

MS: You moved into directing with *Michael Clayton*, how long had you had you hankered that urge? And was it because some of the screenplays that you'd written had been amended, changed?

TG: Sure, absolutely. I kind of blew it; I wish I'd done it years earlier. I had another script, probably the best thing I ever wrote, it was a movie called *Wild Kingdom*, really changed my whole writing life, and changed everything. It was really like the big creative moment for me in my life, of breakthrough.

And I had the opportunity to direct it, if I hadn't been such a Hamlet about it, it would have changed my life in many, many, many, many, many ways. Some of them probably negatively, and it wouldn't have been good for my family, or anything else. I kind of wimped out on that, and I should have done that, and I wish I'd done it sooner. Then when I went to *Clayton* I knew what I was doing.

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MS: And could you go back and do that script. It's a great script I have to say, I read it.

TG: *Wild Kingdom*? How did you read *Wild Kingdom*?

MS: It was on the internet.

TG: It's not on the internet.

MS: I found it.

TG: That's a surprise. I think it's dated, it was a movie that was of the moment so much. It's power was so culturally, I've thought about how to update it, I've certainly thought about how to cannibalise the lead character and his backstory, several times. But I just think that once the moment moves on it would sort of be wrong. Even doing it as a period movie, I don't know. It was when the idea of paparazzi was a very, very fresh idea. It's not a fresh idea any more.

MS: Some of the other writers in this series have talked about the personal connection to characters and obviously *Clayton*, you shot some of it in your old neighbourhood. Your wife and son have little roles in it. How much do you relate to Michael? He's a fixer, and if we're really crass you fix scripts occasionally. Maybe I'm reaching in there, but do you relate to that character at all?

TG: You know what happens is, you do these things and I never had the experience before because I never really went out and sold a movie before. We went out and sold *Clayton*... You go out and sell your movie as a director, and I've written all three movies that I've directed. But you sort of find out what your movie's about when you go out and sell it, in a weird way.

I was really unaware, blissfully unaware, of whatever personal connections I had to that character until we went out and sold it. And that was like even a year after we finished it. Yeah, I think there is some aspect of serving others and deferring what you're supposed to be about. And having driven past the exit and missing it. It's not a movie about... it's not a heroic movie, it's about a guy who's driven past redemption, I mean in many ways he's

blown it. So yeah, there's more of a personal connection than I thought.

MS: You said once that there is no day of directing that is as exciting as writing. Do you still [believe that]?

TG: One qualifier, there's no day of directing that's as exciting as a great day of writing. A great day of writing trumps everything. One of those three days, or even just a really great day where you just break something...

[break in recording, so there's a little bit missing]

An opening so good, and you know what you're going to go and do tomorrow, looking forward instead of being terrified of going to work, you can't wait to get there tomorrow morning. You know?

MS: And what is a great day of writing? How long do you spend at your desk. You haven't got one of those treadmill desks that Susannah Grant has?

TG: A treadmill desk? I feel like I have. You know what, if you want to be there, it doesn't matter, I'll stay there. At the end, like when you're really going, it doesn't matter, I'll stay there, I'm not coming home for dinner, I'm just staying and going and going and going. If you want to be there. That's my whole goal now, as I'm older and wiser and sadder, I just want to create a situation where I want to be there.

That seems to be the only two speeds I have anymore, which is either being terrified to go sit there or wanting to be there. I want to make as many days where I want to be there.

MS: Okay, we're going throw it open to you.

Question: You talked about wanting to lose lines if they're not necessary, I feel a bit nerdy, a bit embarrassed but I actually timed the scene at the end of *Michael Clayton* where he's in the cab. I couldn't believe it came to one minute 50 seconds where he's just staring past the camera, and I wonder whether when you're writing you write for looks and performance, or does that just happen when you're shooting.

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TG: That scene I didn't have in the script, so it's a yes and no answer. That scene I didn't have, we were looking for an ending all the way through, it was making everybody very nervous that scene because everything else was so tucked away and everybody got so used to being very prepared and everything. And we didn't have that

When we finally came up with the idea, we shot many versions of it, there's actually a four minute version of it, we kept trying because it kept messing up in different versions. So the answer to that is that wasn't scripted originally, but I do write that way. And as I said before, if I can't get visually excited about the scene that I am writing it's very difficult to write, if I'm beyond just seeing it. People say 'you should be directing every script that you write. You are the director, it may change and things may move in transit, but you are the director of that movie. Every single script I ever wrote I directed beforehand.'

And now I'm more needy of that than I ever was before. If there's not a visual... because I kind of know that what I'm working on I'm going to be directing, so if there isn't an exciting visual aspect to it, or if I can't see a way to make it visually exciting, or something that makes it filmic, that makes it cinema, I lose interest in it and that hooks me back in.

Question: You mentioned early on the importance of the relationships around the writing process, you've got different people you're writing with or for. I wonder if you go a bit deeper into what the range of different relationships there may be, or what shapes these relationships, in the *Bourne* trilogy you worked with two different directors, how that changed the process?

TG: That would be another three hours. Look man, people are people. You know your family, you know the people that you work with, you know. I was raised as a collaborator, I played music for 12 years seriously before I ever started writing. Being in bands, being in vans with people, driving around, being in recording studios, running a painting company with somebody, tending bar for five or six years, dealing with managers and customers, all those relationships are the same relationships.

Some people are fantastic, some people suck in the moment but you hang in because they're great. Some people are worth it, every minute. I don't know, every relationship is different. I never stay longer if I feel I have nothing else to give, or if I don't like it enough I quit. You try to have as much fun as you possibly can, and I think I'm a very, very experienced collaborator, I think that's been the dominant part of your life, if you're going to make a life in the movie business, and yet how ironic that most of my life has spent alone in a room.

MS: Do you prefer writing alone or writing in a team?

TG: Even when Danny and I were working together we were never in the same room. The closest I ever came, I did a lot of work with Goldman, and Danny and I worked with Goldman. A lot of stuff would happen in the room with him. One thing I really wish, I wish I had learned how to take shorthand, I wish I took better notes. My note taking has always been, it's a constant, I wish I'd taken better notes when things were really flying and things were going quickly, it would have been very helpful. But working in the room with people? You know what, I'm sure soon enough I will. Everything is leading towards writers' rooms these days, and everybody I know who's moving to television, which is probably the dominant theme of this year's series and will be the inevitable theme of next year's, all of us, everyone's leaving in a way and going in that direction.

And it's all built on rooms. A few friends that I have that are in my position that have gone in and created shows, are just, they're just so happy, my God. You're not alone, everybody's in there, and some of the people suck but God it's great, it's just so exciting. Man, it's easier with other people.

MS: And you announced this week you're doing a TV show.

TG: We did, we announced a television show that Danny and I created, that we'll do for Gaumont.

MS: So was that an idea you had as a film before?

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TG: Danny tried to that as a feature idea for five years, and could never squeeze it down into a thing. Then he wanted to do it as a television thing, it's a public domain thing, it's a historical character. He heard that somebody else was doing it, so he put it aside and then that fell apart and then he came to me. But he's really the spark on that. I took it and said 'let me see if I can live in this' because it's a very grim topic. It's about Anatole Deibler, who was the last executioner in France. He ran the guillotine until 1937. It's a show about his life.

Question: You've kind of answered it already, thank you for the talk, it was interesting that you kind of stripped away any high falutin' talk and went grass roots on it. But I wanted to ask, you talked about the outline of a thriller, you were able to race through it, rather than on your own, I just wondered who, would you go to a writer, would you go to a producer, a director in terms of being able to bounce ideas in that early stage of being able to race through it for an outline, for a thriller specifically.

TG: If I'm really stuck I'll call my brother, if I'm really stuck on something I'll call a friend. If I really needed. I try not to be too needy about it, because it's kind of whingy to be a little bit too needy, and you get off the phone and 'why did I call, I should have figured this out on my own'. I'm not exactly sure of the question, I'm not exactly sure where to go with it.

Questioner: You've pretty much answered it.

TG: Okay.

Question: Is the character of Arthur Edens [the Tom Wilkinson character in *Michael Clayton*] based on somebody, because I was surprised when you said the film came from the Clayton character and from that scene, and you said it's not a film about heroism, because it seems like what I've loved about that film so much was the heroism of Arthur Edens, that's a film about him. He gets done for, but not without getting something good out there before he goes which Michael Clayton then helps to get out there. So for me he's like that character in *Network* who kind of goes against the grain, and stands up and starts talking the truth, and also he gets mowed down. So is he based on someone in fiction or reality for you, that has

such a transformative experience and then decides to go outside the box?

TG: The heroism, maybe not. I had two specific dealings with people that were manic depressives, that I knew, had direct knowledge of, who were very similar. I was fascinated by the mania of it. I think as much of a hero as he is, there's a little bit something suspect in his heroism, in the same way that Michael Clayton's heroism is suspect in that his heroism really doesn't come around until he's off his medication. What's he been doing all the rest of this time?

He calls himself to that same standard. So it was more the bi-polar of it that was interesting to me. And then, as a writer, you know writing for him was like writing for Al Pacino in *The Devil's Advocate*, it was just the most fun. You could just really go for it. Writing the speeches for Al Pacino in *The Devil's Advocate*, everyone thinks it's so hard, 'oh these speeches are so hard', that shit's the easiest thing to write. Seriously, that stuff is just, I could write that every day. What's really hard is two people in a room, where something has to...

The motel room scene in *The Bourne Legacy*, between Rachel Weisz and Jeremy Renner is, on a degree of difficulty, Olympian, compared to writing any speech in *The Devil's Advocate*.

Question: You said you sold your first script when you were 30. Had you set yourself a time limit where you said 'I'll write 10 scripts, give it five years' say. Or were you always determined that you were going to make it?

TG: Man, I don't know, you'd have to ask my wife that. My son was about to be born, I didn't have another plan. I didn't have a backup plan at that point. I'd already traded up. I'll tell you the bravest thing I ever did, the second bravest thing I ever did – I won't tell you the bravest thing I ever did – the second bravest thing I ever did I was kind of was quitting music. I'd come to New York, I had a production deal and had a band in New York. I was sort of writing at the same time, and I was getting much more interested in that.

The bravest thing I did was, at 25, go 'I am not going to do this anymore. I can see how good I'm going to be, I can probably make a living

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at this the rest of my life, but there's a limit on it, I'm not going to be great, I'm not going to be as good as I want to be. It's capped; I'm not going to do it anymore'. And I kind of quit cold turkey, 'I'm not going to do any sessions, I'm not going to do any singing' and that was a much bigger... when I cast my lot with being a writer I was doomed.

I was already in; I'd already thrown off another thing. I think I thought in some way I would get over somehow, some way of writing. I was turning into a good writer, my prose was getting [better] I was learning how to be a writer. I could write memos, I could write publicity if I had to, I could go work in advertising, somehow I was going to... but I didn't have a backup plan at that point.

MS: And that first script was for Chuck Norris and Cannon, wasn't it?

TG: For Chuck Norris, *Cupid O'Malley – As Dead As they Get*. Never made. Peter Cohn, my dear friend Peter Cohn was working at New Line when New Line was at the Port Authority and had 12 people, and this girl knew him, she had gone to college [with him] and she said 'Peter's in the movie business' and I went to him and he goes 'I never wrote a script, you've written all these scripts, but I have this idea' and we just started drinking and writing.

MS: Is it any good?

TG: It's too good, it was too good for Cannon. It's frickin' insane, it's Chuck Norris, and Vietnam vets and southern California, and the chip industry, and he's got a crossbow, but there's a mystery in it. You know what, to tell you the truth, it was too complicated and too good. Oh my God, I hope Peter sees this.

Question: I don't know whether intentionally or not, but the underlying theme of the series of lectures seems to be in some way that the author is the originator of a film. Do you feel that, and has that changed now that you're a director? Do you resent the 'A Film By' credit that directors often get?

TG: I would never take that credit, I will never take that credit. I think if you're a writer-director you have every right to take that credit. Paul Thomas Anderson can take that credit, Woody

Allen can take that credit. Michael Haneke can take that credit, take it, you want it, you earned it, that's for real. But there's a tremendous amount of abuse on it, and look, every situation is different. There are movies that are made in spite of the director, there are movies made that I have been on where there was no director.

I will not name names. A call sheet and an AD and actors, and something to do that day, and a DP and that's what happens. There are movies where the director, even though there's a great script is absolutely – even though there's a great script – where the director is absolutely Zeus and makes it happen and takes it some place where it didn't ever belong.

I don't know how to parse it out, I think trying to have any organising, theological principle about credit, if you want to know what happened on a movie, you cannot read [it] on IMDB, you have to call up your friend, who you trust, who worked on the movie, who knew what happened and say 'tell me what happened on that movie. Did she really do that? Did he really do that?' And people do that all the time. You cannot read the credits and find out what happened.

MS: What about movies where... *The Bourne Identity* you completely rewrote the script yet you share credit. But *The Bourne Supremacy*, which somebody else came in and rewrote afterwards, you get sole credit. How do you feel about that situation?

TG: I can't get into all the arcane... again it would be a really fascinating 20 minute story about sharing credit on that movie. I actually arbitrated against myself on that script, because the movie that existed after a year was so terrible that no-one wanted to be involved in it, and we spent a year fixing the movie, we spent an entire year fixing it and by the time it had gotten good and we'd fixed it we'd already arbitrated for the credit a year earlier.

On *Supremacy* though, yeah, I get sole credit, but it's my world. Everything after the first 15 minutes of *The Bourne Identity*, there's nothing, there's not one single piece of Robert Ludlum that's ever existed in anything else that's ever

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existed in anything else that's ever been on that. The Robert Ludlum estate has been the great beneficiary of my... to me that's a written by, an original screenplay. Those are my characters, none of those characters existed, you're two clicks away, anybody who doubts me you're two clicks away on Google from the synopsis. But as I say, credit is a very... you could do a month on credit.

Question: You touched on it earlier, you said as you got older you became less interested in writing dialogue and more in action, but looking at cinema at the moment it seems to be polarising against television in which television is mainly dialogue driven and cinema is becoming more and more visual. For example, *All Is Lost* Robert Redford's new film is 106 minutes of no dialogue. So how, as a writer, how do you feel that... because a lot of writers learn to write dialogue but as you said as you've become older it becomes more of a challenge to write the visuals?

TG: It's the lingering regret that I feel right now, look I would like to stay in the big movie business if I could. The big, smart movie is the movie I root for, since everything is big now. And we don't have time to get into that either, why movies are getting big, they're getting big because of international audiences and because DVDs are gone and because of a whole bunch of different things.

Fewer, bigger, louder, generally more stupid films, whereas television is getting smarter and smarter and smarter, and you only need three million people to be a rock star. So, I think the attraction of television is that's where ambiguity is living, and interesting characters and shades of morality, and all the interesting things that you want to write about.

It does sort of pain me, I'll be upset to go through a whole life of really wanting to become a director and really falling in love with the camera and really falling in love with the cinematic aspect of a big screen, if there's not much opportunity to meld those two. It's just hard, hard, hard to do.

Questioner: What I was alluding to was something like *All Is Lost*, which is an incredibly intelligent film....

TG: Right, which I haven't seen.

Questioner: ... with no dialogue. Or you take *Drive*, for example, which had huge swathes of just visuals. Cinema is polarising, as you said, into the action based mindless blockbuster and also going off into this other direction, so, as a writer honing your skill and actually having to write purely visual rather than just dialogue...

TG: You want to be able to do everything, you want to be able to do everything, and you've got to play to the thing that you're doing.

Questioner: But it's easier with dialogue to drive something forward, whereas just purely visuals is a skill in itself.

TG: Well I want all of those, can't I have them all? Why are you taking that away? I don't know, I'll face that tomorrow.

Question: Do you think it's helpful to use formulas like the hero's journey by Joseph Campbell to help you move your plot along or to build a first script.

TG: Again, like I said before, I think it's more forensic. I think it has to be instinctive, I think you go back and look and go 'oh, what did I do? That's what I did, that's how this worked'. You know that. Everybody here has been going to movies, you've been sucking up narrative since you were born. You grow up in a culture [where] you don't have to fill fields, you don't have to bang stones together to clean your clothes, you have all this leisure time and you've filled it with narrative, and food.

What is the cumulative number of stories that this audience has watched and looked at? You know more about storytelling than you know about almost anything. Probably your families. It's really astonishing, you know instinctively what a movie looks like. It's always astonishing, people give you a script 'I wrote my script' and it's like 'did you ever see a fucking movie?' You know what it looks like, you know what it feels like, you don't need Joseph Campbell to tell you what a hero's journey is, you know what it is. It's already way down deep inside you, he's writing about something he says is deep inside you before you even knew about it.

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So, you have all that, you don't need that help. It's great confirmation when you're lost and you're trying to procrastinate and the book's in your office and it's like 'oh well let's open Joseph Campbell'. I've done that, so I don't want to sound too cool for the room, I have a copy of it and I've looked through it, but it doesn't help you.

Question: Hi, Tony we promise not to tell anyone, but hypothetically if you were going to write another Jason Bourne film and hypothetically you were going maybe to direct that film, then hypothetically where might Jason Bourne go next?

TG: Next. Hypothetically.

MS: But when you did *The Bourne Legacy* you gave the studio a 30 page document that said this is the mythology of the character and this is where it can go, did you have other adventures of Aaron Cross planned?

TG: No, but what I wanted to do, because there were so many crazy ideas floating around, things that they were thinking about doing, the start of my whole conversation was you do not want to replace... this is not Bond. You can't replace Matt Damon or do a prequel or do anything, you can't possibly do that, this whole thing has been about integrity.

What you want to do, if he doesn't want to come back and they don't want to do it and you're stuck, is you want to do something that expands on what's been there before and leaves a candle in the window so that he's very much alive, and that everything that's happened before is real and true, so that all possibilities are open, so we really left him at the end, so the possibility can come back and go with Jeremy. Obviously the mad fantasy would be that the two of them would be together at some point. There's no reason [why not].

But really not to do a single thing that would violate what had happened before. To play absolutely completely true to the integrity of what had been there before, and make it so that Matt could come back, and you could have a Jason Bourne movie when he comes back at 75. What an interesting movie that is.

MS: But you said you connected more with Aaron Cross than you ever did with Jason Bourne, I wondered what you meant by that?

TG: No, actually I would say the opposite of that. The issue for Aaron Cross was more visceral for me than the issue for Jason Bourne. Jason Bourne's issue [is] 'I think I'm good but I'm really bad'. I've always known that I was good. But the issue, which was one of the three days that paid for the year, the issue that came up one morning when we tried to come up with a sequel for Aaron Cross, was 'what if I was facing the fact that someone was going to start to turn a dimmer down on my brain?'

'What if someone said 'if you don't stay in the programme you're going to shed 50 points off your IQ, that you're going to lose your enlightenment?' That I would lose enlightenment. Watching people go through Alzheimer's, watching people become diminished, that was really... that is something I would fight, that's something I would go on a hero's journey for. That is a fire I would go and fight for, that is a journey that I would be on.

Question: Thank you for a wonderful talk. As an aspiring screenwriter and someone that would love to write things like *Michael Clayton* I've got a ton of questions that I could ask about that sort of thing, but I feel obligated to my sister whose favourite film of all time actually is *The Cutting Edge*, to ask what your experience on that film was like, with it being the first time you had a film made, just to know how exciting that was and what your experience was on it?

TG: It was unbelievably exciting. I went up to go to Toronto, they were in pre-production and I got there, they were out on a recce or something and I walked into the production office and there were like 30 people working there and there were desks for 75 people. All these people are working because I sat in my room, it's so.... I've never lost that feeling.

I worked really hard to stay on that movie and not get fired. I just worked really hard to hang in there on that movie, and it meant everything to me. It was really important to me to get a movie made, I'd written a lot of scripts that hadn't got made at that point, it was really critical, your life changes when your script made.

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But I'll tell you, the feeling... it wasn't going on set and watching the first scene or anything, it was really walking in the production office and going 'oh my God there's 100 people that are working on this movie, holy shit, there's trucks and cars and all this stuff'. I'd been on movie sets all my life, but this was all because I sat in my room. It's a very cool feeling.

Question: You've spoken a lot about being afraid of what you're going to write tomorrow or being afraid. I was just interested to know in those moments, is it lack of confidence and what is it that you say to yourself to brush yourself off and get yourself back in front of your computer?

TG: It's just when nothing's happening and you have to go to the room, and you know what the day is going to be like, or you think you know what day is going to be like, and yet you know you have to go there, and all the time you're going to waste, and all the feelings of wasting all that time, and all the crap you looked at online, and the newspapers that you read and the phone calls that you made, and you're going to waste the whole day and nothing's going to happen and maybe it's never going to happen again.

Oh, this is a pretty fancy rich screenwriter's problem, right? I'm not asking for sympathy, nobody who gets their shit asks for your sympathy, but it sucks and you get afraid to go to work. And what keeps you there, and keeps you going there, is the experience of having lived through 700 other days like that where finally something happens, and finally if you go there long enough something will happen. You'll get too afraid not to work, it'll get more painful not to work than to work, you just get there. Some day that equation will go the wrong way and it really will be the last day.

But it's just experience that saves you from not going on, but that's the writer's terror. And as I said I'm sure composers, painters, anybody who's doing anything like that... when nothing's there and you're bored with it, and you feel like you've done everything else before and it feels useless, I don't know, it's not happy.

Question: You said during the talk that you get friends coming up to you asking how to write

great action scenes. I wondered, what do you tell them?

TG: This is a good question to finish on because it sort of touches on what we talked about. It really is, as I said before, what you know and what you see. There's a couple of times where I've typed things just because directors have asked you to turn in something, twice I've done that.

But if I'm going to write an action sequence, it has to be real, it has to be a real place. On *Bourne*, for every single one of the films – *Identity* were all locations that I knew, I knew Paris really well, I knew everything about it so I was writing about stuff I knew. When we went to do *Supremacy*, as I was writing the script, while there were just placeholders for the action, [producers] Pat Crowley, Frank Marshall and I, long before the script was written visited Berlin, spent a week in Moscow, all those sequences were built absolutely to the locations.

'Oh my God, here's the market, what if he grabs vodka, there's a cab, what a great place for a car chase, what a great place in Berlin to jump from the bridge'. On *Legacy* I went to Philippines three times before we shot, all of those action sequences are completely built exactly to those locations; you build it for where it is. You go there, you see it, you deal with the limitations of it.

It's not what's so great about it, but what's wrong with it, what will make things go wrong? What will make things be contained? What haven't I seen before? 'Oh my God, this is really tough here, this would be really hard, I've never seen this before', it's what's eccentric and wrong about things, it's the limitations of things that make them specific and make them interesting.

And how to do it in a place that you haven't really visited or isn't really real to you, or you don't understand, and trying to write action if you don't understand how gravity works or understand what a derrick does or what a Ferris wheel does, if you don't understand the physical world you're at another limitation. But the more specific and the more real it is to you, that's the key to getting into all of it.

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MS: And then on the page, translating that onto the page?

TG: On the page, alright. I have everything, I've been putting it off for weeks, it's sort of like a bullfight. It's kind of like giving a speech, you've been putting it off and putting it off and putting it off, I know all the things and finally I can't wait anymore. It's like 14 cups of coffee, and anything else that will help you do it and you sit down and you try to do it as fast as possible. Anything that will help. It's the one time I'll really party when I write, because you really want to just get it all down and energise as much as possible.

'He does this, he does that, she's there and she jumps...' You want to feel, you want to get pumped up. I haven't written a lot of sex scenes, which I'm assuming is the same thing. That's next.

MS: On that note please put your hands together for Tony Gilroy.

APPLAUSE

TG: Thank you.