

**18 September 2014 at BFI Southbank**

*This transcript has been edited for clarity.*

Dear reader,

I made the decision beforehand to do the talk without notes, and with no necessary point of destination or departure: I only wanted, in a public space, to see if I might be able to grapple, in front of and with the participation of a live audience, a number of very abstract and challenging ideas - many of them counterintuitive and contrary to commonly shared assumptions we in the film community have about things like art and commerce. I thus maintained a speaking style that can best be described as Valley Girl/Guy-Meets-Not-So-Cute-In-The-Philosophy-Section-Of-Foyles-Bookstore-After-A-Few-Beers. The transcript below maintains much of that style, hence its exemplary cringeworthiness. I must add one other prefatory remark, and extend my apologies to my fellow filmmaker Paul Verhoeven. There is an exchange with a very brave and lovely audience member about art, not-art, good art, and bad art, in which, if you see the video or listen to the audio, you will have no doubt as to my disagreement with her regarding the merits of *Showgirls*, a film I very much like - even, I daresay, love. But in the cold hard print below, as I use her example to continue my argument, it's easy to miss that, and hence my apology; I have thus added a few words in brackets that underscore my dissent from her judgement.

**James Schamus**

**Jeremy Brock:** Good evening ladies and gentlemen, I'm Jeremy Brock. On behalf of BAFTA, the BFI and the JJ Charitable Trust welcome to the fifth year of the International Screenwriters' Lectures. Our thanks as always to our constant star and general Lucy Guard. This year I am more than usually ululatory because we have a stellar line-up of speakers reflecting the increasingly obfuscated boundaries between screenwriting and game writing, between writing and directing, and between film and television. Not only do I rather proprietorially feel that this is a splendid, lovely and wonderful series, it's also very apposite, we do try to reflect the changes and to give those voice. We open therefore tonight with the renowned autodidact and multi-hyphenate James Schamus. I am not even going to bother listing his credits because if you don't know them go to the back of the class. It is a huge honour to welcome James here tonight. He will lecture, followed by a Q&A with film producer Tanya Seghatchian, and then we will, as we always do, open it up to the floor. Ladies and gentlemen, James Schamus.

[Applause]

**James Schamus:** Thanks to Tanya and Jeremy for your vision in putting this series together over these years, raising the status, the dignity, the profile of your fellow scriveners. Everybody at The BFI and BAFTA, it's really a pleasure to be joining you guys tonight. I got online and watched a number of my predecessors, it was intimidating. They also follow a very particular genre, one which I am ill-equipped or at least ill-disposed to participate in, so I'm going to be a little cranky and ornery tonight, at least in theory, but I hope some measure of human kindness shines through beneath the veneer of mean. I'm not quite sure that the 30-45 minutes of autobiographical humble-brag, from which the aura of good advice and inspiration comes is my thing. Because if I started it, it would just be bragging and you wouldn't learn much anyhow, and I think the genre of advice-giving, I think a lot of you here are probably aspiring screenwriters or practicing screenwriters. Let me put it this way, if you're an aspiring screenwriter who isn't actually already screenwriting, you're really not an aspiring screenwriter. See, mean already.

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So I decided to kind of rub against the genre a little bit, not because I don't feel some shared compulsion with Jeremy, however ululatory he is, to increase the dignity and respect, self and otherwise, of myself and my fellow writers, but rather I think that there are some confusions that are worth exploring, and contradictions that are worth noting and spending some time meditating on together with you, that drive this perceived need for self-respect and respect and recognition. And one of them is of course this sense of recognition of screenwriters as artists in their own right – that we are creators, we are artists. I think most of us would agree with that statement. If anybody disagrees please raise your hand. So that's what my talk will be about actually. I disagree. And for some fairly cranky but profound reasons, and I'm going to share them with you tonight. I'm going to do so in an incredibly pedantic way, hence the whiteboard, and the form of my talk and the form of my complaint will come via the medium of a lecture on German aesthetics since the enlightenment through its post-Kantian and Marxist iterations into the 20th century – Adorno and other critical theorists. I'm actually serious. So I will expect and solicit your responses, questions, comments and complaints at any time. We won't have to break it up into the first part and then the second part, but the second part will be announced to you and will manifest itself when Tanya raises her hand and says, 'Basta, enough, I'm coming up and we're gonna do the proper Q&A.'

So art and artistry and artists. And I'm just going to ask a few questions and from time to time I'll stop, because the genre I am embracing here is that of the person who you see in front of Sainsbury's pacing back and forth who's dressed well enough so that they might not be homeless, but they're kind of dissociative and just kind of saying stuff, that's what we're going to be doing tonight. And so occasionally I'll go to the board and put something fairly abstract and meaningless up on the board and then we'll return to it at some point. So for example, I'll do this [draws square], and then I'll do this [draws a second square], and then I'll do this [draws a third square] – that's just one example of what I'll put up there. But at other times I'll just be talking, looking around and then I'll do this [writes 'Time + Money' underneath squares]. I'll say 'time and money, that's a thought,' and we'll see

where that leads us. And if you want me to put anything on the board just please make suggestions, I'll put it up. Again, I'm not kidding.

Let me ask you a few questions, and these are why questions. And one of the answers to the why questions could be well, if we just had more screenwriters at NFT Theatre One every night talking then the answer would be obvious because these issues would go away. But let me ask you this question, just as an example. I assume that all of you having lived for some time in Britain, Great or lesser depending on what happens, have attended a production, even a school or community production, of a play by William Shakespeare. You know, *Much Ado About Nothing*. And let's just say that the players were less than successful in their delivery of the play. I assume that when you walked out of the theatre that night – and assuming that your child was not part of the production, otherwise you would have had a very different response – that you turned to your colleague or friend or date and said, 'Ah, that Shakespeare just sucks, you know. That was so boring.' No, you don't say that do you? You say, 'That was the worst production of *Much Ado About Nothing* I have ever seen in my life,' right?

So there's something strange about that because, let me ask this question. Some of you have gone to the movies this summer, not to the cinema like here, but to the movies. When you walked out of the movies and it was, let's say 'Pièce de Merde: Part Three' from Studio de Crème de la Crap, starring 25million plus ten percent gross, and his 5million against three and a half percent gross love interest, and you walked out of the theatre, I assume you did not turn to your date and say, 'That film was terrible. The script was great, but the film, what a terrible job they did with that script!' Have you ever done that in your entire life? Once even? Oh you have? Probably it was somebody made a movie off of your screenplay.

The crazy thing is the way that first distinction we make between plays and cinema, this is a distinction where film theory is born. About 100 years ago Hugo Münsterberg, who was a hugely popular public intellectual at the time, 1916, writes the first great book about film and film theory from a Neo-Kantian but really interesting point of view. I won't do a

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Münsterberg lecture, don't worry. But these kinds of comparisons say something, what do they say is the question. Why is it that that works that way?

And you can extend the question a little bit. For example, perhaps next week you'll head to the Royal Opera House, where they'll have a new production of *Rigoletto* enticingly and entrancingly set in a Nazi concentration camp, or whatever they do with operas when they set them wherever and it's all some new production and they got rid of the old Zeffirelli one and now they have the new German one that's set on Mars. But no one ever says, 'Oh, they're remaking *Rigoletto*,' right? They're just re-staging it. They didn't remake *Much Ado About Nothing* at the local public school, right? So why is it then that when they remake a movie they don't just stage the script, it doesn't even come up, right? It's a whole new thing, the script. It's not like 20 years after the movie was released somebody goes, 'That was a great script, let's make it again with different stars, because there are really big stars now and we can make more money.' No. Why? Why is that?

These are questions that are not rhetorical but they're hard to answer aren't they? And one of the reasons they're hard to answer is because we, while we ask for respect as artists, we really don't know what we mean when we say art in this context. We really don't. We don't know the history of it, we don't know the uses of it, we don't know the ideologies of it. People like me who pretend to know actually don't. And so the questions kind of sit there and fester. And one of the ways you can start to answer those questions is to think very practically. So for example many of you here are screenwriters, and so we ask this question: you have completed a screenplay. Have you completed a work of art? If you're an artist it seems to me self-evident that your answer should be yes.

But if we put that question in context, for example, you are a poet and you have now taken your quill, dipped it in ink and you have written a poem this morning before breakfast, the poem is finished, you've written a poem. It exists. It may not have yet been published, but there are plenty of obscure literary journals that will send you rejection letters five months after you submit

to them, so at least you know you're in a process, right? But the poem exists; in some way, shape, form, manner, you have created a work of art. When you have finished a screenplay, what you have essentially done if we want to be strict in our definition and really make the definition ontological – you know, what is the being of this object that has just been brought forth into the world? I think we can say the following: you have created approximately 124 pages of begging for money and attention. That's pretty much what you've done. And how that gets you into the art category is an interesting question. Or does it?

So, again, question. I'm from the United States, I'm a proud member of a union that represents screenwriters. But we don't call ourselves a union, we call ourselves a guild because we're really fancy, and we're writers. Why don't we call ourselves a union? We do, on the east coast in particular we say we're a union, but it's like the subtext. We are the Writers Guild of America. So why did we end up calling ourselves a guild as opposed to a union? Clearly there's something going on there in terms of the trajectories and histories of the ideology of authorship, ownership and creation. And we have positioned ourselves as screenwriters in a hybrid space in which on the one hand we want to create intellectual property, and on the other hand we want to get paid for it and therefore we often give up ownership of it. So we are creators but not owners. We're workers but we are not bosses of our own art, which is a very strange thing.

Now you might say, 'I am a screenwriter of original screenplays and I often write them myself and then bring them to market,' but even there the language of the marketplace betrays your aspirations. It's a very funny thing. When a poet writes a poem she doesn't finish the poem by putting the pen down and saying, 'I've written an amazing epithalamion on spec.' But somehow when screenwriters write screenplays they visualise, in a sense, their production as the equivalent of mortgage-backed securities and derivatives. That is to say they have entered a speculative enterprise. Speculation, specula, seeing, vision, but also clearly a financial instrumentation of the actual activity itself. And the embeddedness of this bizarre

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relationship between creativity and the on-going production of the concept of intellectual property is of the essence of the screenwriter's life. It actually conditions how we feel about ourselves, about how we feel about our work, and how we relate to the work and what the work actually is.

And in particular these days you hear a lot of discussion of the pressure on film and the screenplay form by New Media; digital, television. We have this wonderful narrative now that television is where all the action is, there's an incredible effervescence of creativity, it's outpacing cinema in such a way – which by the way is in many ways true, but in other ways did they forget that the UK had this whole TV thing going on for like 50 years? And that's been the case, with some gaps, here in the UK. There's a very American narrative about this, and part of what that narrative is also about is the consumer, the audience. We have new consumers, and who are these people? They are people who want to consume their audiovisual media anytime, anywhere, anyhow. Right, those people, you've met them before? And this puts pressure on the screenplay form in a number of ways. Number one, it puts pressure on the film business itself. There has been a noticeable decline and slowing down of the development pool and the amount of money going into it from the Hollywood studios.

It also triggers a lot of discourse in the pseudo-public media as to the very nature and structure of narrative satisfaction and audience interest in narrative. That 'Ah, I love these open-ended narratives where you know characters, you can explore different characters, and then there's the cliffhangers...' etc, etc. And again with very little consciousness of the relationship between the same dynamics that embedded themselves, for example, in Victorian novels, where we read them as novels, but of course we all know Dickens was writing in the serial.

So something's happening that's putting pressure on the objective nature of the unit of cinematic stuff. It's being attacked from many different sides, and in particular from this attention deficit disorder culture where time, temporality is not only the unit of narrative consumption and production, but

also the unit, that is to say, the human unit, of the consumption of narrative. The time factor is starting to get very strange, and it's starting to particularise and break itself up into different kind of units. And it's very funny because on the one hand it's all about, 'It's got to be short and it's got to be in small pieces and people have to be able to watch it on their new iWatches.' And on the other hand you have this very funny discourse, the Netflix discourse of, 'Let's just dump the entire season online at noon,' so you can basically not live for the next 24 hours while you binge on it, right? So interesting right? Time and how people are relating to narrative. But somehow cinema and screenwriting and the film piece of it gets distended, and there's a lot of anxiety and intensity around it.

And in fact, if we go back to our earlier definition of a screenplay, which I think was a pretty reasonable one, that is to say approximately 124 pages of begging for money and attention, we can finesse that a little bit by looking at the history of the screenplay form itself and its relationship to time and money. Remember, time is money, right? And now we'll understand a little bit more why. Who's the guy who really created the screenplay form that we all use that's in Final Draft, that's encoded in the very software that most of us writers use to write screenplays? It's a guy named Thomas Ince, I don't know if anyone remembers him now. He was one of the most important people in the history of cinema. He ran one of the biggest studios in the history of cinema, Inceville, and then he ended up forming a company with a lot of major players including DW Griffith. Any of you who have visited the Sony lot, it's called the Sony lot now, it used to be the MGM lot, in Culver City in California, you'll still see the colonnades at the gates on I think it's the north side of that campus, that's the only remnant left of Ince's empire.

He died in, I think, 1924 under very mysterious circumstances. The official version was that he had some strange stomach ailment that just took him out overnight, but the gossip was fuelled by the fact that the onset of this very mysterious disease happened while he was on William Randolph Hearst's yacht. And apparently the story goes that William Randolph Hearst was a little angry at his girlfriend, Marion Davies the great movie star,

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because she was, sorry for my French, 'shtupping' Charlie Chaplin who was also on the yacht, and apparently William fired a shot that was intended for Charlie and that landed on Thomas Ince. So Thomas has a certain notoriety because it's assumed in Hollywood circles that he was actually killed by William Randolph Hearst and that it was covered up, it wasn't really carried in the papers at least.

But Thomas Ince was a really amazing guy and one of the things he did in the very early era of cinema in the teens, when you were moving from one-reelers to two to three to longer form, when time was starting to morph the screenplay and the film into something larger that now looks and feels like narrative film, he was there at the creation of that, at the multi-reel film with Griffith. And back in the old days they used to have production units that included a core of actors and they would just go out for a day and say, you know what, they would say to Tom: 'We're gonna make a movie. A gypsy, you know, a gypsy family with the circus is going to take a baby, a white baby, and then there will be a chase, and then they'll get the white baby back.' It's like, 'That's a great idea, go for it.' And then they'd come back and they'd run the rushes and he'd say, 'What are these elephants? How much did this cost? What's the budget?' It was all kind of amorphous.

And what he said is, 'Look, I've come up with a great idea. It's called a screenplay. And I'm not going to approve any movies going out until I see the screenplay and I give it to a guy – who we now call the assistant director – who's going to break it down, and then I'm going to send it to my accountants and they're going to budget it, and then I'm going to give you this amount of money to do it. And so if you want elephants, you've got to put it in the script, and maybe even in capitals so that they'll pay attention, and then I'll provide you a budget, and don't go over budget because that's coming out of your salary.' And he really rationalised what was essentially a chaotic serial production approach to filmmaking, and he did it through the medium, guess what, of the screenplay. The screenplay was really the control function for the way in which time and money were organised in these production units. And to this day we've adapted pretty much whole

what Thomas Ince created as the ability for the money, the capital, to really organise and yay or nay, because they had a piece of paper rather than a bunch of people standing on a set waiting for them. It's a lot easier to say, 'You know what, it says two elephants [whistles] – one.' Rather than go on set and go, bang, now there's one.

So it turns out that the work that we do is work that both creates and inspires and catalyses and motivates, but just as importantly it is the grounds on which control and money and the executives like me intervene in the most effective way. That is, before the shit starts to happen. And that's the form we use, that's why we have that form, and it's uncanny. The words on the page, the textual linearity of them, are really the matrix for the introduction of capital into the process. And that means that at that moment something else happens. Those words become not simply words and not simply inspired creations, but they become a place where we conflate two separate ideologies and two separate economic practices. One of those ideologies is the ideology of authorship. That is to say, there is a sole, usually a sole genius garretted somewhere with a skylight because they can't afford the candle, and some inspiration happens, and it is expressed somehow physically through the hand and it ends up on the page.

And we all assume, most of us unless you're trained lawyers or nerds like me, that this authorship has something to do with another regime of how we organise the results and proceeds of that process, and that's copyright. But if you look at the history of copyright you'll notice something very strange. Copyright from its inception had nothing to do with authorship. It had to do with the granting by the crown or the monopoly to certain booksellers and publishers the ability to apply to license to print books, therefore allowing the government to censor before the fact. And they had the copy right, there were a certain number of people who had this right to do that and authors were not part of that process. And you have various modifications over time, in particular by the early 18th century with the statutes of Anne, where suddenly copyright, especially as freedoms of the press start to increase, starts to become associated with the inception of

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the work. That is to say the moment at which the work embeds itself in some material form on the page.

And so authors get closer to the idea of copyright. But as they get closer, that powerful ideology – of originality, for example – itself is seized again and again by the machinery and the business, in our case here by the capitalist business of the media enterprises and the culture industries. And it turns out at the end of the day that while many individuals can leverage that proximity to the moment of creation to some form of ownership, whenever you have the kind of creation that we have, you are simply a moment in time at which capital gets to coalesce and organise. And it's very interesting how writing and screenwriting in particular become extremely important in this process, much more so than we think, and this is where my empathies to the crew – and Jeremy I'm looking at you – and self-respect and respect come in, from the very beginning of the way in which the film industry tried to protect its commercial interests and the interests of its investors.

I'll give you one example. When photographs first appeared in the 1930s they were not copyrightable. Movies were made of photographs, so how are you supposed to copyright a movie? So after a long battle that took a long time, about 50 years in the United States, and Anglo and American law were kind of trailing each other back and forth on this issue, finally by the 1880s photographs became copyrightable. The reason they weren't copyrightable was because it was understood that photographs were mere imitations and recordings of light rays from reality, and you can't copyright the real. You can't copyright the public space. Public surfaces, reality is not copyrightable. Copyrightable objects are only things that are material instantiations of original ideas. So by the 1880s you get copyright in photographs. How do you get them? You get them because they claim it's like light writing photo-graphy. Light - writing. Graphics - graphia. And that even just an amateur photograph still has some subjectivity embedded in it. That the photographer had to choose the angle or chose the moment or chose something, and that this one little signature of subjectivity, of humanity, gives you the right to copyright the results.

So now you have photographs that are copyrights, and when you made a movie, let's say in 1904, you would shoot the movie and in order to copyright it – because at that time, just like now, it was complete Wild West in terms of business practices – what happened is you would make a movie, you would send it out the lab, and they'd make some prints. Immediately one of your competitors would get hold of a print, they would re-photograph the print, create their own inter-negative, re-package it with their own brand and sell it somewhere else. And they used to sell movies by the foot, or the metre, that's how movies were distributed. You would simply sell that as strips of photos. So it was not a fun time to be trying to battle your competition, it was pretty rough and tumble. So they said, 'Well, okay, wait, we're going to copyright our movies.' So what they would do is they would copyright every single frame separately, that's how you'd do it. And the only reason that you can come to the BFI and see early silent movies – because they were on nitrate prints, these things just disappeared – was because they had to copyright them on paper prints. And you would send them to the Library of Congress, you'd send them to the registry, and those paper prints survived. So when you see an old silent one-reel film, you know *Life of an American Fireman* or whatever, you're actually seeing re-photographed paper prints of each single frame that in and of itself was copyrighted. Kind of crazy right, but that's why they survived, that's the only reason. So the machinery of business copyright protection really has saved a lot of our inheritance in the cinema.

So now what happens? How about you're a company and you decide to make a really funny movie, and the movie is going to be called *How a French Nobleman Found His Wife Through the Personal Ads*, because it turns out they had personal ads back in 1904 just like they do today. It was like OkCupid but you had to go to the back of the tribune. And it's a hilarious movie. There's a shot of a French nobleman, then there's the ad, the ad has come out, then there's a shot of him running up Riverside Drive in New York, in Manhattan, and he's chased by 100 women, because he's a French nobleman so all these women want to get married to him. Pretty funny, right? What happens if you're the producer of that film and two weeks later a movie appears called



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*Personals?* And it has a shot of a French nobleman, and he decides to put a personal ad in the paper, and then he puts the personal ad in the paper, and the last shot of that film is him being chased up a street by 100 women? Well that's what happened.

So of course company A, I'm forgetting, I think it was Pathé and I forget, I think it was Lubin, sues. And they go, 'You can't. That was our, you can't, you ripped us off.' Right? And the defendants replied, 'No we didn't. Not one frame of our movie was your copyrighted material. Not one. It's our movie.' And at this point it goes up to the appeals court, and a wonderful scholar from Canada, André Gaudreault, has written a lot about this, and the decision is made by the judge. His decision you'll find very interesting. He said, 'Well yeah, it's true that this is how we copyright movies, that we copyright the individual photos, that's the copyrightable material. But it's weird because just a bunch of shots lined up one after the other don't actually make up a movie. It turns out that they're showing things, but a movie, it turns out, and this is actually the property that the makers of the movie own, is the telling.'

The telling, not even the story but the telling. The narration. And that in order to consume a film you assume, even if it's not existent or conscious to you, a narrator who is telling the story. And to the extent to which the film creates, post facto in a sense, this experience of narration, it – in its entirety, as a whole – becomes a copyrightable property. And that was the elegant solution. Suddenly capital now can find a locus in an object that is completely abstract, and yet recognised in law as the essence of its investment. That is to say, this narrator. We screenwriters like to think of ourselves as that person, but of course that person's actually the embodiment of vast sums of capital that congeals around this eventual text that our screenplays inspire. So you find this idea of the ideology of the author transforming itself into a new kind of author, the kind of author that you see at the end of every film where it says, 'for the purposes of copyright the author of this film is 20th Century Fox'. Alright. It's not un film de James Cameron, right, it's the money. Money is the author. And that also allowed an infinite expansion of the space and time of the investment as it organises itself around all of these industrial processes.

So that gets us back to art. Remember we were all artists. And again back to all those questions we asked before. What does it mean that when we finish our artwork it's not an artwork? What does it mean that we still invoked this ideology of authorship and art? Well one of the things it means is that we do a very bad job at identifying ourselves effectively as labour, as workers. We're like better than workers because we're artists, right? And weirdly the more that we invest in this ideology of art and the respect we think is due us as artists, somehow the worse we seem to do as workers. And we can't even organise around the actual effective intervention into the industrial process that collectively – because we're all individual artists – we could possibly do if we got our acts together, right? And that's one of the effective ways in which these ideologies of authorship and art work.

But arts are still an interesting concept, and I don't want to give it up too much or too quickly, because if I throw away art then what's left? Commerce. Fine. But for some reason if you're here tonight you probably still have some affective, if not political and ideological, interest in art. I assume that when you use the word art, it tends to have a positive valence, right, you have to say, 'Well that's art.' It's like a good thing, right, in general? How many people think it's not in general a good thing? Okay, well at least one of us. So, why? Why? First off, you forget one thing, and it's a categorical confusion that again screenwriters get mixed up in all the time. And that is, let's put it this way: what was the last film you saw that was a great work of art? And you can actually shout it out if you want, it's kind of fun to hear what people think.

**Audience:** *Boyhood*.

**JS:** *Boyhood*, fantastic, yeah. What a great film. And by the way, talk about time and money. What about a film that was just not a work of art? I mean you don't have to if you don't want to be rude in a public space and diss a film that's fine, but surely you can think of one, right?

**Audience:** *Showgirls*.

**JS:** *Showgirls*, okay. Okay, hmm. I don't have time enough to argue with you tonight.

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Here's the problem with that statement. It's not that it wasn't art, it's that it [for you it] was bad art, and weirdly we have created a category that does not allow for modification. When we say art, we automatically mean that if it's bad art it's just not art, which is really kind of weird because for example you could have two children, one who becomes a priest and one who becomes a mobster, and so you would have one bad son and one good son. You don't have just one son and then one, I don't know, the thing. Like what is the thing there? Because it's the bad son? No. So we have initially already a problem, because we're so cultured and we go to lectures at the BFI, so art is good. No it isn't. Like most of it sucks, right, it's terrible. But it's still art. That's the crazy thing.

Except for one thing, cinema, and the great French philosopher Alain Badiou pointed this out. You go to, for example, the National Portrait Gallery. The National Portrait Gallery is one of my favourite museums because it has so many great paintings, but then you also get the *BP Portrait of the Year* which is like, 'What, like are you kidding? What? It's the Queen and then it's a rock star and then it's like what, who's paying these people?' So you can feel like, wow, because it's right there – there's Thomas Cromwell over here and Holbein and this and that, and then there's 'blergh!' So you have this incredible hit of good art and bad art, and you can see it right there. Cinema, weirdly enough, doesn't seem to have that problem.

And I'll ask you another question, and I think you'll all pretty much answer similarly if you're honest, which is all of you probably have some fairly guilty pleasures when it comes to cinema. *Showgirls* is yours. But no, see this is why now nobody's going to raise their hand again, it's like God, he's just so mean. But we all have a guilty pleasure I'm sure. And what Badiou says is in the cinema, unlike other arts where if it's a bad painting it's like bad art, you're falling, you just fall, in the cinema the weird thing is you can only go up. Did anybody see any schlocky movie this summer and it had some moment in it that was just awesome, and you were like, 'Oh my God, that was so much fun.' Anybody have that? What was it, I'm not here to pick on you either, but what was it?

**Audience:** *Guardians of the Galaxy*.

**JS:** *Guardians of the Galaxy*, there you go. Absolutely, just the very first thing where he puts the headphones on it's like \*sings\*, and then he's walking around with those little rat things. So, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, perfect example. Is *Guardians of the Galaxy* a great work of art? Hmm, now they're not so, now they're, maybe. But let's assume that it didn't quite get there, which is okay because we all try and often, most of the time in fact the vast majority of them fail. But the point being is this, that somehow you start here with shlock genre or whatever Marvel thing, and the movies let you go up, right, they really do. And probably your favourite moments in movies were in movies you saw as a kid, and they were just so awful but they had something in them, they really did. Movies, there's something going on in terms of the social energy, the artistic energy, and it's not art, that thing is not necessarily art. There's something else, we don't really have words to describe it because when we talk about art we actually constrain ourselves by using protocols and judgements and rules and regulations, signalling to each other our culture, the status of it.

And movies are slightly embarrassing in that regard because you have high cultured people, you have the great critics of, you know, my hometown paper the *New York Times*. And it's absolutely true if you take last year's stuff that they reviewed it's gonna be 'Euro Depression: Part Deux', you know, misery, and this that and the other thing. And then they're always going to come out with one surprising shlock movie that they're just passionate defenders of. They're not wrong, they're actually right, it's just that there's no aesthetic criteria by which to make that judgement. There's other criteria being solicited, but they're not aesthetic, it's kind of crazy. But we all do that. Now we all have cover, we have cover that we've had since essentially the 1920s and 1930s, and the cover that we – this group, and I include myself – do is via a very sophisticated sociological, ideological analysis. So how does that work?

Now tell me you've never had this experience, but I assume you have, just looking around the room, I'm just getting a vibe. You go to some big Hollywood movie with some friends and you're subjected to the usual horrific, capitalist, ideological,



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sexist, racist torture, imperialist torture. You know, just the worst Mission Rambo Impossible kind of thing. Right, just like the worst. And you walk out of the theatre and you go, 'That was the most racist, sexist, homophobic, imperialist blah blah blah I've ever seen in my life. I'm feeling sick and I'm not even that politically correct, it was just like really, did I have to see that?' And your friend goes, 'No, it was ironic, it was subversive. *Mission: Impossible 4* is a critique of masculinity. You don't understand.' Is this ringing a bell or am I just making this up? 'Woah, what, what? How did that happen? How are we even having this conversation?' What's going on there? So suddenly the aesthetic field becomes a field of play and all this kind of crappy, horrible stuff gets thrown out there, but then there's always somebody who redeems it because their analysis is better than yours.

So that's also art, that turns out to be art space. Now we didn't know that, we hadn't counted on that when we talked about art. It doesn't make much sense to us. So what's going on? And is there some version of art that we can still in this world of time and money, which I'll get back to, redeem, in a sense? And for that you really do have to go back to where it all began, this idea of art, which is relatively new. It's only about 250 years old. The first use of the word aesthetics in the context that you understand it was only in 1750. That was Alexander Baumgarten, he wrote the book, and at that point in the German enlightenment there was a lot of piling on in terms of art theory and aesthetics. This idea of 'Art' with a capital A. Before that you had arts; you know the art of shoemaking, the art of perfuming, the art of cooking, the art of whatever, there's a lot of arts. Those are all small a. 'Art' is this other big thing and it gets very important until you get art for art's sake and all that kind of stuff, right, and this is where we had that positive valence about arts. It becomes 'Art'.

So what is it? Well by the time you get to the end of the 18th century you get people like Immanuel Kant really interested in this subject, and bizarrely at the end of his entire critical project he writes his last critique, the third critique, the *Critique of Judgment*, which is really a book about something we hold really dear to us, and in fact is related intimately with what's going on in Scotland right now, because the Scottish

enlightenment was actually a propulsive force in the creation of the German enlightenment that creates these aesthetics. Because you have this whole idea, this new idea of individual human beings who can represent themselves, and when we talk about representation we're talking about art but we're also now talking about politics, get it? It's kind of weird that they start using the same terms. And they're moving into a public sphere that's been created. Politics gets created when people themselves begin to gather and represent directly to each other, their interests.

And Kant realises and is a huge believer in the birth of this kind of bourgeois freedom, and he writes a book that's about freedom, but weirdly it's a book about aesthetics. The *Critique of Judgment* is actually about art, it's strange. And even he's surprised. He didn't realise when he started his whole project to create what we think of as modern human beings, which he kind of did, that he would end up writing a book about art because frankly he didn't spend much time looking at it himself, but he thought about it a lot. And he created the idea that art was a space of a kind of freedom that was particularly human and might really be the connective force between our relation on the one hand to our reason, the rational thinking that allows us to escape the strictures of the natural world, and on the other hand the natural world of natural law.

So for example, here's how he might have described art if he were not as smart as he was but just like me and talking to you. So for example, here's a pen, and if I do this [drops pen], it falls on the ground, because why? It is an object in the world that is subject to natural laws. It is subsumed by universal laws. It's merely an example of a certain kind of matter, and anything like it, anything that shares the same properties is going to have the same response when it's thrown up, it's going to fall down. It is subject to that universal law. What Kant says about art is, art's kind of weird because it's a thing that exists in the world that's bizarrely in some ways not subject to universal laws. Great art actually is a thing that there are no rules or regulations that you can a priori, that is to say beforehand, say, oh, if you just check off this list of rules and regulations that you find on page 103 of Sid Field's screenplay writing

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manual, you will have written a great screenplay or created a great film.

And what he says is, it's bizarre but we create things that we adjudicate, we judge as great, and profoundly great, but we don't have the adequate language to subsume them under concepts of universal laws. That action right there is subsumable under universal laws. It will always hold. It's always subject to those laws and therefore it's not free, it's beholden to those laws, it's just an example. But art is the product of some kind of freedom that actually creates its own rules, and I'm not kidding you when I say Immanuel Kant creates rock and roll. He creates the idea of the genius. What's a genius? A genius is somebody who does something that is not explainable by rules and regulations. You go to art school, you go to film school, you learn how to do it. 'I did exactly what they told me. Why is my movie so bad?' But rather the genius is that person who creates an object that by its example sets the rules. It is exemplary. It is not subsumed under the universal.

So this is a radical moment where suddenly there's a whole new object of human experience and production that solicits the idea of freedom in the world. You have this notion something is not subsumed under universal law, and that's a big deal for these guys. And again, a lot of that comes out of Scotland, but a lot of it's just in the air in Europe at the time. And it maintains its consistent propulsive force through Hegel, through all kinds of philosophy, all these guys all the way up to the 20th century when suddenly you have a new inflexion coming through: Marxism, Freudian theory and post-Hegelian philosophy that says wait a second, there's something weird here. I'm not feeling comfortable with this idea after all, but I still believe it in a certain way.

And that's where Theodor Adorno, the ever-adorable Frankfurt school philosopher, comes into play. And what Mr Adorno had to say was, 'Yes, I agree completely.' He says, 'Art is pretty much the last place in the world that lays claim to the primacy of the particular over the universal.' But what is the universal today? The universal is this. And why is the universal money under a capitalist system? Because it is a system of equivalence. That is to say, everything in the world is equal to everything else because it

can all be turned into a commodity value. So it is a weird thing. Now right outside I have parked a truckload of oranges, okay. That truckload of oranges is the equivalent of an uzi machine-gun, because I can turn it into its value currency and exchange it. It's all exchangeable. And it turns out that the world we live in, with the increasing financialisation of everything, including, remember what we talked about before, the intellectual property of even a story... That's just one more thing that you can exchange for something else. And the logic of the exchangeability and equivalence is the new universal.

Adorno starts one of his great essays with the sentence, 'He who speaks of culture also speaks of administration, even if he doesn't think so.' . Administration is the management of equivalences. It's the maximisation of resources, their exploitation and their commodification. And weirdly we have this ideology that says that art is this one thing that is, what is it? It's priceless. Remember that one? But we were really uncomfortable with that, because when we say priceless, again, what's the contradiction? It's priceless because, 'Really? Francis Bacon? That stuff went for 173million bucks? Wow.' In other words, priceless means really pricey, which is a weird commodification of the whole idea. When we say, and we tend to use the same language in these strange contradictory ways. We say, you know, 'I'm somebody with real values. I have values.' Like, oh, you cost more than I do? In other words we can't get out of that language.

And Adorno locates the disease of the universalisation and commodification of everything in the culture industry itself. To him that's the locus of all bad stuff because the culture industry does one thing well, and that is it pretends to particularise your experience in a particular unit of temporal consumption that you associate with your leisure hours, which have of course turned into consumption hours. That is to say they're commodifiable units that get re-injected into the economy – and remember he's writing in the 20s and 30s and 40s – and they do so by particularising that experience, you know giving it different layers, high class, low class whatever, but really subjecting it to the same logic of administrative extrapolation value.

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And the great dialectal thinking of Adorno winds itself up in this wonderful phrase when he says, 'Look, we treasure art because it's non-instrumental. It's kind of useless, right; it's its own thing. It doesn't have a use or use value.' But he said, 'But isn't it weird because if you do that, by that very gesture you're assuming the usefulness of the useless.' So laying claim to the value of the useless, of the artistic creation as this one particular thing that stands up against the whole system, bizarrely at the same time says there really is a usefulness to the so-called useless. But it doesn't really work that way. So he's raising a huge objection.

So, time and money. When you get now into our situation with cinema and you understand that there are all these forces that are battling to particularise the units in which money flows through particular creations, laptops and phones and 'I want it now' all that kind of stuff, you understand a little bit about the undercurrents of these crazy contradictory ideologies that have driven us to this inability to rationally think about it. Because we still think in terms of equivalent units, and we're trying to move those units into spaces that have some form of integrity when in fact the whole point of the exercise is to make sure they circulate as quickly and radically as possible out there. So it's kind of a weird thing.

That's why we go back to this guy here. And I'm going to move back now into the even higher realms of abstraction because all of you are not asleep yet, so that's good. And go back even at the very basic level of that moment when that judge said, 'Hey, the intellectual property is the story.' Story and narrative we know are temporal arts, as opposed to let's say sculpture, which is an art of space, and this is language we've derived from Lessing, another 18th century German philosopher. But time and space, I know it's weird, right, we're talking about time and space. Time and space are kind of funky concepts especially at the moment that cinema is being created at the turn of the century, last century. They start to blend together as we know with Einstein, and Einstein had a big fight with a guy called Henri Bergson, who was a great French philosopher at the time. He had a big fight with Einstein, he disagreed with him, and he actually knew his math which was crazy, so

he was coming from a place that meant something.

And for decades Bergson was dismissed as the guy who got up in Einstein's grill, and obviously didn't know what he was doing because Einstein's so great, because we have like the Atomic bomb. So see, Einstein was right. And it was a misunderstanding between the two of them, but primarily on Einstein's part. He didn't understand that Bergson was talking about human consciousness and the presence in the world of some kind of freedom. And Bergson actually identified the cinema as a place where that freedom was under a certain amount of threat, oddly. The very basis of its mechanical apparatus was threatening to him. And here's the reason why, and it's interesting, and again you'll see, I'll wrap this up and then Tanya's going to come on and talk normal English to me shortly. And you'll see why this wraps up into this idea of screenwriters and narration and property and money.

Bergson pointed out in some of his early work that we make a fundamental mistake when we think about time, and he said it's so fundamental that it's almost invisible to us, and this was his problem with Einstein. He said, 'It's really impossible for humans to think the abstract concepts of time and temporal units without thinking of them spatially.' You can't, it's really bizarre. He starts by interrogating the whole concept of number. You have your number one, but let's say the number three, does the number three have three ones in it? Or is it like a thing in and of itself? Or is it made up of all these other things. But those other things, even if it's made up of other things they're the same thing. They're the same thing. Like three can't be made up of like a rabbit, a carrot and a toad. Oh, that's three. That's three units, abstract units, right? Because otherwise, and four was a chair, a light, Jeremy Brock and a shoe. That's like how is three related to four? No, they have to be related because it's the same thing even though they're separate things, and it's kind of bizarre, right? So the way you think number, in a weird way you think of these same units and they're spread over space, and space is a weird thing because it's the thing you have to assume is a homogenous thing that has nothing in it. It can't be a thing because if it were it would add to the

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numbers that you're thinking. But as you think of numbers you can fold them up into each other, after a while they become abstract, you don't think of all the other ones before them.

Time, however, is bizarre, because we think of it in the same way. Here's one second, two seconds, three seconds. But just like with numbers and stuff you can divide, right, that's the whole Zeno's paradox. You can divide one into one half, divide half into quarters, and you can do this into infinity. So geometric space actually holds an infinite number of divisions and units. You can go on forever, you just set up a computer programme and keep doing it, making it smaller and smaller and smaller. And we have to believe that space is dividable itself, and we think this into infinitely small units, which maybe it's hard to think it but it's practically the case when you're doing the math. What about time? Well the first thing you ask yourself is, okay, it's this second, and then here's a new second, and then the question is, well what's in-between the seconds? Like what's between them? Well I guess it's this thing, time stuff. Well then why isn't that a second?

Right so Bergson asks Einstein, 'What the hell are you doing if you think you can divide time this way? The only way you do it is because mentally you're creating it in space. It's a big problem because you're abstracting out the thing, the essence of your own experience as a living being.' And Bergson understood that time, a moment of time is actually a hybrid; it includes the past and it includes expectations and somehow the future too. And the weird thing is then that, that moment, the actual lived moment, what you call *durée*, duration, is not quantifiable. Hence the argument with Einstein. It is actually an aspect of consciousness, and therefore it's a moment when there's the possibility of a kind of freedom. You could act in that moment because something is between the abstract measures that you've dealt to create this kind of equivalency of units of time.

So you end up of course... and by the way for Bergson, you can imagine, look at movies, 24 frames a second. The worst possible mechanisation in abstraction of lived experience. It's like, this is a nightmare, right. But at the same time the experience of

cinema for a lot of people, even at the very early stages, was a blossoming of a new kind of temporality that took them out of the horizon of your usual time, which by the way is your death, sorry, and said, wow, here's another unit of experience that has its own shape, and that shape is not the kind of shape that we have as an abstract series of seconds that ends in your death, sorry, and it's another type of temporality. And so for theorists like Vilém Flusser and others who realised that that moment is a kind of narrative overlay, narrative is a very interesting concept there. It lays over the narrative of your life – that is to say your birth, eating, pooping and dying – another temporal experience that has its own beginning and end, as Godard would say, not necessarily in that order, which is one of the cool things about art and cinema in particular. It gives you an experience of a different temporality, a kind of protest against the horizon of temporality and the abstraction of it that Bergson talks about as killing you.

The only way that works is if there is a kind of particularity, going back to Kant and Adorno, that raises its voice or hand or whatever it is as a kind of protest to this kind of relentless and inevitable death, sorry. And that's really what art in a weird way can be and is, and it finds itself in cinema coming up even as a product, a by-product, almost as a waste product of all of these crazy attempts to get the job done and get out there and do it. That experience, however, is usually killed before it gets a chance to start precisely by the strictures and precepts that most screenwriters are given and give each other in terms of narrative construction. That is to say, if you think of this unit, this particular unit that you've created, as a protest against precisely that kind of inevitability and abstraction, and you attack it by means of rules and regulations for things like three acts or a protagonist who is frustrated at the end of act... What you're doing is in a sense taking the possibility of a moment of explosive freedom, some particularity, and you are just rubbing it under the universal rules of product and genre that you've been handed by the industry.

So as an executive and as a screenwriter, my main goal is to try to find those moments of failure within the process of the well-constructed narrative, precisely so that there

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is an interruption in the usual mechanics of, yes, death. And that's hard to teach or even talk about, really, because if you're talking about it you're giving rules to people to follow, and therefore you're killing them, essentially, and their experience in their life. Tanya's going to rescue me from the rest of, because I could go on like this honestly for hours as you can tell, but I do hope at least that little piece of the evening, or not so little piece of the evening, laid some track for the conversation we can now have.

**Tanya Seghatchian:** James, thank you. My head's spinning, I'm sure the audiences' is as well. That was brilliant and I have so many questions to pick you up on and explore from what you've said. But I think probably the thing that most of the audience is thinking is, who the hell is this guy and even if he won't tell us about the biographical crap, where did he come from? Is he a professor, is he an executive, is he a screenwriter? Do those definitions even matter? Where did you start?

**JS:** Okay, wow, where did I start? I mean look, if there's one thing I can say, it's that in 25 years in the film business I'm actually... I made money. But yeah, that is to say that that was actually a business lecture, not a philosophy lecture. And that's a sad thing to say, but it's also probably a true thing to say. And it's not the kind of post-modernistically wrap up in an ironic way, but rather to say, if you're in this business, you're in a business, and unfortunately that does mean that the monetisation of your experience is a fact and you have to deal with it. And one way is to embrace it wholeheartedly and become just an absolute creep, and the other way is to find some kind of creative relationship to negotiating with the flow of capital and how you're going to ride it. So weirdly I was in grad school and was all but dissertation from Berkeley, and I blessedly had very little student debt, which now looking back obviously makes me incredibly old because that's not what's happening now. And I was able to take out a loan and pull a geographic because I didn't have any coursework left, I just had to write, and ended up going to New York. And weirdly I landed at a time when people like Christine Vachon and Todd Haynes and Tom Kalin and others were creating what we now think of as what used to be the independent film world in the States in the late 80s. And I was

starting to hang around them and see their amazing short films and their work and talk, and it turned out I had absolutely no skills whatsoever, couldn't act and couldn't write or whatever, so I volunteered to help raise money. And they were like, 'Cool, 'cause we're just like Brown students who'd studied semiotics,' and I was like yeah, kind of like me too from Berkeley. But it was a job nobody else wanted.

**TS:** But you understood from the outset that the market, that there were gaps in the market, that niche areas were areas where you could write to fit, produce to fit?

**JS:** Yeah, it felt as if there were still, there were underserved audiences and there were people who were looking for ways, even to express emerging communities like the LGBT community at that time, but others too. And you could leverage a lot of different little pools of support. Back in those days European public television was still a thing, and there were commissioning editors who would actually want to commission things that they thought were challenging and interesting for people, and you could pick up small bits of change. And there were grants and things like that, and you'd patch these things together, and then you'd find the rich uncle, and voila, you have movies like *Poison* and *Safe* and others that you could patch together that way.

**TS:** But as a screenwriter when you pitched the subjects that were going to be the subjects of your film, were you picking them with a sense of the market with Marxist ideology in your head, with a burning desire to tell that narrative? How did you begin in that sense?

**JS:** No, to me it was craft first, and one of the things that I did when I started was I was interning at a place, and I just asked to read all their screenplays that they had in development my first day there. I took home I think 12 or 14 scripts, stayed up all night and read them, those were the days, and then walked in and said, 'Look, I've read three drafts of this script, it's terrible. I understand that your option's running out in three months, why don't you pay me \$2000 to write it, to do a draft,' because it was a non-union shop. And then like, 'I've never written a screenplay before but I have poetry, I've written a lot of poetry.' And they looked at

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me and they go, 'Hell yeah.' And I wrote my first script. It was a biopic of Clara Bow, 'The It Girl', who in her own way was a Marxist critique of capitalist consumption. And it was a blast, I had a great time and I learned a lot. And I still have an enormous amount of respect for screenwriting as a craft, and over the years I've done a lot, not as much as... the last few years running Focus got very corporate-y so I didn't have as much time, bandwidth. But in my indie days I would actually take on jobs doing production drafts of kind of big popcorn movies actually. I don't talk about the ones I don't, you usually don't get credit for that, but they pay you like, it's like combat pay, and you learn a lot. It's like an engineering job. I would work on films where they were in pre-production, building sets, cast, and they had fight sequences all blocked out and animatics of them, you know these were huge mega-budget movies, and they were like, 'Oh, we forgot, there's no plot.' And I would be literally the 18th writer, I was the 18th writer on one of these things. I was like, 'That's cool, let me figure the pay. Let's get that done, let's do it.' So that's a lot of fun.

**TS:** And did you, have you, do you ever ask yourself is this a work of art?

**JS:** No, I would rather do what I did tonight, which is put a little pressure on these assumptions, and I hope I did a little bit of that for you guys. The goal here is the next time you say, 'Wow, it's art,' is to go, 'Wait, something, I can't remember exactly but I think that's weird.' If I did that then it was worth the hour.

**TS:** And if we take that art definition, distinction just slightly further and ask where the notion of art house cinema sits. I'm curious to know how in the context of that lecture you would describe it?

**JS:** Look, a lot of it is, I mean there's the cynical version which is just differentiation and market segmentation. Differentiation of product, market segmentation. There is a market for pork ice cream, there just is, it's not the biggest market but if you corner the market you can actually make a pretty good living and get your kids through college. That's the Adorno take, that people like to differentiate themselves through their consumption patterns and habits, and you know wear t-shirts with the insignia of

whatever it is that they make allegiance to and find other people in the dark who share their enthusiasms and all that kind of stuff. And you know, it's the Pierre Bourdieu distinction, it's the way in which we create capital, cultural capital that allows us to move through the world differently. And oftentimes for people who don't have actual capital, cultural capital really is capital. So I'm not dissing it. I've made a pretty decent living riding the crest of that wave. But within that there's other valences that are interesting. There's abilities to create political identities and communities and connect with people through artwork. So it's not as if I lay claim to like super p.c. like, my movies have changed the world blah blah blah. But, to the extent to which they're used by people to signal to each other that it's okay to be this way, or like I actually empathise with that kind of person, and you can use them to find each other and build certain types of even real, if not often virtual communities, that's something. And certainly culture functions in that way often very well.

**TS:** And national culture, whether it's British, Scottish, American indie, how relevant is any of that? I mean you've been very involved in a lot of British cinema in the last 25 years.

**JS:** Really, I'm involved in more films out of this town than anywhere else. So it's a real – obviously I'm just one of those American anglophile guys, but there is something, there's a real connection there. But think about it this way, again, just to put a little pressure on these concepts, and I hope the concept of nationalism even though I'm not tipping my hand yay or nay. Think about it this way; we have Hollywood cinema, and that's what you call it, you call it Hollywood cinema. And that has something to do with the Hollywood sign even though there's no studios in Hollywood, right. And then you have American independent cinema. So how did independent cinema get American but Hollywood is like this weird utopia that's not really a national thing, right? So again very interesting way in which we locate in a kind of fantasy structure not only nationalisms but their transcendence, in this case a kind of ur-globalisation that we associate with Hollywood and the Hollywood system right, which sucks up... Whenever you know, whenever you get a good director over in Britain and they have a breakout hit, guess what, 'Hey, wow, come over and visit me in



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Malibu. I've got this new deal.' You know, we're a vacuum, right, Hollywood is a vacuum. But it's not American, and its revenues now are only 30 percent, maybe 40 percent American. Hollywood doesn't make American movies. Its primary focus right now is to make movies that 20 year-old Chinese people want to see. That's really the future of it, but they've always been kind of that way.

**TS:** But also that thing for a writer trying to work out where their back yard is, given you've written 11 films for Ang Lee, if not more I don't know.

**JS:** Yeah, I've written more they just weren't made.

**TS:** Where's the commonality there? Or who's playing in whose culture, or are you both playing in a universal one?

**JS:** No, yes we're both playing in a universal, Jewish cosmopolitan culture. That's honestly...

**TS:** As opposed to the studio's.

**JS:** Yeah, that's exactly, that's really where I am. That's where I live at least. But again, that idea of culture where you have this word that comes out of cultivation and land. It's the land and the people, the volk, the kultur. And suddenly it becomes this other thing, it's this moveable chess piece that people can float in and out of. And in fact that's really the great contradiction and paradox of culture. You have an identity, everybody here has a personal identity, but when you go to a great movie what do you do? You identify with. 'Oh, I really identified with that character,' right? And movies allow you to transport your own identity into other genders and races and nationalities, that's the whole point of them, so you're constantly at play with that. And of course your identity, your self-identity is itself a product of, by the way, of these intellectual property regimes I was talking about. Like, think about how weird this is, truly bizarre, because it's quite recent. You're walking down the street and a brick hits you on the head because there's some accident or whatever, and the story of it is so interesting because now you can go, 'I own the story of my life' And it turns out the story of your life,

because it's narrative, is actually the intellectual property object that allows you to have property in yourself, but the strange thing about property is it's only property if you can sell it, otherwise it's not property. So you get to own yourself because you have a narrative. The narrative is property and you can sell it yourself. This has always been a problem for capitalism and for Western bourgeois individualism since John Locke created this idea of self-identity and connected it to narrative. He connected it to life story, the thread of consciousness that connects you. Are you the same person you were when you were three? Well, kind of but there's still, you assume a thread of consciousness, a narrative.

**TS:** I have a suspicion you are, but...

**JS:** Well, but the case law's great, I'll give you one case and hopefully we can get the audience questions. Here's a good case: Twentieth Century Fox announces they're making a movie based on this real woman artist's life, oh it's actually Universal announces this in the 80s. They're gonna make this movie and Sissy Spacek is attached as a producer and star and it's announced in the trades. Twentieth Century Fox really gets pissed off, says, 'You cannot do that.' They're like, 'Yes we can, the movie's about this woman.' They go, 'No, because we made a movie about her in 1959 and we bought her life story rights back then.' And Universal are going, 'Our movie's about what happened after that, it's actually like what happened later, the narrative, those units there.' And Fox says, 'No, when we bought her life story rights we bought the entire life, not just up until 1959.' So it's about to go to the court, and they made a movie in 1959, some of you have probably seen it, starred Joanne Woodward, it's called *The Three Faces of Eve*. It's about the woman who was the first person to be officially diagnosed with multiple personality disorder. So how did Universal wiggle out of it? Well the woman came forward, she was a wonderful artist called Chris Sizemore, she's a really interesting woman. And she said, 'Yeah, it's true that that was the contract in 1959, that they bought my entire life including the rest of my life, but when I signed the contract I was not myself.' - This is absolutely true, totally true story. Because when you own yourself, you can lose yourself. We create multiple personalities

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because you hypothecate and alienate your property, technically alienating your property.

**TS:** Do we have any questions from the audience? There's a gentleman down here.

**JS:** And there's a man with a mic, he'll find you.

**Question:** Thank you for the inspiring talk. As Tanya said you made all our heads spin, but I sort of came to expect that because you're managing to pull things off that certainly seem very mystifying to me, including the writing and producing. When I humbly tried and got some money together for a film I was producing whilst writing something, it was like you know on a computer where you get this beach ball that sort of goes round and round. My mind was eating itself. So please help me, what do you do when...

**JS:** I don't know. Look I wish I had tips, I really do, but I find it increasingly difficult myself quite frankly to do that stuff. But think about it this way, was this a movie you were working on, was it a movie you were writing? Here's the funny thing, at least in the States but I think also here, in the cinema, writers are hired by producers and then the producer at a certain moment utters these words, the three words, 'Get me rewrite,' and they're gone and there's another writer and whatever, and then the director directs the movie. But really it's a director's medium and a producer's business. Television, who runs those shows? The writers. They're the showrunners. Guess what, the writers hire the directors and not even behind their backs what do they call them? Shooters. 'He's just a shooter. They shoot my stuff. I just have to hire them because I don't have the time to...I'm too busy running my incredible business empire with my shows at HBO.' How do they do it? I have no idea; I really don't. If I could figure that out I'd be happy to embrace television. I love TV as a medium frankly and maybe at some point will. But that is really, to me a great showrunner is like a superhuman, like in a different species than I am.

**Q:** But you don't feel there's a different part of your brain that writes or producing is a different sort of mind-set?

**JS:** Yeah, it is absolutely a different type of mind-set, but then again so is being a parent; you know what I'm saying? So it's very hard to you know, sorry I'm not helpful.

**TS:** Do we have, Jeremy over there I think has one. There's a boom above you Jeremy.

**JB:** Oh is there? James, that was extraordinary, thank you so much. You're like the kid on the block that we're all so terrified of because you're so smart, so I will stumbly try this question. I don't know whether you know Tony Kushner's afterword to *Angels in America*, it's an extraordinary piece of writing. It basically debunks the idea of playwriting's authorship as a singular piece of authorship; it's more of a conversation. And I wondering what you think yourself about the idea that the public as consumers are less hung up on the idea of art, and as consumers they walk into a gallery and they look at their iPhone. They consume without really needing to deconstruct the genesis of art as art, and they think of it more as just an expression of self. And I think one of the interesting things about film is that directors have had the narrative, they've held the narrative if you will, they've held the narrative which is that their 'film de ...' is an expression of themselves in one way or another, whereas in a sense of the audience experience it's a collaboration, a conversation between a whole number of people. Industrial in scale, but still an investment of self, and I wonder whether you feel that that notion of investing yourself in something, whether it's a rewrite or whether it's an adaptation as Emma's going to be talking about on Saturday, is in and of itself worthy of the word that the audience might use more liberally because of course the lexicon shifts the whole time.

**JS:** I think I understand the question, but you may well be a lot smarter than me. I think I get this, and look, you've set up a lot of moving pieces. One is the audience or the public and what they think and what they don't think, and it implies a demand on them that they do. But these are demands that are not necessarily necessary to make, and in fact we don't live by those demands. We live by other demands, which is their attention and their time and their money. And increasingly again, the unit, the monetary unit that drives the entire industry, you have to understand cinema

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economically is basically a loss-leader advertisement for what it really is, which is a television programme. Movies are...you don't make money. Even if you make \$100million on a Hollywood movie at the box office you're still down, you don't make money, the cost of marketing and the take from the theatres. So we've been making TV for a long time. We call it cinema because that's a great marketing ploy. And cinema also has inflected in it this sense that you were talking about of the investment of self. And so now there is a breaking up of the unit, and so people are supposedly consuming particles of it, and in fact the economy is driving them in that space. We think that the consumer, the audience member is like, 'I want it now, here, on this, blah blah blah.' But in fact what's happening is it's the advertisers and the ISP's and the media companies that are trying to grab attention at any cost, in any way possible, and when you have that attention you have the opportunity for them to collect pay now or do this or whatever and get the advertising. So it's really about attentions and attention economy, which is funny because of course it requires a complete lack of attention. But you just, again, press the cat video. So frankly all those things get mixed up and you find this locus of how to fit them together, which is this idea of the individual who invests his or herself into the process and the product. Recall, however, that Locke at the very beginning of this process understood value as created when a human being mixed his or her labour – it was always his – in something material. There was a mixture of human volition and stuff, that's where the foundations of capitalism come from.

**JB:** Thank you.

**TS:** We've got one more question. There's, I've only got time for one more question as opposed to only one question to answer. The gentleman over there, thank you.

**JS:** Yes, but we want you to address the boom.

**Q:** I really loved the film *Hulk*. I was wondering if a film that I thought was quite similar, the recent film *Lucy*, where it's like a human being becomes God, or a God. I was wondering was that intentional of *Hulk*? And I read somewhere early on saying it was

going to be a trilogy. Did you write further films in the series before it was abandoned? Thanks.

**JS:** Thank you. Yeah, well thanks for liking the *Hulk*, you're obviously the odd man out here. But it's really interesting, I kind of love not just the movie but the fact of it because it's the bad object in Ang and mine's career, it's like, 'Oh the *Hulk*, but otherwise they...' you know, kind of thing.

**TS:** Is it bad art?

**JS:** Yeah, exactly. But the bizarre thing about the *Hulk* is, is you go on Rotten Tomatoes it's actually fresh. I thought it was like the worst movie ever made, no, it's not hugely fresh but it's like 64 percent or whatever. And the other weird thing is it made a bit of money, and then they were like it was so bad that they had to make *The Incredible Hulk*, which actually made less money. But what I like is that it is still the bad object, there's something bad, and it really has that energy around it in our careers, and we're supposed to be like, 'Yeah, and then we made the *Hulk*.' But to your question, yes I started on *Hulk 2*, and then quickly decided before anybody made the phone call that I'd make the phone call and say, 'You know what, I'm actually working on a little something something and I've got to think about studying for my Bar Mitzvah so we'll move on.' And so that was fine, but I had a really cool idea and it was on a Native American reservation and it was all about radioactivity and it was really political and would have been awesome. But the thing about God, you know Ang has gone on to really grapple with the concept of God, not in its normative Judeo-Christian Western idea of this great powerful intelligence of control, but rather as the essential non-humanity that's still within us all. And I think *Life Of Pi* to me was the masterpiece in that journey. I didn't write it and I didn't produce it, but to me it's one of the greatest films ever about staring back at the non-human that is you and dealing with it, and that's something that's an accomplishment that's very rare in Western cinema in particular, but he pulled that hat trick so I'm very jealous. Okay there's one more, come on, we have to do one.

**Q:** Is that film art, *Life Of Pi*?

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**JS:** *Life Of Pi*? No, it's just pure business. Yeah, is that film art? Yeah, but now you know, it's going to be tough to use that word isn't it, right, I hope so.

**TS:** We're not using it.

**Q:** Tough not to use it too.

**JS:** It's tough not to use it? No, I hope I gave a little sense that there is still... I had that little utopian moment tonight that said, you know, there's a function for the word art that seems valuable, sorry, to me, and I hope to you guys too. And I hope that got through.

**TS:** I think James it totally came across. We'd like to have you back every year with a new way of teaching us to use our language. Thank you so much, thank you for the films.

[Applause]