

On the Art of ‘Making Movies Happen’: An Interview with Andrea Calderwood

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In most film historiography it is the directors or stars that get the glory, while many other collaborators are consistently overlooked. Such has been the case with the film producer. Despite their centrality to the film-making process – involved as they often are in both the business and creative sides of making movies – Film Studies generally has had little to say about producers, unless it is to castigate some, such as David O. Selznick or Irving Thalberg, for their supposed greed and philistinism. Some of the reasons for this neglect can perhaps be traced back to the considerable difficulties inherent in defining the actual role that the producer plays on any given film, but this neglect has nonetheless had the effect of distorting our understanding of the medium. Scottish cinema historians have been more generous to this group of film-makers than most other national cinema critics, but Lynne Ramsay, Bill Forsyth and Peter Mullan are routinely the names associated with Scottish cinema, while film-makers such as Frances Higson, Douglas Rae or Rebecca O’Brien remain obscure.

*Amongst the most influential and successful of all film producers in the nation has been Andrea Calderwood, whose career has thus far included a stint as Head of Drama at BBC Scotland as well as a long and accomplished career as an independent producer. While at the BBC, she provided unprecedented support for young and emerging Scottish talent and oversaw the department’s push into feature film-making, beginning with *Small Faces* (Gillies MacKinnon, 1995) and *Mrs. Brown* (John Madden, 1997), the latter of which garnered a number of Oscar nominations. Here, she also provided the first ‘greenlight’ for *Ratcatcher* (Lynne Ramsay, 1999) which remains one of the most acclaimed of Scottish films. With her move into independent production, first with *Pathé Pictures* and later with her own production company *Slate Pictures*, Calderwood continued to make important Scottish and British films, including *Ratcatcher*, which she helped to complete while at *Pathé*, *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands* (Shane Meadows, 2002), *An Ideal Husband* (Oliver Parker, 1999), *I Am a Slave* (Gabriel Range, 2010) and *The Last King of Scotland* (Kevin Macdonald, 2006). In a wide-ranging interview conducted in April of 2011, Andrea discusses her experiences at BBC Scotland, her work on canonical Scottish films such as *Mrs. Brown* and *Last King*, the art of transnational co-production and the future of British film institutions such as *Creative Scotland* and the *British Film Institute*.*

CM: I was wondering firstly if you could say a little bit about your time as Head of Drama at BBC Scotland.

AC: I came into that job out of independent production. I had a small independent company and when I went to talk to them about that job, I didn't really expect to be given it. I went to see them to say you should really be working with a broader range of talent, new talent; you should be working with independent producers. At the time, the previous head of production only did in-house productions and only worked with about four, obviously male middle-age writers. I felt I was part of a new – we never called ourselves a 'new wave' – but a new generation of people who were used to working independently, used to working freelance and I was particularly inspired by taking a course called EAVE (European Audio-Visual Entrepreneurs), which trains European producers to do co-production.

I got to meet people at BBC Scotland, weirdly, as I was trying to do a short film in Gaelic and I put together about five different financiers just to do that short film. That's how I was used to working. On the student films I did for the National Film School, I would go around and raise money from lots of different sources, like local councils that had anti-nuclear policies, or I did another short film where we had about eight different funders and so that was my approach. I guess I was quite entrepreneurial, to use that term. So I said that this is what the BBC should be doing, and working with independent companies and working with a lot of the new talent that I was working with, and they took me at my word and offered me the job, which is not at all what I expected. *[Laughs]*

CM: That doesn't happen too often!

AC: It was headline news at the time, there was all of this stuff about 'a wee lassie takes over BBC Scotland'. This was Peter McDougall, who is actually a very good writer,¹ but you'd go down to the pub and ask him what he thought and he'd say it was great headline but that me being there meant they were going to close down BBC Scotland drama and we weren't being taken seriously. I had a bunch of the old guard men coming to me and saying 'they're never going to let you do anything in London'. But the truth was just the opposite: because I didn't have any baggage and I guess because I didn't know any better, I just went down to London and, being very enthusiastic about the projects we had, I managed to treble the output of the

¹ McDougall's scripts include *Just Another Saturday* (1975), *The Elephant's Graveyard* (1976), *A Sense of Freedom* (1979) and *Down Where the Buffalo Go* (1988).

department in eighteen months. We also did the first feature films, and we never thought to do feature films before. Because that's how I always saw myself – as a film producer – I always treated the department more like a production company where we pushed through the projects we wanted to get made.

We did Gillie Mackinnon's *Small Faces*, which was the first feature the department had ever done. *Mrs. Brown* we did originally as a TV film because the money was there to do it as a TV film. I remember saying to Douglas Rae – the film's producer – that we shouldn't waste time waiting on feature film money, that we should go ahead with the TV money that we had and get the film made. We were really keen to have something with Billy Connolly in it and Douglas was clever to line up Judi Dench. We also brought in John Madden who had directed a TV film with us at BBC Scotland before and Jeremy Brock to write the script. We applied the principles of bringing in the best talent and then *Mrs. Brown* became a feature film because the talent involved was so good. Then Harvey Weinstein bought it in a bidding war and took it to the Oscars and it took on its own momentum.

I was also keen to develop some other feature films as well. We developed Lynne Ramsay's work through the shorts scheme we had, Tartan Shorts. She was just a really stand out filmmaker; she just felt like the real thing. I was very excited by discovering Lynne because I felt she was like a young Jane Campion, a real cinematic feature film-maker. She wasn't somebody who was just doing drama on television, she actually made movies.

One of the luxuries of being at the BBC is that – and particularly being at the BBC outside of London – is that in London the BBC is divided into different departments, it was feature films, TV films, mini-series, returning series and so on. But in Scotland or any of the other national regions you could do the whole range of drama. This meant that with the kind of talent I was working with you could just do any format you wanted to, whether it was a serial, a television film, a feature film or whatever. We had a lot of freedom to do things we like, so that was the way we were able to do Lynne Ramsay's shorts. Lynne's treatment for *Ratcatcher* came in at about 65 pages long. It was kind of an essay on the bin men's strike and she had all these amazing photographs of guys that were collecting the rubbish and they had dead rats on shovels, very evocative images.

In terms of feature films, I was at BBC Scotland for about four years and we did a variety of programming formats, but I still thought of myself as a film producer. After the success of *Mrs. Brown*, I looked at opportunities to be a film executive in many different companies and I chose to go to Pathé because I felt it had a combination of British Lottery money, which came with a remit to develop British talent, as well as French cinema money. The relevance to *Ratcatcher*

was that I had developed *Ratcatcher*'s script at the BBC and it was one of the projects that I championed when I got to Pathé and had gotten some money to get made and the French financiers at Pathé had no idea what to make of *Ratcatcher* because it was written in the Scottish vernacular. *[Laughs]*

In order for *Ratcatcher* to happen, it needed for me to be in both of those positions, to be in the position at BBC Scotland where we had a remit to develop Scottish talent and then to be at Pathé where there was also a remit to invest in British talent and to find films for the cinema. I don't think we could have financed it if it wasn't for the circumstances because it needed somebody like me that was a Scottish producer who was completely convinced by Lynne's talent and me being in a position where I had access to money and to say 'okay we're gonna do this'.

For the film we had very good French co-producers. Bertrand Faivre, who had been involved in one of Lynne's shorts as well, came in for about 10% of the budget as the co-producer and we got support that way. But it was really taking a leap of faith with Lynne that made that film possible. It was good timing, good circumstances that were able to make that happen.

CM: I wonder if you could say a bit about how you see the role of the producer, because this is something that, especially to those outside of the industry, that seems a very amorphous position in many ways. From your own experience working in the business, what do you see as your role as producer or executive producer? What do you feel is your thing to do when it comes to making films?

AC: Well, the main role is to make films happen. There've been a lot of films I've been involved in that wouldn't have happened if I hadn't willed them into existence. It needs a lot of bloody-mindedness, will power and conviction because it's very easy for a film not to happen, particularly in the UK. The annoying part about the producer role is that so many people get to call themselves producers, but very few people actually do the work of the producer. It is a nebulous job. When I started with the training, people all said to me that I should be in production and I didn't necessarily know what that meant and I used to ask people what that meant and they couldn't give me the answer. There are so many different aspects of production but I think that's why I find producing the most interesting job because it's got the creative side, the organisational side, the financial side and for me, I don't tend to generate ideas so much as I tend to get on board ideas early. So if a film-maker like Lynne was to come up with a really strong idea, I can recognise a good idea and run with it.

Or if we come across a book, I really enjoy putting the talent around the book. For *Mrs. Brown*, Douglas Rae came to me with the idea of doing something about the relationship between Queen

Victoria and John Brown and it was very dry and historical. I didn't even know if it was a play then, it was kind of a treatment for a play that a historical journalist had written in Scotland. He had done a little of the playwriting but it was all about the politics of the time, not really about the people. He had the idea of Billy Connolly playing John Brown and at the time we really wanted Connolly to do something for the BBC. So that was when we had the idea of Billy Connolly playing John Brown. What I did was to insist that we had somebody like Jeremy Brock writing the script to make it a cinematic script and then bring in John Madden to direct.

I think the same of *The Last King of Scotland*. When I got involved with that actually was when I was brought the book by a production company when I was at BBC Scotland, but I didn't do it because I was about to leave the BBC but also because I felt it was a challenge because the book had a passive central character, a big challenge ahead in finding an actor to play Idi Amin and at the time they had a commercials director attached. Two years later, after I had been at Pathé, I then set up my own company with the backing of Film4 and one of the roles for me at Film4 was – as well as producing and initiating new projects – to be the creative producer on other projects they had in development that they felt needed more creative direction. So they brought me in on *The Last King of Scotland*. One of the first things I did on that was to get everyone to agree that we had the wrong director. Then we had to go off and find another director and we went through a phase where we worked with another director on that and there was another screenwriter. The film was nearly financed through Film4, but Film4 collapsed, we set it up again but this time we went with different screenwriters, Peter Morgan and Jeremy Brock, and director Kevin Macdonald who had just done *Touching the Void*, which I thought was a great piece of storytelling. He, especially for *The Last King of Scotland*, matched the vision I had been trying to find for the film for the previous three years, making it an accessible thriller but on a political subject. I had met Forest Whitaker originally when we started the project with the old director, before we even had a script to show anyone, but I felt like he could capture the reputed qualities of Idi Amin. So when I went back to casting with Kevin, and he was nervous about working with Forest because he had to agree that Forest was the person who would play the role from the inside out and best inhabit the role of Idi.

So it's a long roundabout answer to your question but I think it's all about finding the germ of an idea, getting a sense of what the film is. This is one of the things we always learned on EAVE, which was to find the heart of your project. You have to know what kind of film it is and then you can understand who the right talent to attach to the film is, and also how to finance it. It's also to match the film to the market properly, not to make a political film too much of a thriller, or to make a romantic comedy that doesn't make people laugh and so on. What I've learned over the years is to go with gut instinct and to really understand what a film is as opposed to trying to

turn it into something else. Those are the most successful films and TV shows I've been involved with, those that have stayed true to their spirit and have had the appropriate talent attached and the right financiers for the spirit of the film. That's the producer's role: to understand what kind of film you're making and to approach the right talent and the right money to get it made and then to see it through all the different stages of production and getting it made. I don't know, maybe the producer is the 'keeper of the flame', or something like that. *[Laughs]*

CM: One of the things that's very interesting about the films you've worked on – it's very interesting to hear you say you came out of this co-production training scheme – is to look at all the people who've supported your productions in terms of finance or in the case of *The Last King of Scotland* providing permissions, by which I mean the Ugandan government. On *Mrs. Brown*, for instance, you had partners from America (WGBH) as well as interest from Ireland, from Irish Screen. With co-productions, one often hears about the problem of too many cooks in the kitchen or trying to keep a lot of competing interests happy on the same project. I was wondering if you could say a bit about your time working on these films trying to keep all the backers happy from such different backgrounds, from America, from Ireland, from France, from Africa.

AC: Irish Screen was committed to doing TV films at the time, purely as equity investors. WGBH has a long tradition of working with the BBC. Because we developed the project at the BBC, we were very much the lead producers on it. I began producing again because I enjoy being in the thick of it with the production, collaborating with the writers, with the director, basically making the film. Even when I was an executive I always saw myself as making the film, even though I am sure some of the producers involved wouldn't necessarily have thought that because when you're producing a film, you feel like you're on a mission from God *[Laughs]*, and other people can come along as passengers with you while you're making *your* film. That's what drew me back into producing, I would actually have been more financially secure if I had stayed in some of the executive jobs, but I always felt that the film-makers left the room and went on to have all the other meetings and have coffees together and I always wished I was going with them instead of simply going on to my next meeting.

What I've always said to people is not to treat financiers like it's a 'them and us' situation. Part of the reason that financiers are in this business as opposed to the oil business or whatever else they could be doing is because they want to make films. You get the best of collaborations if you make people feel they're part of the process. I think it goes back to the same idea that the successful financial collaborations work when people are trying to make the same film. Tensions start to rise if you disagree about the sort of film you're trying to make and you start to move in different directions. I think that it's quite unfortunate when people come in behind a film and

they don't understand what kind of film it's going to be and don't have a solution and try to turn it into something different.

For me, that's part of the skill of co-production, if you look at them and think what are the parts that you can sell to people for what purpose. In the case of Irish Screen, they were in it as equity investors, they wanted to see a good return on the film. Somebody at WGBH wants to have stars, awards, classy stuff, a classy piece of British drama that they could have on their Masterpiece Theatre strand. Working with, say, Film4 and Fox and Scottish Screen on *The Last King of Scotland*, Film4 really wanted to have the relationship with Kevin Macdonald and Peter Morgan; that's the big thing that drove them. They liked Peter Morgan's script, the first draft and they really wanted to make Kevin's first feature film. Fox were in it because they had a relationship with DNA Films and the Film Council and what they wanted to have was something that could take them to the Oscars. Scottish Screen wanted to be part of a successful film that was somehow connected to Scotland – a Scottish film with Scottish talent in it.

Then it is a lot of communication, which can be quite tiring if you're making a film with a lot of partners. You feel you're doing the work of making the film with the director and the production team, but then, for each decision that's made, you then have to make a round of phone calls. If you've got, say, two other producers to call and three financiers, each decision has to be cleared by five different people. So you make one decision and then you make five phone calls to people to say 'this is what we're doing' and not to tell people what's happened afterwards but to make them feel that they are part of that decision and not presented with a *fait accompli* because people can be very territorial. Sometimes you feel that many people get the producer credit but it's only one or two actually that are doing the work of a producer, but if you need those producers for different reasons – somebody may have had the rights to the project or somebody else is bringing in a substantial chunk of money – you've got to allow them to feel that they have their role. If they are a part of the process of getting the film developed, they've earned their roles.

CM: It seems that co-production has been a very positive exercise in your experience. Has there ever been a time on these films or maybe others where it hasn't been so easy to keep everybody on common ground?

AC: I'm not pretending it's all sweetness and light. There are things that fall apart. There was a film called *Cargo* (Clive Gordon, 2006) that was a UK-Spanish-South African co-production originally and then it was a UK-Spanish-German co-production and it ended up being a UK-Spanish-Swedish co-production, because people said they were going to invest and then didn't invest, they'd changed their minds. These kinds of things can happen. There can be real

personality issues as well when you have a number of different producers on a film and it tends to be a territorial issue as well. There can be people wanting to be seen to be the producer and not necessarily doing the work or people not seeing eye-to-eye on a film and maybe resenting that one producer has more of a role than another. So there can be a lot of battles on the way, but to make these kinds of independent films, they tend not to be the kinds of films that a studio will look at and say, 'you know, I can make a fortune from this'.

For *The Last King of Scotland*, for example, everybody was nervous about making a film that was set in Africa with a black dictator as one of the leading roles. We were convinced that Forest and James McAvoy were the right people for the film and Forest went on to win the Oscar and James McAvoy now has a fantastic feature film career. That was about us being convinced that we had the right people for the film, but we would never have been fully financed by Fox, for example, because they would far rather have done the film with Denzel Washington and Tobey Maguire, or someone like that. *[Laughs]* But on the other hand they didn't want to put up \$30 million for the film. Everyone agreed the film was worth \$10 million, so it was an odd mismatch of them wanting to have the comfort of having star casting but also wanting it to be independently financed. What we had to do was to cast what we thought were the best actors to the role but also the people who we could get with the money that we had; but they also turned out to be the right actors. I think if we had gone with more Hollywood-type casting it wouldn't have been as convincing a film. That's the kind of judgment you're always having to make as a producer, it keeps coming back to understanding what kind of film it is that you're making. Because the film was an independent-scale budget, because it had Film4 involved, who were backing the director, the UK Film Council because it had loads of money in it through DNA, it meant that Fox were only on risk for less than 25% of the budget. We also had the backing of Scottish Screen who helped keep a certain Scottishness about the film, it meant we could make a film that was true to its own spirit rather than it turning into something that might have felt a bit more fake, a studio-type film. I think that's the advantage of co-production, it can allow film-makers more independence because they don't have the direct studio pressures to deal with.

It ended up with Fox taking the bulk of the return on *Last King* because they're the studio and they distribute it, so it can have downsides as well. The title of 'independent producer' can be a bit of a misnomer. You're not independent at all; you're completely dependent on your financiers, but by putting together a number of different financiers, it does allow the film-maker to be more in charge because everybody else has a percentage of risk in the film, whereas the film-maker is the one with 100% of the risk on the film. Whereas when the studio is 100% financing a film, they are on risk so therefore they can give you 100% of the pressure. I think that's the upside of being independent.

CM: *The Last King of Scotland* doesn't get talked about in Scottish cinema studies maybe for the same reasons that Scottish Screen may have had trouble funding it, it's not set in Scotland, it's not filmed in Scotland and so on. Yet it's a Scottish story in many ways.

AC: It's a completely Scottish story. That's why we wanted James McAvoy as our lead actor (well, he's a good actor as well). I think it's a very Scottish phenomenon, because of the colonial legacy, this idea of leaving Scotland for an adventure, fundamentally, and having an impact on the country you go to that's not necessarily positive. It's a classic Scottish colonial story. The history of the Caribbean has really been affected by Scottish adventurers. The history of Africa has been affected by Scottish adventurers. The Scottish influence is huge. Whenever I'm in Nigeria, I'm forever bumping into people with some kind of Scottish connection. It's hilarious. We're a great country with a lot to answer for and that is one of the things that drew me to it. It's a real theme in it, the legacy of colonialism and the impact of dictatorship, all that stuff that a lot of countries in the world are still dealing with. It's a fundamentally Scottish story I would say.

CM: To return to the point about co-production: it's good to hear a positive view of the practice. It's often talked about as multiplying pressures, but this in an interesting way of looking at it.

AC: I did *Generation Kill* for HBO with Company Pictures and that was a joy, because that was fully financed by HBO and they do respect their talent. They had a huge respect for David Simon and for George Faber, who was an executive producer on the series. That was lovely in a way because I didn't have to worry about raising the finance, I just had to worry about getting the show right. HBO are a particularly talent-friendly organisation.

CM: So not all studios are made the same, are they?

AC: It's to do with whether or not the people trust the talent they're working with, because if they do, that's fine; if they don't – if people are trying to second guess a director – then that's a nightmare situation. Being a producer who's worked with a director that people aren't convinced by, people have said 'well, you can stand by the monitor and help them', but that's not going to work because no matter how much input you have as a producer, in the end it is the director who makes the film. You know, films that I've worked on that have worked well – it's because of the right director, and conversely we've had films that didn't work because it wasn't the right director. In the end you can't get around the central role of the director, they have to be the right director for the material.

CM: Since *The Last King of Scotland* it seems that your work has taken a very African turn, in terms of either locations or themes of the films. I wonder if you could say a bit about this or why you've gravitated that way as a producer.

AC: Well, I was always interested in telling stories on a large scale and telling international stories. That's part of the way that I've always seen myself. When I did the EAVE course, the feature film project that I had was the life story of Chester Hines who was a black American crime novelist. At the time I was a 26 year-old Scottish film producer and one of the reasons that they had me on EAVE was because I was crazy enough to have this idea that I would do a black-themed American feature film. When I did my university dissertation it was on black women writers in America and there were all these dead Scottish writers who were men. I've always had this international outlook and it's that scale of story that interests me. I like telling strong, large-scale stories. Sometimes I do domestic stories as well, but I tend to be drawn to the larger scale projects. I think that there's not a particular reason for doing films in Africa; it's just that there are big stories to tell there because there is sort of constant upheaval; there's been a lot of dramatic history there; dramatic events are still unfolding in Africa. I guess that's why I'm particularly interested in stories that come from there rather than domestic British drama.

Also it's very practical, one thing leads to another. The reason I was asked to produce *Generation Kill* was because of the producers at Company that I knew from the BBC. They originally called me up for some advice on filming in Africa and then they called me back and said 'would you like to produce it?' Because it was David Simon and it was about the war in Iraq and it was HBO, I just said yeah. I really enjoy filming in Africa. You feel, when you're there, there's a real sense of it being an event, because there aren't so many films happening in countries we tend to film in. It's a real privilege to find yourself getting to know people, for example, that work in theatre in Uganda or work with people in Mozambique or wherever it is. It's the greatest part of film-making. It's not like turning up to work in an office every day. Sometimes you'll find yourself standing on set with the sun coming up and you'll think 'this is great'. Just at that basic level, it's a good working week to have. But more fundamentally it's where exciting stories come from.

CM: One of your projects in development that seems especially interesting in this regard is *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

AC: That's exactly the kind of thing that I'm talking about. Previously we tried to do a film set in the Nigerian civil war, with the same writer and director that we have now and we just weren't getting anywhere with that one. Then Chimamanda [Adichie]'s book came along and it's a very accessible approach to that story. It's a love story with these glamorous twin sisters and how their lives were taken over by the civil war. It's sort of *Gone with the Wind* set in Nigeria. It felt like a very accessible way to tell a very big, impactful story.

The way that we're financing this film is through industry finance but also some non-industry financiers from Nigeria who are just interested in having the story told. It goes back to the principles of the first student films I made when I went to the councils who were interested in anti-nuclear messages. It's the same thing: it's Nigerians who are interested in seeing films made in that area and having those stories told. Just being inventive about sourcing money to get films made which otherwise wouldn't get made on this scale. I think the industry is quite nervous about films that have got black leads in them. So this is the way that we can make the film: we can cast it well and then hopefully it comes about, but, as with *The Last King of Scotland* – or even with *The Constant Gardener* – there's still a challenge to get it made originally. Sometimes distributors can be very nervous about things like a black cast.

CM: Kevin Macdonald has said that originally the plan was to shoot *The Last King of Scotland* in South Africa, which is the big industrial hub in Africa. I just wondered if you could say a bit about working in Uganda and why you were drawn to that country, what kind of support you got, how you feel that your films are received in the places where they're shot and so on.

AC: When we originally started developing *The Last King of Scotland* there was an assumption that South Africa was the only place to shoot it. I had gone for a research trip there, before Kevin was involved, to see a lot of the real locations, meet a lot of the real people involved. So when Kevin did get involved, we decided the thing to do was to recce in Uganda and Kenya and South Africa. At the same time as we were recceing, *The Constant Gardener* was being shot in Kenya and they had gone through the same process of going to look at South Africa with Fernando Meirelles, their director, and looked at Kenya and decided that there was no question but that they had to shoot it in Kenya. Politically that was a challenge to do, just because of the politics of the book. That really helped us because they were able to gain the confidence for the film because it was possible to shoot in Kenya and in East Africa. That especially helped give confidence to the bond companies and to our financiers that it was possible to shoot there.

We still didn't know if it would be possible to shoot in Uganda, but again we had the same experience. We looked at Uganda and the real thing was clearly there; the real people were there; the real locations were there. When we went to South Africa we realised we'd have to construct everything to shoot it, and so you almost might as well shoot it in Europe because South Africa is a world away from Uganda. People talk about Africa like it's one place, but of course it's a huge continent with huge differences. People are very different. There's a real urban feel to people in South Africa because of their experiences and in Uganda, even though there are different tribes there, there's a more unified feel and look and approach to the world. East Africans are very distinct from West Africans and from South Africans.

But the key thing was to get backing from the President of Uganda, because it's a relatively small country and all power is with the President. So we had to jump through various hoops and spend months trying to get a meeting with the President, which we eventually got. We went to see him with Kevin and some of the other producers and he was very smart and very astute about it. He knew that it was a good idea to remind people how bad Idi Amin as a former dictator had been; he wanted to be viewed as a more democratic President. That was one thing. He wanted to promote international investment and industry in Uganda and he wanted to put Uganda on the map as a tourist destination. One of the key locations was State House, which I had seen from outside when I had been on the previous recce a couple of years before but we had to be able to get access this time. We asked if we could have access to State House, but he told us it had just been demolished the month before, which nobody knew. It was demolished because the Chinese government had offered funding to build a new State House for the Commonwealth Leaders' conference which was coming up in a few years' time. This was a big scandal in the country: this Victorian mansion had been demolished to make way for a new building. He offered us all the government buildings and free use of army personnel and he did basically everything he could to make it possible for us to film there and he was incredibly supportive.

That was a huge asset and then we took the film back there for a première. Forest Whitaker said that's when he was most nervous about screening the film. He's a method actor and he really tried to become Ugandan while he was making the film and it was Ugandan opinion that he was most concerned about. He was delighted when the press loved the film and they said we really captured the spirit of Idi Amin and the spirit of the times in the film. I was back in Uganda a couple of months ago with Forest on a new film he wants to direct in Uganda and it was a long process because everyone there loves the film and loved the way he portrayed Idi Amin. We had people who thought he was Idi Amin, that he was Idi Amin reincarnated in the film. First time he came out on set from the costume department – it was at the hospital – and all the people were shouting “Idi, Idi”. They really thought he was back. That's another reason to make the films about the country and from the country. It's a fantastic privilege and that's what Ugandans kept saying, that they were really glad that we were making their story and we were glad they were allowing us to make the story. We felt we really wanted to be true to the story we were telling – which was the whole reason we wanted to shoot in Uganda and not shoot it somewhere else.

It was a similar approach with *Half of a Yellow Sun* where we've always known that we'd shoot it in Nigeria. We haven't considered shooting it anywhere else, which people think is a bit of a scary prospect. I actually recced that last month and it wasn't at all scary so we're hoping it'll be a similar thing that once we film there, other films will want to shoot in Nigeria.

CM: So it's been a really positive experience for you, working in Uganda, which is very good to hear, I'm sure, for those working there.

AC: Everybody's always really nervous about working in Africa. What I always say is the filming in Africa is easy. It's getting to Africa to film that's the hard part, convincing people that, number one, the film will find an audience and, number two, that it's safe and practical to go there. That's always the big challenge. Every recce, every shoot you go on there's always people questioning whether it's the right thing to do, 'Do you need to go there?' You always have to spend ages convincing people. "Yes, we need to go. Yes, it will work." Then you get there and it's great. It is the hard part convincing all the nervous nellys that we need to go.

CM: For that reason, it's interesting to hear that *The Constant Gardener* was such an inspiration. This, I guess, was a logical forerunner to you merging your company with Potboiler Films.

AC: That's exactly the reason we got together. After *Generation Kill* I was looking for new partners and Gail [Egan] and Simon [Channing Williams] were looking for a new partner because Simon was, sadly, getting ill and he knew he unable to produce with the same energy that he had been. We had met each other over *The Constant Gardener* and we talked about the projects we were planning to do and it felt already like we were in the same company: we were basically making the same kind of films. That was the logic of merging the companies. Then Simon, sadly, died a few months after I had joined the company. We never really got to work closely together. But it's been a very good partnership for Gail and me. In independent producing, it's tough and there's strength in numbers. It's particularly good to find somebody who sees films in a similar way, to make the same type of films, because, as I was saying earlier, the hard part is, if you're all trying to do something different, those are the collaborations that don't work. When you find somebody who wants to do the same thing, then it's good to not have to try to do it on your own.

CM: What do you think about Scottish Screen becoming part of Creative Scotland?

AC: I think it always depends on the people involved in these organisations. I think it was inevitable: that's how things are going in the UK, everyone's getting merged, cutting overheads and so on. But, as long as the people involved can create enough of an identity around screen media and not be submerged into the other arts, that's okay then. That's always the issue: it doesn't really matter what the money is: it's who is administering the money that makes all the difference, because you can make a small amount of money go a long way if you've got the right approach to it.

For example, Film Agency Wales is interesting at the moment. Film Agency Wales was involved in *I Am a Slave*, a film I did which was set in Sudan. Basically what they do is to back Welsh talent wherever they're working. Gabriel Range, the director of *I Am a Slave*, is Welsh and Film Agency Wales were backing him. They weren't really worried about spend in Wales or any of that stuff. They just see him as a talent that they want to promote. They invested a relatively small amount of money in the film, but they turned out to be our best supporters because they see themselves as supporting the talent of film-makers. They don't see themselves as there to make a profit or there for their own status. So whenever, for example, the other investors were refusing cash flow because of a dispute over transmission dates, Film Agency Wales said, 'Look, the film's already happening. They've gotta shoot these dates. We're prepared to put our money in, so you just go ahead and put your money in and stop messing around.'

You need people like that who really are your supporters and basically that's how they operate, they see themselves as enabling Welsh talent, whereas Scottish Screen are much more about Scottish residency and spend and so on. I think that's a very narrow definition. When I was at BBC Scotland, I was much more interested in stuff that created Scottish content and generally developed Scottish talent. We did a show called *Cardiac Arrest* that wasn't set in Scotland but it was shot in Scotland and developed a lot of Scottish directing talent, for example. I think being more open and positive about how you define your Scottishness or Welshness or whatever it is, is much more positive, because it's an international business, fundamentally, making films. If you try to keep it within narrow borders you limit yourself. That's why we had a French co-producer on *Ratcatcher* and so on, that allows you to do a lot more and to work on a bigger scale than being very narrowly domestic.

They have a got a very energetic person at Creative Scotland running Creative Development in the Screen division (Caroline Parkinson). If she continues to do what she says, and just backs talent, is less bureaucratic and so on, then they've got a good chance of succeeding. But they've suffered a lot in the last few years with being very concerned about the bureaucracy, being concerned about the opinions of their constituency. I think in those jobs you have to be a bit bloody-minded and just run with it and make it happen and then people will appreciate the work. I think if you ask for everybody's approval all the time you'll never get anywhere. I'm hoping they'll have the courage of their convictions and just go on and get some films made.

CM: Yes it will be interesting and I guess you have similar opinions about the UK Film Council going away and being replaced by the BFI.

AC: The same people have moved over to the BFI so actually I don't think it'll make much difference. As long as they can stick to their convictions about the films they're making then it

should work. I do think it's about the people; it's not necessarily about the money but how you use the money. If you use it in a positive and enabling way, as the Film Agency Wales do, you can make a huge difference to film-makers. If you're very restrictive and it's all about profits or ticking boxes, then you might as well not have that money because it stops you from doing things rather than helping you.

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