

Michael Darlow, 09/12/11

Michael Darlow is a television director, writer and producer

Interviewers: Ieuan Franklin, Laura Mayne, Rachael Keene

IF: So you knew him [Jeremy Isaacs] from um from the *World at War* [series]...?

MD: Yeah I first met Jeremy in um early 69. I won one of these things, it wasn't BAFTA then [it was the Guild of Television Producers and Directors] and the presentation thing was at a [the Dorchester] hotel in Park Lane, and Kenneth Horne was giving out the awards. And in those days you knew you'd won in advance because the press interviews had to be done before. So I was there knowing I'd have to get up on stage to get the award. And Kenneth Horne was giving them out. And literally, he got to us and he just dropped dead on stage. Terrible....appalling. And so understandably there was a bit of a hiatus....Kenneth Horne was rushed off and was dead by the time he got to hospital. And so uh eventually, I can't remember exactly how we got given this uh lump [award] and Jeremy it transpired had been I think the Chairman of the Jury on it. And we were sitting there, and the evening had got to be a bit of a downer by then, you can imagine. We were sitting there around the table. My first meeting with Jeremy, he had got one of these awards, it had a very heavy base, it was a solid lump of stone. And um we noticed when we got given it, it said 'for Sports Outside Broadcast' – there had been a mix-up – Jeremy slammed it down, all the glasses and bottles jingling, 'They can't even get that right!' [all laugh]. That was my first introduction to Jeremy!

IF: You don't mind us recording this? That's great. I'll send you a copy; we've got a chit form I'll send to you. So...I mean maybe we can start obviously with the campaign for Channel 4, but I was just thinking in terms of our project, which is looking at the influence it's had on film culture, and low-budget filmmaking and so on, where do you think we should trace the narrative back to, because, for example, in your book you look at the BFI 1968 mini-revolt.

MD: It's difficult in a book to know where to start...There had always...I think almost....throughout the history of cinema in Britain, certainly from pretty near the beginning, certainly by the 30s it [British cinema] was then a commercial cinema which was essentially...[it] fairly quickly in British history became the American cinema *really*, because they were the source of finance and also its values had tended to be that [of Hollywood] even when you had the weekly visit to the flicks, even though the films seemed to be very British, which they were, because they were made primarily for British audiences. But that...cultural *shape* of the American cinema was certainly the dominant one from fairly quickly, when cinema became commercial. I suppose if you put it simplistically, 'Charlie Chaplin went to America'. And although there were alternative ideas, I mean if you think of the early years of the Soviet Union, I mean 'cinema is the most important medium for us', which is Lenin isn't it...And um you know the idea of um agit-prop cinema to create the revolution, there was that alternative view. And there was a bit of that elsewhere in Europe but really it's the curse of the English language isn't it, that it's the same as

the Americans speak. They said that there was always this sense that in the cinema a British voice was at a disadvantage and things like the creation of the BFI there's an element of trying to balance that out, to establish the idea of a British film culture. And by post-war the American domination was more and more total, really. So and the cinema for anyone who wanted to get into it, was very out of bounds, or very hidebound. You could only get into it on your conventional terms. So if you take um the films that people like Lindsey Anderson and all those people [made], you know, Free Cinema. And actually 'cos there were large British commercial sponsors who were paying for the films – they weren't a real alternative film culture. But it was there potentially. So there was always this latent...looking for a means of getting an audience and a more open means of expressions. And anybody coming into the cine...or not into the cinema, because on the whole you didn't go into the cinema, or if you did you got into it on such restrictive terms, unless you happened to be the son of the Prime Minister or something, sorry Anthony Asquith. And it was it was difficult and you...the barriers were there. And I understand and sympathise with the technician's unions who felt that they had to protect themselves. Although I'm not a trade unionist, I happen to be an Honorary Member of BECTU...but the um. So people who wanted to get in and find alternative expression, there was always this tension. The BFI therefore was central because of the Experimental Film Fund and all that, although poor [financially] though it was. And then when television started, their entry criteria were rather different, of course. So when BBC 2 starts, every bright university student from Oxbridge...the posh universities in our colonies like Scotland and Wales...[all laugh] [LM: I'll let that one slip] I wouldn't have said it, but I wanted to see if I could get a rise! The um you know, they flocked to join. And you were expected to be...but then there was an element of that mirror image selection which um large...people who look at where you take on manpower and you mirror image select you know...in the BBC. And actually the ITV companies were a very interest mixture of both because it was showbiz on the one hand, sort of Lew Grade on one hand...or there was the um Sidney Bernstein way. The Head of the BFI, who um - Denis Forman - he took on. Sidney had been involved with um with Eisenstein and all that, and bringing their work into Britain with the Film Club [Film Society] in the 1920s and early 30s, so their view was...Cecil was doing showbiz so there was some showbiz. Granada would pretend there wasn't but boy there was! [laughs] ...So you had to be one or the other. But at least you could get in if you were young, if you were interested. There was a chance, it was a bit limited, but you could get in. If you got into ITV you were pretty restricted because of the union arrangements. If you got into the BBC you had to adopt the civil service code, which was very hierarchical. I don't know what the civil service is like now, but in those days it was very regimental, it was very much like joining the navy, promoted slowly, by keeping your nose clean, and all that! People like Huw Wheldon and Hugh Carleton Greene tried to [free things up] but he [Greene] was responding to ITV, and their success. So there was always this sense of frustration...that...free voices weren't allowed or couldn't get in. I think I mentioned it in the book, there was a...the interesting places in the in the arts in the 1950s were really in the theatre. Joan Littlewood, the influence of the French theatre, and later of the Berlin Ensemble. The uh...Royal Court, which interestingly embraced part of that Free Cinema I think because Lindsey, Tony Richardson all [worked there]...and you know, you'd go off to make a film for the National Coal Board, or something. A wonderful young director who sadly, sadly, committed suicide. He was, he'd got out during the Hungarian uprising in '56, Robert Vas. He went and worked for the Coal Board, and he actually made

wonderful films. Forgotten now...but a wonderful filmmaker who died too young [IF: *The Vanishing Street*] Yeah, yeah, wonderful, wonderful. And there were those of us fiddling about on the periphery. And I know that there was a point in my career when the [laughs] there was I remember a mate of mine, born here in Portsmouth, he lives in Chichester and um he and I had this great plan that we were going to start theatres in the round in this country, very much influenced by Roger Planchon in Lyon, and um what was going on in Paris, and all of that. And then there was another man, two of them, one of them was Ken Loach. They were also planning to do something the same. We were all in the theatre, in the peripheries of the West End and television and so on. And um I remember the Arts Council, the head of the drama department took Ken, Bill Hayes, his partner in the venture, and Nick Light and me out to lunch at Scott's restaurant, which was at the top of Coventry Street, kind of looking down Haymarket, it was frightfully grand you know. With sort of flaming things and waiters in tuxedos and all of this stuff. We were taken out to lunch there, and we were told that 'you people are the people we want to be the next generation coming up in the theatre', and we were frightfully chuffed with this. We got nowhere of course, but there was a moment a year or two later when things were beginning to change in television. And I remember saying to Nick, 'I've gotten the chance, I think, to start doing interesting things in television. It's going to be possible to do more interesting work in television than in the theatre, and certainly than in the cinema'. There was no chance of doing work [in the cinema] that was going to be seen, that was interesting. That dichotomy was always there. I remember years and years later bumping into Ken at a party...to do with a football club....and Ken and I saw each other across this crowded room and sort of approached each other, and Ken said, this is only 6 or 7 years ago...'We were going to revolutionize the theatre! Whatever happened to it?' Well I said, 'you revolutionized the British cinema, so that's good enough', you know [laughs]. There was a moment when if you were lucky, then you could get into television. But it was still very restricted. You felt very frustrated at the BBC the civil service thing, or ITV. So when the BFI revolt happened, that feeling and it was '68, there was all that feeling, it was very much in touch with all of that. Um a feeling that the whole world had been...it's in *Look Back in Anger*...the world's been run for too long by people who spend their time looking forward to the past. That the same people seem to have been [in power]...Jimmy Porter says something like that. There was very much that feeling of frustration and it coalesced round this, this button, ITV2. Because there was a possibility - so that was...And there was a sense of kindred spirit. And if you worked at all in the edges of television, and with Denis Mitchell's films, we... some of them we edited at Granada but [with some of those] you'd go and cut at Wardour Street. And David Naden - you know about David Naden? [IF: No] Well David had taught at the London School of Film Technique, which was one of the very few film schools [at the time]. And Dai Vaughan, some of whose stuff [on documentary] you must have read, Dai was one of the people he taught. There were other people - Martin Smith. They were an interesting group of people [see [Graef on Tom Schwalm](#)]. And a lovely lady called Jane Wood, who is alas now dead. He'd set up this editing house [David Naden Associates], cutting the stuff that was for sort of commercial, um, you know small time, you know Reed Paper Group [?] or whatever but also where the ITV companies used film, and very occasionally for bits of the arts, Kensington House for the BBC but much more rarely. Where they didn't have the facilities to do it, they would cut at David's 181 Wardour Street, upstairs. There was Maurice Hatton, all sorts of people would be there. There was this ferment, you'd go down to the Intrepid

Fox or The George, and you would hatch these plans. Everything came together at Wardour Street in that time, oh and the big companies their headquarters were there in Film House, and all that stuff. And there was this collective of interest and of ideas, this ferment of things. It really...the ideas started to ferment there, so that when Maurice and co. led the revolt in the BFI because of the you know they wanted more money for the Experimental Film Fund, because it was the only outlet you could get. The chance of having your film distributed at the end of it was a bit slight! I made one for them, for Contemporary Films but Charlie Cooper at Contemporary Films was one of the only people who took this 16mm stuff. [RK: Did you know Derek Hill at all] Yes, I mean Derek was all part of it. That distribution, and also the New Cinema Club and everything else, yeah absolutely that was all part of the same set. Also going to see...going to the Academy, the Paris Pullman, and the other cinemas that were showing European films. Because God we were envious of the French! They funded film properly and people could get in and do stuff that was interesting. You know, I later made a film about Truffaut. It was wonderful! You know, I mean the sheer jealousy of that and the excitement of it, that you could do this – um why couldn't we? I remember in '65 I think I was working for Bob Heller, who I mentioned in the book, who was a remarkable, remarkable man, sadly, sadly forgotten – shouldn't be. Um I'd worked for the BBC – John Boorman had seen a film I'd made with a mate. My mate was an Assistant Editor at Shepperton, so he was a member of the ACTT so he'd got a ticket. And um he and I made this little film, 16mm film you know. With some friends and all that. We'd made two of them, two little half four films. And Brian Lewis, who was head of the local documentary output at Southern Television, and Tony applied for a job, so Tony took one of our films down. And it just happened that Brian had been an editor at ITN, and so had John Boorman. And John Boorman had just got the job heading regional documentaries at Bristol, BBC. And Tony showed them this film - Tony got taken on, on the strength of the film. And John said, wait a minute, he made this with another chap. And Tony came back and said 'hey, get in touch with John Boorman, he was interested'....So he [John Boorman] took me on to make a film for them, you see, in Bristol. So we'd both [Michael and Tony] gotten into television. Now, Tony'd got a ticket. But I hadn't. You didn't get an ACTT ticket for working in the BBC. The BBC didn't recognise the ACTT; it was the ABS, which was the house union, as we sneeringly said! So when I, I made this one film, which gives you an idea, I think, of how it worked. And then I went off to direct something for the Arts Council in Northern Ireland for 3 months...And I was going to direct a film for John Boorman for a series that he was doing, 'View', a half-hour film [for that]. And my film caused rather a bit of trouble locally because it was about a group of archaeology students doing a dig in the graveyard in Winchester Cathedral. And I'd contrasted them with some old men um in the St. Cross, which is...they're all wearing a uniform, a bit like Chelsea pensioners, except they're not. You know, yeah? And I'd contrasted the two, because the students were all regarded as a bit sort of hooligans by the...if you know Winchester, you know what the people of Winchester are like. And this had caused rather a rumpus locally, and the BBC had had to answer questions from the senior citizens and the Mayor! The BBC Regions used to like to keep up good relations with the region they were in. So when I got back to Bristol the series of films had been cancelled, and my own film had been cancelled. I was what was known as a Production Assistant, which meant I could direct films. When I got back to the BBC, this series had been cancelled – nobody had told me. I had been put on a game show because I was the right rank, grade. Yeah?

RK: So it really was civil service!

MD: Yeah! Absolutely. And I confronted them and said, 'I don't want to work on a game show, I'm going to go back and work in the theatre...I want to make films, this is about self expression', and all that! I served out my minimum time, got married at the same time. And um left. Then what? I still hadn't got a ticket, had blotted me copybook with the BBC. But, luckily through a friend of the family, who was the Vice-Chancellor at [?] University, John Wolfenden, knew the chap who was the Head of Documentaries at ATV, Mike Redington. He'd just left and Bob had taken over, having fallen out with Sidney Bernstein. Bob having been brought over by Sidney to head up their documentaries, having worked on *March of Time*, and having been done by the McCarthy Committee because *March of Time* must be communist (!). A wonderful man, Bob. Have you ever seen the Phil Silvers show, Sergeant Bilko? Well he looked just like Phil Silvers, he made the best dry martini in London. He was a wonderful guy. Anyway Bob saw me...Lew [Grade] had taken him on to keep his licence because um Bob knew the story about [indecipherable]...because he [Bob] was sympathetic to people who had fallen foul of the authorities. So he took me on but he couldn't take me on to direct, because I hadn't got a ticket. But he could take me on as a researcher. And then I could apply for a ticket. I became a researcher for Denis Mitchell, *Day of Peace*, right? [IF: Yeah]. And um I think I've told you [IF] this story, but there was a moment on *A Day of Peace*, we wanted to film...this was one of those big bloody international series where each country makes one, they're always disastrous. And it was going to go out on the 20th anniversary of the end of WW2 in Europe. We'd been out and filmed an East End family but Denis wanted to mix it with sort of bits of British heritage, so one of the sequences we were going to do was the Horse Guards you know riding to change the guard at Buckingham Palace, and down to the Horse Guards barracks just off Knightsbridge, early in the morning, to film this. I was there as a researcher, negotiating with the police to film this [the regiment riding through], with an ATV film crew, unionized of course. And, um, Denis was ill. We got a message from Linda, or I think possibly Linda turned up and said Denis can't get here, you know what the sequence is, just get it. So I shot...as they were there saddling up, polishing their brass...a shot here, a shot here. Denis and I had discussed how we wanted to do it. Word got back to the shop...the balloon goes up. Absolutely disgraceful! Someone without a ticket shooting a film! Black the film! [IF: Manning restrictions...] Yeah, all that. Eventually it blew over. But it was a very clear example of what you dealt with. You know the old hands; I remember I was doing my first film with the BBC. Tony and I had used a wind-up Bolex, shot round the streets in Holloway...And um we hadn't got synch-sound of course, but we'd got a tape recorder, and we'd managed to synch it up...cos it was 16mm and we were into tape joins. We were just on the cusp between tape joiners and cement, because with cement losing the frame was a pain in the arse. But we'd done that. And we came to this thing with the kids in Winchester, doing the archaeological dig. And they'd got all these things they'd dug up, and they were sitting at the table inspecting these things and trying to catalogue them and all that. So I said to George the BBC cameraman – I had a 2 weeks shoot. The first one [the cameraman for the 1st week] was a chap called George Shears who had worked in the BBC at Elstree for years and had worked at MGM. And he had a 16mm blimped Arriflex, and they were pretty bloody big in those days, the blimp was enormous. I said to George what I want, I said 'I want a handheld pan round their faces'. [He said] 'What? Can't do that! *Shoddy work!*' I had never seen

this before or since. He took the camera body out of the blimp and he tossed it at his camera assistant – thousands of pounds of Arriflex! And he caught it. And he said ‘I can’t do that, you shoot it!’ ‘And write on the sheets *shoddy work, shot under protest!*’ And I was meant to be shrivelled, you know, like the witch in the Wizard of Oz. But I didn’t know what it was all about, it was water of a duck’s back to me. Even in the BBC...So there was huge frustration because there was this lightweight equipment. When we went up to Granada, which was better than a lot of places, there was still this over-manning. Famously, *Disappearing World* disappeared because of you know multi-times T. I mean Frank Cvitanovich’s documentary [*Beauty, Bonny, Daisy, Violet, Grace and Geoffrey Morton*] about the carthorses – that became a sort of celebrated case. 100 odd times T because of the overtime, because the horse wouldn’t foal for a vital sequence. If someone’s standing there with a camera a mare is not going to foal, they’re there for hours or days! That sort of thing was hugely frustrating, so the chance of breaking out of that...

RK: That sort of affected early Channel 4 as well didn’t it because there were concerns that the independent producers would not be producing content up to television standards?

MD: Uh...One of Jeremy’s biggest mistakes in the view of many of us, although probably in the long run he was right, was to take the Head of Tech. Ops or whatever it was called at Thames, and make him the equivalent at Channel 4. We used to go out to shoot and he insisted that everything had to be shot on 2-inch Quad if I remember and then on 1-inch um whatever it was called – C1 or whatever, I can’t remember. We were all into something much lighter-weight than that, but it wasn’t up to standard. We used to disguise it. And if we shot the props [?] we’d degrade it a bit so you couldn’t see the difference, so we’d mix the two up. To give you an idea of what went on at Thames, I was shooting at about the time...just in the run up to Channel 4 I think it was, I shot a film written by a Russian dissident, about her experiences as a Russian dissident, you know, shut up in her flat in Moscow with the KGB outside. We had to shoot this sequence outside in a car at night, 3 KGB men, and I counted 68 people in the dinner queue. When I went to ask the Production Manager - I thought perhaps the management had gone out for dinner in Finsbury Park you know – um he said that was normal! When we went into the studio, the first morning I walked in, through the flaps of a little box set...movie studio....[indecipherable] it had a ceiling because I wanted a sense of claustrophobia, I walked in at gallery level at Teddington, so upstairs. There was a *huge* amount of light beaming down on this, literally, box set. And I said to the lighting guy, you’ve got an awful lot of lights on, won’t you cook the actors? He said no we have to have that amount of lights burning, otherwise they say its sub-standard, sub-grade. And this light wasn’t reaching the set, but it was all on! That sort of insanity, you know. It was just a waste of money if nothing else! Can you imagine the poor bloody actors? I suppose it gave them a sense of claustrophobia alright!

IF: Maybe we could return to...you know the Channel 4 Group, and some of that activism later... perhaps because we’re talking about film production, maybe you [LM] wanted to ask about *Accounts*, which might be a contrast to that frustrating experience.

LM: Mmm. Yeah well you of course directed one of the earliest commissioned Channel 4 films, shown in the first series. I wondered first of all if you could tell us a little bit about how that film came to be commissioned.

MD: Uh basically Mike Wilcox had written...had won, jointly with Hanif Kureishi, the year before, the new writing award for the play of *Accounts* at the Royal Court. Hanif wrote the other one, I can't remember what his play was called now. When David Rose and Jeremy were setting up Film on Four they took on Walter Donohue, who'd been at the Royal Court as well. I think – I cannot remember which way round it went. But I think it was Walter Donohue's idea that that would make a film. He talked to David, David said yes, and they approached me. I think it was that way round rather than the other. And I can't honestly remember. So that's where it started. Because we were running a company [Partners in Production] which worked effectively like a collective – it wasn't a collective, it was a company limited by guarantee but in which we were all equal therefore shareholders. Producers, technicians, make-up people and so on. Um Otto Plaschkes, movie producer, worked on that rather fashionable film shot up in Newcastle [IF: *Get Carter?*] about a girl. No, one of the other ones [perhaps *Georgie Girl*]. He also worked as sort of associate producer with people like Huston and things and on things like *Lawrence of Arabia* with all those people as well. Was Plaschkes involved in this as well? We worked with the same people. I can't remember. But we were all part of the company. Otto became the producer. And then Charles Stewart who was part of the company, was much more known for documentary, um famously *Ethiopia* and Roger Graef's *Space Between Words* and all those things. He was the cameraman. And he hadn't done much drama then. But for that sort of film I felt we wanted that kind of thing anyway. The editor, the designer, Tony...Foxy Abbott, wonderful, wonderful man. He'd been um the Head of Design at the BBC and I think he'd just retired or finally got fed up with the BBC. He'd been at Arnhem and all these things, he was known as Foxy because he could find the best camouflage foxhole when you were in trouble, he was a Para, and he got the MC - never talked about it. He became the designer. Um and um so the editor, same sort of thing. Um John Wilcox who became the first assistant to production, we brought into the company because he obviously fitted in with us all. So it was...all the heads of department, were part of it. It was ours. And of course, Channel 4 allowed you to use 16mm, and then if it was going to get shown in the cinema, which was always the hope, they would get it into a form in which it could be shown in the cinema. And anyway you couldn't take lights up those bloody hillsides, those fells – impossible! If you've seen the film. We did it with an unknown cast pretty much. I mean I suppose Jonathan Newth had had a little experience, but none of the others. We cast Elspeth [Charlton] because when we were going to cast the kids, we went up to Newcastle because Mike lived up there...and um he sort of pointed us...and I think Cecil Taylor, C.P. Taylor, the playwright, he was all part of live theatre up in Newcastle. And all that sort of alternative writing that was going on up there, it was very lively in the North East. And Cecil was very much mixed up with all that, although he was a Glasgow lad! And they pointed us in the direction of trying to find these real [people] because that Borders Northumbrian accent is quite something. And if you don't speak that accent almost nobody can do it. And so we wanted real people. So there was [indecipherable]...there was Mike McNally he was a rock.... Bob was a rock singer. And we auditioned these people. Elspeth was playing either in live theatre or the Royal in Newcastle or something, and we asked her to do the readings with them.

And we were so impressed by her that we cast her as Mum. We didn't want stars or anything. And Channel 4 was very much against that [stars] actually, in principle. I set the boys up and they lived on a farm for 3 months, worked on it. So they had to learn to handle the animals. And all that. You know and so when they're doing the sheep dipping, they're not complete experts but they're not complete amateurs either. When they were doing the lambing, OK so the farmer was there. The difficult birth scene, he was there ready to put his hand in and pull at the right moment! But we could shoot it for real. We went in to the rugby club. I don't know what Health and Safety would say now. We put lights in the shower! There's a point when they're out in the town and one of the boys tackles the other. And they were having problems with doing this. We didn't want stunt men. I said, come one, just rugby tackle him. I'd forgotten I had a radio mic on me, because there were other parts of the unit around, being a night shoot there were lights and things. So I tackled...threw myself at him in a way I wouldn't have done normally, in the heat of the moment. Brought him down, said 'do it like that'. Got up and realized I had terrible pain. I remember saying to John [through gritted teeth] 'when we've finished this *get me into a car and get me out* because I think I may have to go the hospital'. I'd broken 2 ribs! It was very much that way, you didn't have stunt men. You know, the scene in the slaughterhouse was for real. We went to a slaughterhouse and did it while they were slaughtering the animals. [LM: That's amazing, and the 2 boys did very very well]. Yes they did. Mike did rather well as an actor, went on to the RSC and things. But...you could do that and *boy*, was that a freedom.

RK: How far did Channel 4 actually get involved? What was your relationship with David Rose and...

MD: Well, David and Walter we told them what we were doing and I think Janet, who was the Cost Controller, came up one day and stood on the mountainside with me and said 'hey, this is lovely' [laughs]. And that was about it. And I mean we came in way under budget, and gave them their money back. When we did the first series of um *The Other Side of the Tracks* we were so embarrassed how much....we'd spent under half the money! We just gave it them all back. But it was a very good move, because we then got 3 more years of it [laughs]. But you know, so it worked like that. And that was so liberating. It wasn't that one's work with the BBC and Thames weren't good, one could do really interesting things. But it was much more regimented. I mean if you could escape out of sight I mean Foxy Abbott who did *Accounts* had done *Crime and Punishment* with me. We managed to escape to places to film with lots of crowd scenes and things. Um and we were also trying, I remember Richard Eyre did a wonderful production of *The Cherry Orchard* and that particular lighting guy, and I think that was Foxy too. Richard - and I, to a much more limited extent - were experimenting with trying to get television studio cameras to look like film, we were using gauzes and painting gauzes. I did a play about the war poets, in which we used gauzes and things that you can go through and light, so that light and shadowy figures could appear and things. But so we got it freer. I remember I walked in one day, either on *Suez* or *Crime and Punishment*. There was no set, I said to Foxy 'where's the set'? He said, 'you're always moving the sets about so I've put the flats against the wall so you can put them where you want'. We were trying. Richard did it wonderfully with *Cherry Orchard* but it was still a bit against the grain although you had enlightened people. If you had a good cast someone like Huw Wheldon would come on the floor. Now they're all in bloody meetings.

LM: Just going back to the subject of finance. In the early days Channel 4 would commission programmes, putting up the money and giving producers a production fee. And if the programme made any money they'd split the money I think it was 70/30. Did you ever get the sense at the time that C4 was exploiting producers in a way [MD: No...] because they also kept the rights. There was a bit of tension...

MD: No. No, there was a feeling amongst the more um commercial producers that they should have more of it, but then they were more willing to risk more of the money. If you look at what the situation now, it's totally [different?]. But to most of us...who were coming in, we just wanted to make the programmes we wanted to make the way we wanted to make them. That's what motivated us. The yeah there were people who came from a different discipline, who saw it differently. And we combined with them. But essentially we were interested in creativity, alternative voices...it wasn't about the commerce. You know, we were decently paid. You know....So there was that dichotomy, it was always there... you keep squaring that circle if you were running IPPA or whatever. It was always a problem, it was always a challenge. And in the end it broke down, in my view but uh.

LM: So in terms of access, being able to make the programmes you wanted to make, did you feel that um for example producers making programmes for Channel 4, yourself for examples, was that original ethos carried on throughout the 80s, of commissioning anyone who had a good idea. Or did they come to rely on fewer commercial companies?

MD: There was always a tension about that but on the whole they were a lot more open. A lot more open than they latterly became. While Jeremy was there it was still maverick. He could still make maverick decisions. And the vital thing is that you make some decisions that go wrong, otherwise you can't make any that go right really, can you? And Jeremy had the sense to see that, and he got shtick for it of course. But he put up with it. So that...it wasn't perfect but it was certainly a darn sight better than most of the other places. I mean bits of the BBC could be like that, but only in limited ways. If you worked in Kensington House for one of the good guys, you could get away with that, because Kensington House was off the map, compared with the centre. Difficult in the mainstream departments, like drama, although there were periods like with *The Wednesday Play*, where you could. Quite a lot of the drama producers who worked in the BBC harboured ambitions I think to work in feature films. That's understandable. But the result was that they actually wanted to push the cost up. And they wanted it more because it was going to be the calling card. There was a tendency in this way. And actually film wasn't always the cheapest way of doing it – far from it, actually. There were things...which if you treated the medium right that you...it wasn't until much later that we started to use lightweight tape cameras properly. I mean in the book there's all that stuff about the helicon scan units at Granada, for instance. I mean, drives you insane! You know, the technology which was not there [available to be used] but...if it had been used it [video camera technology] would have probably developed quicker, because technology *does* [develop] in response to what you want from it. In the same way that the people who developed the Aurican [?] it was a response to...you know. So you got those cameras. I mean I remember Bob Heller, one of his best gestures to me, sent me off to a conference in Frankfurt I think it was, a UNESCO event with Leacock and the Maysles and everything....and I was just with all these great people, and to go and observe, because they'd got all this kit. And they showed

it...there were all sorts of extraordinary people there...you know I found myself sitting down to dinner with the great, ancient and retired, names of the movie industry! But there was a moment [of overkill]; there was that sort of moment of insanity. I remember when they said, there was some American senate hearing about someone. And they were there [the documentary filmmakers] with their camera, and they got permission. And there, there were all these television cameras and these guys with the blimped Arriflexes, [American accent] "you see when the delegate from the Soviet Union got up and stormed out they couldn't follow him but we could"! And there they'd show us the shot you see. They said, "We were so busy following, we fell over!" So the whole fucking thing you've got the back of the guy's head receding and the camera goes to black because he's fallen over, and actually the guy sitting in the security council have got a better shot because they've got the reaction shot, [not] from the back of the head [all laugh]. But they didn't see that [all laugh]!

IF: When uh when you made *Accounts* as Laura said that was like the really early period of Film on Four. Was there ever any discussion about it being shown in the cinema?

MD: Yes it was going to get released in the cinema, and then for some reason...it was going to get shown in one of the cinemas that used to be on Piccadilly Circus, Otto managed to talk his way into that. And then the cinema actually closed, the company went bust or something, can't remember what the reason was. It didn't get that showing. It was selected by the panel at the New York Film Festival, because they did a representative [retrospective?] season of Channel Four. But they showed it with subtitles, which was quite interesting. I gather from Mike Wilcox, who's been championing this, Channel 4 have just released a DVD of it for use in cinema clubs, apparently. *Apparently*...it is claimed to be the only or [rather] the first gay movie made in Scotland. So amongst the gay campaigners in Scotland it is apparently something of a cause celebre. I don't know this, you probably know more about this than I do. This is what Mike Wilcox told me a few weeks ago.

IF: In the book you talk about, this is jumping ahead a bit with Film on Four, but you talk about the fact that after a certain time they weren't television events really, they didn't have a social and cultural impact compared to *Walter* and some of the early things.

MD: I think that's right. One part of Jeremy's aim had been to make films to go into the cinema [first] and in a sense he did it almost too well. It became the British movie industry, but as we all know, the British movie industry is one of those industries with a chronic illness, every 2 years there's the great revival then its bust again 2 years later. For the whole of my lifetime it's been like that, since the era of quota quickies and all that [laughs].

IF: So I suppose yeah after a while you didn't have the Film on Four strand at all on the television, and it separated.

MD: Not like that. There are movies that they show that have a good airing in the cinema first. Whereas in the old days it tended to be the other way round. So that yeah something like *Walter*.

IF: What about the...

MD: Even *My Beautiful Laundrette* went out on telly first.

LM: It was shown at the Edinburgh Film Festival and people said this should go into the cinemas.

IF: [And it did] unlike David Hare's recent thing [*Page Eight*] which was shown at Edinburgh, and then went straight onto TV. Also you talk about the effect that it [Channel 4] had on TV drama. Do you think it had a negative effect, did it kill off the single TV drama?

MD: Not on its own. But what it did do was to start to prioritise, as happens in film, the director over the writer. And in TV drama always the writer was prioritized over the director. If you look at the Wednesday Play they may have been directed by Ken Loach or whoever, but you remember who they were written by. That is the difference I think. Um and I think that television is the poorer for that, on the whole. Because...television is not the cinema, and it ain't the theatre. But in some ways, if you think about the experience of sitting in your living room, looking at the television, I believe that it is in some ways its closer to the theatre than it is to the cinema. Also what is the most powerful thing on television? The most powerful thing on television is the camera. If it's not wildlife or the real event, a bomb blowing up, it's the camera sitting, watching Richard Nixon or whoever is the potential guilty man, lying. Television or at least the tradition of television, if you haven't got one of those widescreen [TVs] is the right size; it's akin to the face across the table to you. In the cinema that relationship is not quite the same because it dominates you in a way. And in television that's the most powerful thing. And if you look at the best of the Wednesday Plays, frequently they depend on that. Look at the work of David Mercer or somebody. They very much depend on that. Wonderful actors, people like Judy [Dench?] and so on. That is what I think it's lost. That prioritizing of the director over the writer. I might say that because I come from a theatre background and so on. But I don't care how spectacular the fucking thing is, if it's vacuous it's vacuous. I would rather you know, certainly if I'm sitting at home, that's what's going to engage me. Unless...it may be different for the new generation [using mobile phones].

RK: Certain films feel like cinema films, and you watch them in the cinema, whereas watching at home you're not really going to get the benefits of it.

MD: That's what I feel. I'm old. I'm sure that your generation probably don't think like that. It think that's the big loss. But it's a big loss overall you know, as television as got more plural in the sense of the number of channels, it has got a great deal less plural, less catholic in its tastes. Yeah? So you've got to have something that's sure-fire. So, yeah, alright it may be a very good American returning series but at the end of the day that is not what I *think* those of us who campaigned in the '60s and '70's for it, is what we came in for. In fact it's the very thing we campaigned *against* in some ways.

RK: Yeah I suppose we don't see a great deal of British drama of a certain type on Channel 4...

MD: Where's the one-off play gone?

RK: No it'll be a mini-series if anything... *The Promise, Any Human Heart*...

MD: That's right...or it'll be that, or it'll be sort of endless bits of *Downton Abbey* till the time that it becomes stupid...High gloss fine, but it don't quite have the content of *Brideshead Revisited* do it? Or *Jewel in the Crown*...or *Boys from the Blackstuff*.

IF: Just going back to the kind of campaigning aspect of it all then...um that was a long period wasn't it [laughs] the Channel 4, kind of long genesis of it, I suppose there was a lot of influences that came together, with Anthony Smith's ideas, the Free Communications Group, and things like that. Was the IFA always a bit separate from the people who were in independent television?

MD: A little bit, yes. Because they...well they pre-existed us...and they came from a rather different tradition. Nearly all the other people who were campaigning had in some way been engaged in television, if you analyse it. Or they had been engaged closer to the mainstream of filmmaking. So there was that difference. On the other hand...and the IFA didn't aspire I don't think to make what we thought should be mainstream television, you know. They were talking to their own specialist audience in a sense and were happy to do that. They wanted to be seen on a wider stage [but] whereas I think we, all of us, from our different perspectives, wanted to be talking to Britain, in some way. It was about cultural, political, social change, all that....It could be that we're just approaching a similar moment politically now, as people get more pissed off, you know? I mean if you perhaps saw that *Storyville* on BBC 2 the other night about um you know where the great financial crash came from, deregulation and everything. [Talks about people looking for political alternative]. But maybe it'll come back...interesting thing is um the web, the internet, comes back to Philip Whitehead's question he wanted me to ask Peter Jay, 'so why didn't the photocopier revolutionize publishing?' I think there's a bit of that. He was a wise wise man...It's awfully easy to dismiss it....

IF: Jeremy Isaacs when he gave that speech at the Edinburgh Television Festival [MD: That was a downer...] It's strange that...do you think he completely changed his mind about that? Because he [originally] thought there was no such thing as an independent producer.

MD: He'd had bad experiences of course, because he'd gone off and made that thing with that chap, that ex-gangster in Glasgow...and had terrible difficulty getting that placed, and so on. It think that perhaps soured his experience. He'd seen all the blocking of this stuff before, and sort of...it was all going to be different in the '60s wasn't it, after Free Cinema became mainstream, it didn't last very long. I think he feared we'd get co-opted and so on. And anyway you couldn't see the people...could they go out and make these programmes, or would they be a total bloody mess? I mean a reasonable person would have said it would be a total mess, they don't know what they're doing. Where is all the technology, where are the cameramen to come from? 'Cos we hadn't got your little DV camera that anyone can use...I think his fears weren't unreasonable, but they were groundless. I think we just thought *we're going to do it*...but then we were young...and arrogant and confident and all that.

IF: I suppose he [Isaacs] wasn't to know that the ITV companies would hold back.

MD: No he wasn't, and that was, boy did they shoot themselves in the foot. That was the most stupid bloody policy they ever made, that shows their arrogance and loss of touch, doesn't it? Yeah, I mean...stupid. David Plowright explaining that you know they should have been very honest about it. Well I used to go and you know have

drinks with Denis Forman very regularly through all of this. Even Denis, the most enlightened of men in many ways, got it...didn't understand [?]

IF: Um once the Channel had started I think I remember you saying [in the book] that John Wyver was a big supporter and got some funding to carry on the Channel Four Group, and then it was the Channel Four Users Group, and then it dissipated.

MD: Yeah, that was a strong sense that we had to keep Channel 4 from straying from what we wanted it to be, in so far as we'd got Jeremy and people like David Rose, people who were brought in [IF: Alan Fountain] yeah absolutely...it must be kept to the mark. Not stray off...and it mustn't repeat itself and all that, repeat success is the bane of everything in television...Um so yeah there was a strong sense that um they had to keep the faith. A bit like, sort of, part of the Roman Catholic Church ginger group!

IF: I mean um to get to that point you know with the campaigning, it's really interesting in the book, the way your argument had to be couched in the language of enterprise and small businesses.

MD: Yeah I mean you see when Thatcher got in, we were *so* gloomy. That evening when we were all sitting there, saying oh God, you know we've kind of blown our careers up potentially and all for...God...you know, and then *somebody* I don't know, nobody seems to know which person it was, said 'wait a minute, wasn't there all that stuff about small businesses?' 'Wait a minute, yeah! That's us, what does it say? Because there were people who had contacts, which was a help. I can't imagine having contact with Keith Joseph but.... [IF: Anthony Smith was networking...] Yeah, old Tony. It was a broad enough church actually, just about. I mean it could divide up into factions but I think many of us had seen the real damage in things like the ACTT, and the Labour Party [indecipherable] too...But some of those ACTT meetings and Equity too um were a real warning that you mustn't...you had to keep it together. I think we were at least that realistic. Also most of us weren't hugely dogmatic, except about wanting a free channel. We weren't Trots...or right on Conservatives whatever their wretched group were. Yeah there was the odd Trot sympathiser, the odd Ken Trodd kind of figure. But Ken always said he wasn't a Trot, he just had many friends who were, probably true actually. Also we'd learned a lot actually from fighting campaigns in the unions again. Um I mean I wasn't hugely involved in Equity by then, as I had been in earlier years. But certainly those were pretty searing experiences. You could suddenly see the power of the old...Stalinists and things. Um and that was...for someone relatively politically young that was quite an eye-opener to suddenly see that happen I thought Christ that's textbook...so yeah there was that sense that we should just be a relaxed coalition, because there were things we all held in common about what the channel should be. We weren't going on to create a complete set of articles...

IF: And you kept the trade association separate from the campaigning group.

MD: That was necessary. Otherwise it couldn't have been a broad church. That was very necessary. I had my fights with the trade association later. And it, in my view, turned into something else. That was very necessary in the early years, and also to get ourselves into the other broadcasters as well. 'Cos that became something...they could cut you off at the knees if you couldn't get...if you've only got one outlet, you weren't actually going to get anywhere, you hadn't got any freedom. There was

no...what used to be Bob Heller's refugee camp. But that was one of the good things...I remember Jeremy Isaacs when I left Granada in a rather public spat over *Johnny Cash* [at San Quentin]. Jeremy summoned me, and so almost his first remark to me at lunch was, I walked round that Granada car park in Quay Street many times and thought of doing what you did but I never did it. So now I've got an idea for you [laughs]...

LM: ...Yeah just to kind of...talking about...the free market model which was kind of created by Channel 4 um did have its disadvantages of course um in that there was such an influx of submissions by independent producers and the small companies as time went on did tend to flounder and it wasn't sustainable for them. And there was a sense of opening out further and wanting more. I wonder if you could tell us a little about your involvement in the 25% campaign.

MD: Well basically there was too much potential work and not enough outlet for it, and so there had to be another outlet, also you had to be able to hawk it around in order to [LM: Of course...] ...etc.etc. But remember *way back* in the past, where the Channel 4 campaign came from and all that was a sense that television wasn't free enough, whether it was by dint of the unions and the commercial managements or the civil service [organizational culture of the BBC] which we talked about before. So the logical extension was to you know try to infiltrate that into the established broadcasters. So it was both things. That made entire...principled ethical sense as well as good commercial entrepreneurial sense. So you could combine a pretty good mixture with that, but you were going to run into trouble with the unions particularly who would see you as a undercutting threat, so you had to handle it within that context. But while Thatcher was in No. 10 there was a way of doing that, if...well no knowing with Tony Blair's Labour Party, but if the old Labour Party had been around the argument would have been cultural. Much more than it was in Thatcher's case. So um and again, it happened that because we were a broad church of people and with lots of different contexts and life experiences and so on, that we had the vital contact with the head of the policy unit. Um you know. That we...it was possible for Sophie [Balhetchett] and me to be taken in then...and then start talking to them. Now that was the...that was probably the critical thing. And we'd got other contacts that were also being made but that got us to Madam...So it was a logical sense but the danger, which I think we did perceive but not clearly enough, was that in the end the independents would start to become proper commercial companies in the senses we didn't like. Um. That was my view of what happened, very much. [IF: The kind of...super-indies...] They in my view in many cases are worse than the broadcasters and I have perhaps a particularly prejudiced view...but in many cases they represent all the things that one least, actually, wanted, in what should be a cultural, creative occupation.

RK: And is there a distinct turning point, do you think, or were there multiple factors that play into it...

MD: Well there were various points in which the commercial operators tried to say we know more than these people, they kept doing that. But there came a point in which they became rather more persuasive to the powers that be of course.

RK: Do you think the changing of the powers that be might of you know particularly at Channel 4 with the switch to Michael Grade, do you think that had an influence on these things as well, and the Broadcasting Act...

MD: Yes. Of course. And sadly Michael Jackson, who should have been 'our boy' [IF: He was central to your campaign]. I haven't seen Michael Jackson for many years but I have argued with him pretty violently about that. Perhaps Sophie should not have fed him [laughs]! [IF: When he was a starving young campaigner!] But yeah...no, I'm an old man who just says it was better in my day, I'm aware of that. Um but I sort of have a sense that if I had my time over again, the conversation I had with Nicholas then about going into television, I don't think it would be the same...Now I honestly don't know. Things are in a pretty bad state of flux all around, politically...

IF: In the book it comes across that you were able to have an influence on the IBA despite the fact that they were so much concerned with the interests of the ITCA, they began to see you [the independents] as a credible force.

MD: Also we did perhaps represent something which might be quite useful, um didn't we? The sclerosis had got into ITV, and it [independent production] might be a way of starting to loosen it...I suspect that people like Colin Shaw, who's a wise old bird and you know should have been in the Mi5, shouldn't he, charming... [RK: We've interviewed him...] Oh have you, he's a lovely man. I think he was quite liberal in some ways, he worked with Huw Wheldon...he was a man with considerable cultural background, he had been a radio dramatist and so on...And John Whitney, actually, once you get to know him, he had a wonderful collection of original sculpture in his office at the IBA, which was all his...A very cultured and civilised man. You think, a commercial radio man, he can't be cultured! There was that element there, you could talk to them, and they liked that, of course they did...Um...Ah I think we were a quite useful tool anyway. We were well aware of the fact that we were being used, the question is did we get co-opted? That's always the danger, that was always the angst. Keeping...trying to make sure one wasn't getting co-opted in the wrong way....But ITV could not continue to go on like that, it was insane...it was uncreative. The trouble is by the time we managed to loosen it, of course, other commercial pressures came into play, and then of course there was Rupert Murdoch. He turns up doesn't he, all down the thing, takes over the Daily Herald, The Sun, he goes it and does bloody LWT, which was always a doubtful proposition anyway, promising what it couldn't deliver. And has he had his come-uppance now, with his little boy, I don't know!

LM: But yeah it was quite amazing in a way in the early 90s, because the monolithic BBC were suddenly having to accept commissions from independent producers and they hadn't...

MD: Actually a lot of senior people in the BBC were jolly glad of it, actually because suddenly they could get in stuff from outside it had also got a bit...they hadn't had a new intake since BBC 2! So actually that wasn't from their point of view such a bad thing. I think most of the senior people in the BBC in that time would say to you...you know...give them a chance (?) But now the impression that I get very much is that in the old days producers and heads of department were trusted to make programmes, yeah you got a kicking if there was a problem....Today it's like Hollywood, there are

umpteen people who'll come in and tell you what you've got to do. And your script, you know, unless it's by someone who they've heard of and is famous and will give you lots of kudos will get buggered around by a bunch of people who have probably done no more than one media writing course, if you know what I mean, and haven't actually sweated it out in you know the second theatre in Salisbury...or the Vic or what have you, or banging round Soho.

RK: So do you think the profile's quite similar across the BBC and Channel 4 now, are they closer....

MD: The honest answer is I don't know...no I read some of the trade papers occasionally in a rather...when I've got nothing better to do.

IF: Do you have any thoughts on the BBC's filmmaking, because in the early 90s they started having Screen One and Screen Two [finally, after such a long time].

MD: Oh yeah it's jolly good stuff, of course they did, hats off to them...The tragedy is that what was left of it went into only doing that...where would David Mercer be today? You know...um Dennis Potter tried to straddle both, but actually his best stuff was proper television. You know where would those people be? Where would the Armchair Theatre [plays] of Harold Pinter be, and all those other playwrights? The playwrights who used to write for the BBC North of England when Alfred Bradley was running it. Yeah there was an outlet but by God it's a poor living out there in the fringe theatre still. But that's where it is. And some of it's beginning to be in self-publishing on the Internet maybe. But um for some years, in my observation has been that I can get a more challenging and interesting in terms of text, performance may not be too good, but in terms of the text, in a fringe theatre. You go and see something that makes you think, hey that's interesting...that's showing a bit of something to do with the world in a way I hadn't thought of before. And that, when we were all young was where we wanted it to be. Now I don't think that's got as much chance as it had. The other people like Nick Fraser [?], there are honourable people trying but it's very difficult. There's the odd little 5 minute film on Channel 4 tucked away somewhere.

RK: I think the schedule is problematic with TV now, I think the Channel 4 schedule has certainly changed from the early days, hasn't it.

MD: Absolutely, that eclectic mix. Because they've got to compete with [so] many more [channels], they feel they have got to have...and also the financing has changed a bit too, so they've got to have a secure size of audience for most of the time, they can't afford to do what Jeremy could do.

RK: 'Cos it's always a very distinct slot [now], you know that 8 o'clock on Channel 4 will be a lifestyle programme of some sort...and that wasn't always the case.

MD: Now that...Mike Grade really did that...I mean it was happening a bit in the latter part of Jeremy's time but Mike you know was a traditional scheduler, brought up in that school of scheduling. And you know by his light very effective at it, but um I think its culturally the poorer...And I mean I think all the channels...I mean where do you look now, apart from a little bit of BBC 4, and a little bit occasionally of BBC 3 maybe. But it's difficult isn't it? And that's very sad. Because I still believe that the medium has real possibilities I just feel that too much of the time that's not realised.

That's not to say there's not good things on from time to time – there are. But there ain't the danger, which is a regret. You know, it doesn't feel culturally as exciting.

RK: I suppose it's part of the thing that if there's only 4 channels you'd be watching maybe 1 or 2 things and it was an event, and you'd go and talk about it in the office, and there's nothing like that now.

MD: That's right...You're absolutely right, that's a big part of it...There's lots of good creative stuff, and bright young people, but I fear for the outlets they have.

IF: It's difficult for them to get through, for their voices to be heard.

MD: Yes, to get in and to get taken on from that. There's always an element of fluke. Someone happened to see your film. Tony happened to see Brian and see the film, and John just happened to be there, so I get a job. But I think there were slightly more chances. Actually then, getting into ITV was bloody difficult, because of the unions, and the BBC, if you hadn't been to Oxford or Cambridge, or otherwise Edinburgh or perhaps even Durham, go into religious programming...if you don't conform you can forget it. I mean it was very like that...Boy was it a boy's club! [Talks about Grace Wyndham Goldie...] I don't want to be over-disappointing sounding but we were very lucky to have the chance...and we didn't protect it. Whether we could have done is a slightly different question but the fact that it's gone backwards I fear the previous generation is always responsible for what we have now.

RK: So do you think Channel 4 could have been protected in some way, or is that inevitable?

MD: You can't protect one bit of it, you have to protect the whole lot, don't you? And I think as competition made the whole thing get more commercial at the broadcasters end, and as independent producers got more competitively commercial and more financially ambitious [at their end], it changed the parcel sold [?]. I think for me the archetypal example, and I can't remember if this is in the book or not, but there came a point at which PACT, which remember had been set up at least in its IPPA/Channel 4 Group part, to represent programme makers, not commercial companies, it was programme makers who were behind it, started to negotiate to try to stop directors and others having an ongoing share in the um like an author's share, a residual share in the work. Now that for me kind of it had lost touch totally, indeed I left it after that, with where it had come from. Mike Dibb and I were both appalled, and 1 or 2 other people...tried to cling to that idea, what was the point of paying fees to something that was working against me? I didn't have to have it, because you know the negotiation of union agreements and things had moved on. Also, independent producers now certainly went through a period when they were by far the worst people over employing so-called trainees or interns. Who were actually shooting the programmes...and they weren't paying them or giving them jobs. That's disgraceful! ... The idea that independents were doing that, that's not why we came in at all! ... What is PACT doing, it should be throwing out of membership people who have done that ... 'Cos you're going back to...how did I come to make my first two films? My Mum was the local organizer of a refugee appeal for World Refugee Year. And she'd done a deal with J. Arthur Rank that they would have a midnight matinee in the local Odeon for some latest blockbuster ...and then the British film industry has a crisis, one of its biennial crises...J. Arthur Rank pulls the movie, my

Mum hadn't got her main event. Cornered by a journalist she said 'I'll make my own bloody film!' It is reported, she is stuck with it, so she then turns to me and one of the other people on the committee, who was Tony, who worked as an assistant editor at Shepperton, and said for God's sake you've gotta make it. She gave the money to buy some film, Tony had a wind-up Bolex, and it really started from there! So we both had Mums...Tony had a Bolex, and my Mum could afford the film stock! And we used the cutting room at night when Tony was working, 'cos they were cutting 16mm in part of it. We were privileged. But anybody who wasn't that privileged...but now...you can go out with a baby (digital) video camera. But when kids used to come to me with a job, I used to say 'what have you made?' If they hadn't used one of these things...if you really interested you're going to do that, aren't you, just because you want to do it. It's like a painter's gotta paint, or a writer's gotta write...