

INTERVIEW

The Art and Craft of Producing Films: Simon Relph

Andrew Spicer

Simon Relph has become a forgotten figure in British cinema history and yet he made a major contribution both as a successful independent filmmaker from c. 1981 to 2005 – making twenty films as either producer or executive producer (see filmography) – and as the first Chief Executive of British Screen (1985-1990), the successor to the National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC).¹ Relph's grandfather, George (1888-1960), was a distinguished stage and film actor; his father Michael (1914-2005), who formed a long-term partnership with director Basil Dearden, was a successful production designer, writer and producer working principally at Ealing Studios. Although he initially resisted following in their footsteps, Simon Relph gradually became convinced that film and theatre were his real passion. He started out as a third assistant director on a television series at Rank's Beaconsfield Studios in 1961, working his way to first assistant director on the Betty Box-Ralph Thomas comedy *Hot Enough for June* (1964). Box became a mentor, encouraging Relph to learn about the whole craft of filmmaking, including pre- and post-production work, which stimulated an interest in producing rather than directing.

Thus although Relph continued to work as assistant director on a number of prestigious productions at Pinewood and Shepperton studios in the 1970s – including Roman

Polanski's *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (1971), John Boorman's *Zardoz* (1974) and John Schlesinger's *Yanks* (1979) – he moved inexorably towards producing. His opportunity came on Warren Beatty's *Reds* (1981), a major American production filmed in the UK. Relph was hired as assistant director but took over as executive producer when Charles MacGuire, whom Beatty had brought with him to perform that role, returned to America early in the production.

Relph's cinematic education and training was augmented by a four-year period running the backstage operation at the National Theatre (1974-78) and supervising the move to a new complex at the South Bank. This job developed his organisational abilities and brought him into contact with some of the UK's most gifted actors and directors. He was particularly influenced by the work of Schlesinger and his long-term producer Joseph Janni, whose films represented the kind of intelligent, probing, character-driven productions Relph aspired to make, whose cultural inspiration was European rather than American. This orientation underpinned the formation of two production companies, Skreba and Greenpoint, in the early 1980s.

The interview that follows is edited from a much longer one conducted at Relph's home on 19 April 2013. In making this selection, I have chosen to focus on his career as an independent producer and film commissioner, which provides a fascinating insight into the fluctuations of the British film industry and the problems of public finance during this period.

Andrew Spicer (AS): When did you start to gravitate towards producing?

Simon Relph (SR): When I went into the industry I had ambitions to be a director. But I began to realise that actually my strengths were in the administration of the creative process. So what I wanted to be was a senior production executive, but running the film, as it were, from the floor, rather than from an office. My models were Betty Box, and Joe Janni who produced John Schlesinger's films. The Janni/Schlesinger films were the kind of movies I wanted to make, more than those by Betty and Ralph [Thomas] who were doing pretty mainstream, commercial, British films. As I worked with some hugely talented directors, including Schlesinger, Roman Polanski and John Boorman, there was something I recognised in these directors that I'd call a ruthless streak. Ruthless in the sense of determined to get what they wanted, almost at any price. I had a confrontation with John [Schlesinger] in the middle of shooting *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, which was a seminal moment when I realised that I wouldn't perhaps be able to do that. Polanski said to me one day, in a fury, "You are too full of the milk of human kindness!" - which was a quote from *Macbeth*, the film we were making at the time.

At the National Theatre I was called a 'Technical Administrator', the person who would run the whole backstage operations and as a result, I encountered a whole lot of writers and directors and designers – I was responsible for the designers – who were precisely the kind of people who I admired and aspired to work with. Through that, I formed relationships that then fed my producing career. I was there for just a little over four years, before John, who was directing at the theatre, asked me to do *Yanks* as Production Supervisor, which meant I had a bit more authority. *Reds* was really crucial in terms of the final step before becoming a producer. Warren [Beatty] was the last part of my film education in producing. I said to Warren I'd like to be a chief executive – what they now

call a line producer – and to run the production side of the film from the floor. He liked that idea. I was producing with Warren, although he was absolutely the boss in every way.

AS: Was the next step to form your own production companies?

SR: Well, during this time the nucleus of what became Skreba was occurring. Anne Skinner, whom I'd met as assistant director on *Séance on a Wet Afternoon* [1964] where she was Production Secretary, had discovered a book by Rebecca West, *Return of the Soldier*, which she wanted to develop. She asked me if I would work with her on it. We had to actually raise the money out of our own pockets, as I remember, because nobody was going to give us any. It was really hard going. This was all going on whilst I was doing *Reds* on which Zelda Barron was working, though Zelda wasn't involved with us at this stage.

The financier [of *Return of the Soldier*] was an orthodontist from California, called Barry Cooper, who we were introduced to by a very, very reputable American lawyer. He put up some of the money for the development of the film, and indeed was planning to put up all the money. The difficulty then was trying to piece the film together – choose a director, get the actors, which was going on in the background whilst I was still working on *Reds*. By this time we thought it would be nice to have Zelda as a partner. Anne and Zelda knew each other well, even though they'd never worked together – because obviously they did the same job. Nigel Wooll, who was my production manager, came up with the idea of the name Skreba: it's the first two letters of our three surnames: Skinner, Relph and Barron. Skreba was set up by three people all of whom had been working as 'technicians' on the floor, but who had ambitions to have more control over their work.

Annie and I had both worked with Glenda Jackson and Alan Bates who said they'd do it and Annie knew Julie Christie as they'd worked together on *Darling* [1965]. Glenda and Julie were both Oscar winners. But because there was a need for American investment, they said: "Oh well, you must have somebody who means more to the American audience." Annie had worked with Ann-Margret on Richard Attenborough's *Magic* [1978], and thought she was brilliant – a wonderful chameleon actor and total grasp of accents. But she is, after all, Miss Las Vegas. So she arrives to shoot the movie and it's my job to go and meet her. I don't think I went to the airport but was waiting at the hotel. She steps out of the car wearing a ten-gallon hat, a blouse going down to I don't know where. She's got a brooch on that flashes when you speak. She's got cowboy boots and absolutely amazing shades. So my heart sinks; I thought "My God; what have we done here?"

Anyway, she turns out to be incredibly sweet, lovely woman. I was there to arrange for her to come the next morning and do her make-up and hair tests. So she appears on the stage and she's dressed in the part. There, suddenly, is this little tiny mousey character that she played in the film. She was wonderful in the film. We start shooting, and by this time Barry Cooper is sending us money, about half a million of a £2 million budget. But about two weeks into the film, suddenly there is no money. I had to go to the crew and the actors and say "I'm really sorry, but we've got all these contracts and the money's not coming in; I don't believe it's going to come. So, we have to stop." We thought at that point that our careers as producers were at an end.

We'd taken the film to a man called George Walker, a boxer, whose principal claim to fame was that he had made two rather successful films called *The Bitch* [1978] and *The Stud* [1981] starring Joan Collins. He was desperately keen to meet Julie Christie, because he obviously thought she was wonderful –as indeed she is and was. And he went to Cannes every year, but he was always seen to be somebody who was a bit of an opportunist. He thought if he went to Cannes with a respectable film then he might get invited to screenings, get the 'red carpet treatment'. Although he basically took Annie and I to the cleaners because he said we had sided with the American before and not with him, the film got finished. George was invited to Cannes and our careers as producers, happily, were saved. It was a baptism of fire, but a good example of what producers have to deal with.

AS: What was the difference between Skreba and the second company you formed at this time, Greenpoint?

SR: The origins of Greenpoint come out of the National Theatre time. Several of the people who were partners in Greenpoint – David Hare, Richard Eyre, Stephen Frears, John MacKenzie, and Christopher Morahan who was the leader – were all making films for the BBC; films that could not then be shown in the cinema. They were all desperate to make movies that might be seen in the cinema. This was the time at which Channel 4 was just setting up. The [Senior Commissioning Editor] David Rose and [Chief Executive] Jeremy Isaacs had both worked with these directors and writers and wanted to make films that would be cinema films. Ann Scott, who became my business partner in Greenpoint, had started at the BBC in the story department before becoming the in-house producer on a number of the films these people had worked on. So the idea was that she would bring

home the team and that I was going to teach them about the movie side of things, about the realities of the world of feature film. The first film we did together was *The Ploughman's Lunch* that was absolutely typical of the type of project. All this was bubbling and being set up whilst *Return of the Soldier's* going on.

Skreba, a collective of producers looking round to find interesting writers and directors to work with, was a bit more mainstream than Greenpoint, which was primarily a collective of writers and directors whose aim was to enable the talent within it to do what they wanted to do. In fact, that was the principle upon which it was founded, there wasn't some kind of board sitting there and deciding which project we would or wouldn't do. If you were part of that circle, you had the absolute right to make a film. None of the others could deny you that. So you were free to make whatever film you wanted to make and the others were all pledged to support you. We had a very simple mechanism: a small share of the proceeds, if there were any, belonged to Greenpoint itself as the production company, the rest belonged to people who actually made the film. There was no money inside Greenpoint. It never had resources beyond those it raised for each individual film. It existed primarily to enable the creative talent that was its centre to do their own work and to do it under their own control, with Anne and me acting as their trusted partners. Skreba was much more three people, all of whom had been very close to the centre of the films in which they were employed, suddenly thinking we'd just like to take that extra step.

AS: How did Skreba become involved in Bill Douglas's *Comrades*?

SR: *Comrades* came about because I had a good relationship with David Rose at Channel 4. Bill Douglas was supposed to be making this film with Merchant Ivory but they

obviously just didn't click. Then David asked me if I would take it on. I had this curious link with Bill Douglas, because my father was the head of the BFI Production Board that had initiated and funded Bill's trilogy.² I did think there was something pretty remarkable about the screenplay that Bill had written. It was unlike most other screenplays in the sense it was so completely visual – extraordinary. *Comrades* was the most satisfying film I produced. Bill, in my view, is a cinema genius. It was really tough going, doing it, but *Comrades* is a film of great beauty. I always look at it now and I think “My God, it's just amazing.” I was always interested in films that were fundamentally about the human condition and politics with a small ‘p’. *Comrades* actually epitomises what I mean by that. It's about those characters, those individuals, but it has an enormous political dimension about what's right and wrong.

AS: What markets were Skeba and Greenpoint's films aimed at and how were they financed?

SR: We were not making the kind of films that would attract or interest Hollywood Studios. They were much more typical of European cinema. We weren't trying to go for the broader American market at all, although we did have some success with the independent USA distributors. But they would not finance our films because even the American independents can pick and choose, and they like to wait and see. And the UK film distributors were simply not making any investment in British feature films. They made money from distributing American films, but very, very little of was reinvested in British film. The idea of UK distribution investing in indigenous UK film just doesn't happen. That's why we don't really have an industry; why it's so difficult.

I remember that when Channel 4 began, at the beginning of the 1980s, it was a great white hope for us because the kind of films we wanted to make that we thought we could finance just weren't happening. So suddenly there was a resource and a place on which they could play, which simply hadn't existed before. So it was a big change moment. When Channel 4 came along there was a mechanism there for a certain level of filmmaking.

AS: What do you see as the main differences between the NFFC and British Screen, which replaced it in 1985 when you became the first chief executive?

SR: The NFFC made decisions through its board guided by the managing director, which at the time it was axed was Mamoun Hassan. Previously Hassan had been the director of the BFI Production Board and indeed was so during the time Bill Douglas made his trilogy. I think Hassan's choice of project was perhaps a little more personal than mine. The NFFC would often commit funds to a project, including *Comrades* as it happened, at an early stage to help them raise the rest of their funding. But this had the effect of building up unspent resources. At the time British Screen took over from the NFFC there was a significant surplus of funds waiting to be invested. This did not help the film industry's argument to retain the Eady levy, which had been the source of those funds.³ There was constant lobbying going on against the idea of the levy, making out that it was closing cinemas. It was total rubbish, but [Margaret] Thatcher, who was all in favour of privatisation, thought it would make more sense to scrap the scheme and to use *some* of the saving to give the new boy, British Screen, £2 million a year that it could invest in film. The principal beneficiaries from the loss of Eady, namely Rank and Thorn-EMI, invested a paltry sum of £250,000 each even though the sums they saved were huge. British Screen was not, like the NFFC, a public body but a privately owned company with

shareholders and a board of directors and I was appointed to run it. We decided on an investment ceiling of £750,000, which was to represent about a third of the budget of films that could cost a maximum of £3 million.

My guiding principle was to balance what a film cost with its potential earnings. You never can tell whether a film's going to succeed or not. But the films needed to have an economic basis. We could not take the line of the BFI's Production Board, which was actually saying "Really, all we care about is artistic merit" therefore primarily cultural rather than commercial. The difference, for me, was I'm saying "No, we're making films where there has to be an intent on behalf of the people making it that there is a balance between what the film costs and what it can earn. So filmmakers had to demonstrate to me how their film's going to sell, where it's going to sell, how much money it's going to make. I had to feel, "Yes, this could work." This could include highly experimental films. Derek Jarman was able to demonstrate that there was a market for films such as *The Last of England* [1987] that only appealed to smaller, specialised audiences, but which would therefore recoup its tiny budget. There was an economic rationale. British Screen was there to stimulate the film business rather than film art. Unlike the NFFC Board, the Board of British Screen did not make 'creative' decisions.

The return on investment for British Screen was roughly 50 per cent, which I think matched if not bettered the average of the UK Film Council, which of course took over from British Screen [in 2000]. This implies an element of subsidy because filmmaking's a high risk business. What we were doing was mitigating some of the risk – we were taking investments in films in positions that would encourage a more commercial investment from other parties. For example, if somebody came in with a private investment, which

was the highest risk money, then you'd give them a more favourable recoupment position perhaps than British Screen received. It was a subsidy but with an underlying commercial purpose. What we were subsidising, if anything, was business. This is not about content; this is about how to maintain something which described itself as an industry but actually isn't.

To be honest, what I spent most of my time doing at British Screen was helping producers to piece together the finance, which is usually in several parts. The overriding principle for me was that I didn't want to use British Screen as a mechanism for exercising my own particular taste in movies. So the fact that I liked a certain kind of movie was not relevant. There was a fundamental principle about British Screen, and the NFFC, that we were there to break the circle; we were there to actually make it possible for new talent particularly to get started. There was a very strong bias towards first time filmmakers. We were there to try and help people over that particular hurdle. It didn't have to be a first time director; it could be a first time producer, or a first time writer. But the principle was to support new talent. However, all investment decisions were taken with a view to the best possible commercial return.

This is how we put it at the time [reads]: "British Screen usually invests with budgets up to £3 million. Investment decisions are based upon our assessment of the likely relationship between the cost of the film and the return from the marketplace. Films with higher budgets must be able to demonstrate commensurately greater commercial appeal. Even very low budget films must show an awareness of the needs of the international marketplace. British Screen considers material from any genre or in any style, although it is unlikely to invest in pure exploitation when there is no redeeming creative content.

British Screen does not invest in films intended solely for television transmission. Over the last four years we've invested 18m in 44 British productions.”⁴

AS: Why did they approach you for the job? And what was the response to setting up British Screen?

SR: I don't know the answer to the first one. I'd obviously built a bit of a reputation as an independent producer, somebody who could get these kinds of films together and had some taste about it. I think they were rather glad to have somebody managing it who was a practical filmmaker. I was pretty accessible, and I made a point of reading absolutely everything that came in, which wasn't, in those days, too much – it was about 300 scripts a year or something, three or four scripts a week.

On the whole, British Screen was welcomed. Although I think a lot of people regretted the passing of the NFFC, they felt it was probably inevitable. However, Rank and Thorn-EMI were not at all committed. They were just getting off the hook. I therefore had to look for other investors and found Granada. I developed a very good relationship with Denis Forman, the group chairman and David Plowright the chief executive. Channel 4, which was looking for a co-investor in its films, was the most committed. The two organisations developed a strong, supportive co-operation, both committed to bringing on the new talent including fostering short films as training pieces. The chair of British Screen was Lord Joel Barnett, who had been a chief secretary to the Treasury. He was tremendously supportive and I enjoyed working with him. He continued as Chairman for a long time.

SR: British Screen, in partnership with Zenith and with Palace, founded The Sales Company, led by Carol Myers, who had been Head of Sales at Channel 4. It was set up because we discovered we were investing in all these films and needed an organisation to sell them on our behalf to get the best possible terms. The idea was to save money, to pay less for commissions, and to own something which in itself was a profit centre. So it was a totally commercial decision. Producers were very keen on it because they got a better deal.

The government was lukewarm in its support for British Screen except for the flurry around the Downing Street ‘summit’ chaired by Margaret Thatcher. She was attracted by the interest of Lew Wasserman and his enthusiasm for a ‘Hollywood of Europe’ and the hope of attracting inward investment from America. A £2 million European co-production fund was set up just before I departed. We did get some money from that.

AS: Why did you leave British Screen?

SR: I left because I felt that five years was long enough. I thought that there ought to be another mind making the choices, in a sense. It was not a good thing for one person to go on occupying such a key role, in terms of vital resource for production. So I stepped aside. I was keen to go back to my own production. As an independent I was still able to access finance from British Screen, now run by Simon Perry, and in particular the European Co-Production Fund, which supported *Damage*, the film I co-produced with Louis Malle and his brother Vincent. The market had also changed through the proliferation of ‘classic’ divisions of the major studios and more aggressive independent producer distributors notably Miramax led by Harvey Weinstein. Miramax backed *Enchanted April* that became one of its most successful films.

AS: Could we now focus on Lottery funding and your involvement in The Film Consortium?

SR: No-one really felt satisfied with the Arts Council's way of allocating Lottery money where if you made an application they would farm it out to somebody to assess. I was asked on several occasions to make an evaluation on which they based their decision to either allocate funding or not. Everybody was looking for a better mechanism and this ad hoc, film-by-film arrangement was not adequate. As a member of PACT, I lobbied the Arts Council to set up franchises offering a few companies fairly substantial resources that would attract other money to produce a slate of movies, as opposed to one at a time and therefore might be able to ride the rough with the smooth and become profitable.

The idea behind The Film Consortium was to draw together four, well-known, well-established production companies: Scala, Parallax, Skreba and Greenpoint. I had a good relationship with Scala, because Nik [Powell] and Steve [Woolley] had made films for British Screen and also with Parallax, set up initially by Sally Hibbin to make Ken Loach's films but now a collective involving a number of other filmmakers as all our companies did. We respected each other's films, but the idea of the partnership was what will look good in terms of people making the decision, getting the money. It appeared to be a good combination, Scala being on the more commercial end, us in the middle and Parallax being more the art house. There was a commercial logic. Virgin Cinemas agreed to screen Consortium films and were good for its marquee value. I know we were very keen to get them. But Richard [Branson] never invested any money – far too careful. We had a board, but unlike at Greenpoint, we had to sit in judgement on each other's movies. The only way

we could do that was by employing a chief executive and a head of development, and giving them a certain amount of authority. Kate Wilson was the CEO, in charge of the money and the deals, with Colin Vaines as the Head of Production, the person who received and assessed the scripts.

It didn't really work. The attitude of other financiers towards the Lottery money was that it was a freebie and so not an inducement to invest other money in a project that might not be commercially viable. As a result, the investments the Consortium made were often in very weak positions. So if the film didn't do well, they didn't do well. There were certain projects which each company had, which could attract money from the places that they had done before there The Film Consortium was set up. If Scala, say, was looking to finance three films over two years, the Consortium could not support them all, so understandably they would look to see which ones they could finance in some other way. So the films that tended to become Consortium projects were the ones which, for one reason or another, weren't able to get finance elsewhere. The Film Consortium seemed to get the second best of each company's products. For that reason, it didn't succeed. So that comes back to the way in which the Consortium's money was treated. It was often not in a good position in a film that was perhaps more risky than some of the other films of those same partners.

We did finance films from people who were nothing to do with us. The Film Consortium wasn't only to support the films of people who were partners. That was why we had independent people making those decisions, because we felt what we wanted was for the executive to find the best projects they could. We were free as individual companies to

find money elsewhere. None of us had what's called first look deals with the consortium. We probably should have done.

I was very much involved in setting it up and making the pitch and getting it, and winning – I was pleased with that. I have to say, if I look back on it, I think what I had dreamed would work, didn't quite come off. And as it unfolded I became quite detached from it; I don't know why particularly but I did. We hoped that this injection of money was going to build a company that would have on-going resources to reinvest in films. We all thought: "Oh, well we could definitely build lasting businesses out of that." But the bottom line of it is we didn't; it didn't work. It didn't become a rolling fund, which is what originally we hoped it would do. And there were all sorts of arguments about what happened to these huge sums of money.

AS: One of the criticisms was that the scheme fell between two stools. It appeared to be a lot of money and it was a lot of money in British film terms. But if you're going to have a real impact, it was still nowhere near the resources that an American studio might have.

SR: Oh yes, that's true. You really never enter into the mainstream.

AS: Could we move onto the Relph Report?

SR: It was commissioned by Robert Jones at the UKFC from an idea I put to him based on an initiative I'd run long before I left British Screen, the British Film Partnership,

which looked for ways in which production costs could be reduced. Basically, it was a way of collectivising the process. Not paying everybody so much, but making everybody a partner in the movie, so that if the movie was to make money then, yes, those that had financed it would make money, but those who made it would also make money. What I was saying was, “No, you’ve got to pay people a basic salary; you’ve got to do that. But you could take a proportion of the revenues of the film and use them.” So it wasn’t just profit, it was revenues and using them to reward the crew and the cast as well. This is the core of the Report as well as trying to give practical advice about how to reduce costs. I had maintained for a long time that British films cost too much. So you’ve got find a way of making films for less, because the market’s not there for these films. You’ve got to cover the cost. The purpose of the Report was to try to demonstrate how filmmakers might think differently about the whole process, and bring the cost down. I believe in low budget production because it gives you freedom about the stories you tell. The more expensive the film, the more accessible it has to be to a wider audience.

There was a huge discussion with the trade unions about the Report. They were extremely wary of it. The Film Council never really adopted the report, it was never acted upon. It was incredibly useful, I think, to a lot of producers who told me that they love the report and the ideas are really helpful, which I suppose is the most important thing. But I wanted, particularly the revenue sharing elements and all of that side of things, to be formally adopted by all parties, and it never was. So it was a bit of a disappointment.

AS: I read that you had plans to set up your own studio.

SR: Here's another huge subject! I looked back to Ealing Studios as a creative collective of very talented filmmakers, all basically on a modest salary, run by a very brilliant, entrepreneurial figure. And it seemed to me that the most successful films made here in Britain were the result of the commitment and passion of individual filmmakers to a particular idea. They were not things that happened as a result of clever executives deciding, but by virtue of the conviction of the filmmakers themselves. The second thing was you more or less had to have sufficient volume of production. The secret of the American studios is that they make 10 or 12 films a year at least. They don't have a hugely high hit rate, but it sort of works. So my scheme was based on the idea that my, in quotes, 'studio', needed to have sufficient resources to make a slate of films, so that it could take the rough with the smooth.

The principle of the whole thing was to trust the talent, make the films cheap enough so you can let the talent decide what they make. Then find a way of using that money efficiently so that you can actually get much better value: treat it like a normal business. I was looking for an investment of £10 million to produce a series of 12 films over a period of 3 years at an average cost of £1 million. My estimate was that that £1 million was effectively equivalent to £2 million at least in the open market for a one-off film. I knew that there were an awful lot of people in the industry who were in it because they're passionate about film, and that's what they really wanted to do. All they needed was to make a living. I was looking for those people. The studio was going to be at Freshford Mill, near Bath. I put together a complex business plan and was lucky enough to interest Michael Kuhn. The Film Council said it was a brilliant idea, "We love it, but we don't invest in schemes. We're only set up to invest in individual films." In the end I got within an inch of it actually all happening, but by then it had so many different elements and

different people wanting different things out of it that I withdrew. That was 2005 and I thought, “I’m going to leave the industry before it leaves me”.

AS: How do you assess the current state of British film?

SR: There’s a range in British film production which there certainly wasn’t when I set out. But fundamentally the problem is that there isn’t investment in British film coming from the money that’s generated here out of the exploitation of film in Britain. If there was, then I think the industry might not need state support. The United States has a much, much larger market, but the film industry reinvests part of the revenue it makes from film exploitation – huge sums of money – in the process of research and development. We simply don’t have the resource to do that. Our own market, even though it’s producing very substantial revenue, is not doing enough to compete with Hollywood. So inevitably we look like some sort of adjunct to the American industry with a foothold in Europe. And yes, we have the European market, but there’s the whole language issue bound up with that.

AS: Do you think the government should intervene directly and say to the industry “These are the kinds of films that should be made”?

SR: It’s important that there are elements of filmmaking whose objective is not entirely commercial. My view is that the government should support the arts, and film should have its share because in doing so you’re encouraging something which has become one of our major earners. As a result of fairly modest government funding for filmmakers here and there – different places, different times – we have created hugely more than our fair share

of the world's creative filmmaking talent. But the big questions about state support are: "What's the right place to put it? and "How to do it?" At the moment you have this fairly benign tax environment, which is very helpful, I think. What filmmakers have always said is that they would like help which is not tied up. Filmmakers also think the fair thing is to reward success with success, which is what the Eady fund used to do by returning the most money to the films that did best at the box office. But then I think there's another element that says you've got to be helping Bill Douglas, because this is as important. Governments should subsidise sections of the film industry, investing in and even accepting production losses because by doing so they create income as well as culturally valuable films.

In the long run, I think governments will always look at an equation of one kind or another, of what they're putting in and what they're getting out. It's our job as an industry to show them whatever it is they are putting in is coming out, and more so. At the moment I think actually that's been fairly sensibly done. Filmmakers want market stimulation and mechanisms from the government which allows them to make films at a reasonable cost, which encourages and enables activity. And I've always felt that the most important thing is that there should be some preference given towards those who are starting out. That's the first purpose, in a sense, to try and give people who haven't had one the opportunity to demonstrate what they can do, because filmmaking's a high risk business. It's not one that speculative investors naturally lean towards. The key thing is to do things that encourage others to make investments, drawing money into an industry which actually is very profitable for this country.

What kind of industry should Britain aspire to have? For me, that's always been about an industry which is reinvesting in itself much more than it does – this is the thing that is missing. I wish for an industry which would require that at least part of what is generated here is reinvested in new production. Not new production that is simply offshore production from Hollywood, but indigenous production. This is what we lacked. I don't believe the country is, unfortunately, big enough to sustain an indigenous film industry quite the way that one would like it to be. But it is very conveniently situated between America and Europe and ought to be able to play both markets effectively. We would wish, wouldn't we, that the kind of money that Working Title is drawing down from Universal was available in the UK, so the benefits remain here. Indeed, something that is so indigenous, like Harry Potter, is not exploited entirely by Hollywood, rather than by us. In other words, wouldn't it be wonderful if there was sufficient resource for somebody – for David Heyman for instance, the producer of the Harry Potter films – to be able to fund those films from resources within the UK, rather than having to give away practically everything to Warner Bros. in order to get them made in the first place. Warners made billions out of the franchise.

It's been good to talk about it all, because actually it's a long time since I did.

Filmography

Reds (d. Warren Beatty, 1981), ep. for Paramount

The Return of the Soldier (d. Alan Bridges, 1982), p. for Skreba

Privates on Parade (d. Michael Blakemore, 1983), p. for HandMade Films

The Ploughman's Lunch (d. Richard Eyre, 1983), p. for Greenpoint Films

Secret Places (d. Zelda Barron, 1984), p. for Skreba

Singleton's Pluck (d. Richard Eyre, 1984), ep. for Greenpoint Films

Wetherby (d. David Hare, 1985), p. for Greenpoint Films

Comrades (d. Bill Douglas, 1986), p. for Skreba

Enchanted April (d. Mike Newell, 1991), ep. for Greenpoint Films

Damage (d. Louis Malle, 1992), co-p. for Skreba

The Secret Rapture (d. Howard Davies, 1993), p. for Greenpoint Films

Look Me in the Eye (d. Nick Ward, 1994), p. for Skreba

Camilla (d. Deepa Mehta, 1994), p. for Skreba/Miramax

Blue Juice (Carl Prechezer, 1995), p. for Skreba

The Slab Boys (John Byrne, 1997), p. for Skreba

The Land Girls (d. David Leland, 1998), p. for Greenpoint Films

Hideous Kinky (d. Gillies MacKinnon, 1998), ep. for Greenpoint Films/The Film Consortium

Bugs doc. short (d. Mike Slee, 2003), ep. for The Film Consortium

Get the Picture short (d. Rupert Wyatt, 2004), ep. for Greenpoint Films

Birdsong tv series (d. Philip Martin, 2012), ep. for Working Title/BBC

¹ For a discussion of Relph's importance see Andrew Spicer, 'The Independent Producer and the State: Simon Relph, Government Policy and the British Film Industry, 1980-2005', in Andrew Spicer, A.T. McKenna and Christopher Meir (eds), *Beyond the Bottom Line: The Producer in Film and Television Studies* (New York: Bloomsbury, forthcoming, 2014).

² The Douglas trilogy consisted of: *My Childhood* (1972), *My Ain Folk* (1973) and *My Way Home* (1978).

³ A film levy (known as the Eady levy after the civil servant, Wilfrid Eady, who introduced the measure) had been introduced by the Labour government in 1950. It required exhibitors to pay a tiny fraction of the price of each cinema admission into the British Film Production Fund administered by the NFFC.

⁴ British Screen, *Forty Four Films in Four Years* (1989).