

Guru Live Film Keynote Interview: Justin Kurzel

2 May 2016 at Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

Tim Hunter: Hello everybody. My name's Tim Hunter, I'm Director of Learning and New Talent here at BAFTA, and a very warm welcome to all of you, thank you for coming on this Bank Holiday Monday. And welcome to the third day of Guru LIVE, our three-day festival featuring masterclasses, panels and keynotes which bring to life BAFTA Guru, which you're here to see. And the aim of the event is to give people like you access to insights from BAFTA winners and nominees to help you forge a career in the creative industries. So BAFTA Guru is BAFTA's online resource for publishing original content and sharing inspiration and advice from winners and nominees, but as well as that we also ran over 250 events a year, so if you'd like to know more about those please sign up to our newsletter. So this is Guru LIVE's inaugural year, and this is day three, so if we're slightly worse for wear now you know why. Your feedback is really important to us, so after today you'll be sent a link to a survey, and please do fill it in, it will only help us to improve, and you'll be also in with a chance of winning one of the nominee bags from the film awards this year, which is a lovely Globe-Trotter bag filled with lots of goodies, so that's worth doing. Also, if you can support us on social media, that also really helps to make a case for doing this again, and you know our sponsors love it as well. So it's @BAFTAGuru and #GuruLIVE, tell us what you think of the day good or bad. Preferably good. We are creating podcasts of all of these sessions which will come online in the coming weeks, the keynotes are all done the next day so you can listen to yesterday's now and Justin's will be online tomorrow. Thanks to our partners, Nespresso there's coffee downstairs in the David Lean room which I'm sure you've all enjoyed already, and then also they will have lunch in the Members' Bar, if you want to buy lunch it's around a fiver for a very delicious lunch. And as a ticket holder for this session, the keynote, you're entitled to a free ticket to Yes! And?, which is our last session of the whole day and indeed the whole weekend, and that is Cariad Lloyd and a cast of improvisers who'll be writing a short film in the space of an hour using only ideas from the Guru LIVE audience. And that will be followed by a Q&A with Nick Film, Nick Helm, sorry,

who's going to talk about using improvisation in his BAFTA-nominated short film *Elephant*. That's in the Princess Anne Theatre downstairs, not this room in fact, between five and six, and then we have free networking drinks downstairs in the David Lean room. So just finally I just have to thank our partners, so EE is the partner in this creative keynote, who also as I'm sure you know are the title sponsor of the EE British Film Academy Awards. British Academy Film Awards, I should have that down really, shouldn't I? And 2017 will be the 20th year of that partnership. We'd also like to thank our breakfast briefing hosts which are Nespresso, Ham Yard Hotel, session sponsors who include BFI, Film London and Creative Skillset. And finally thank you very much to our keynote speaker, director Justin Kurzel, who'll be discussing his work from his debut *Snowtown*, to last year's Palme d'Or nominated *Macbeth*, and the upcoming *Assassin's Creed*. So, welcome Justin. Thank you.

[Applause]

Justin Kurzel: So I'll play the first clip. I should have given you a warning.

[Clip plays]

So that film scared the shit out of me when I was, when I was, I think my parents let me watch that when I was about nine, ten, and my daughters are obsessed with kind of wanting to watch that film as well because they've heard about it. And it's, this wasn't the film that made me want to be a filmmaker, but it is the film that I, you know, still to this day, especially living in Australia, going to the beach, and that shot underneath going towards the boys' legs plays in my head when I'm supposed to be kind of enjoying a, you know a Saturday dip in Bondi. So it's kind of the power of this film is still with me in a very visceral way and immersive way, and I think it's sort of you know from everyone I've spoken to, *Jaws* is a film that's kind of etched in their sort of subconscious. And I think a lot of it has to do with something I'm really interested in talking to you about, which is point of view, and it's point of view of character. And it's something I've become a little obsessed about recently while editing *Assassin's Creed*, about you

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know your films are told through a character, and usually that character has something that they are struggling against, and you are as a filmmaker doing everything possible to make the audience experience you know that story through that character's point of view.

And I don't mean literal point of view, you know, I don't mean sort of seeing you know, having a camera kind of look towards another character and pretending that it's your main character. I'm talking about every single frame, every single lens choice you make, every single piece of music that you put over this or sound design, has all got to do with what you want an audience to feel through that character. So Brody's, you know, his whole character is based on fear of going into the water. In that clip you never see the shark, so it's all told through his point of view. I mean even the fact that he, all those kind of side wide shots, everyone's coming out of the water and Brody's just on the edge of it. You know the point of view of what imagines is underneath the water with those shots coming up towards the kids. Those over the shoulder shots of Brody looking past the two men, out to a kind of still ocean with a kind of buoy just bobbing you know in the distance. It's all got to do with the anxiety and fear of making you experience what Brody's experiencing. And that's kind of, that's a thing that I've kind of come across that I think subconsciously you understand as a filmmaker. I think that you, you know, you do get caught up in style and you do get caught up in story, and you do have a feeling for how a scene should go or where a camera should go, but you know it's also about interrogating every single moment, where the camera should be that's telling the story of your character, and what you're trying to say within that.

So that kind of, that film kind of started me off, and it comes on you know every six months, you know that film will come on and I'll just start watching it, and I think Spielberg is just a master at putting you in the psychology of a character, and without showing you the kind of monster like he kind of did in this. I mean even that last shot there of the kind of

floating mat that the box was on, you know that's the kind of lasting image of Brody's that then kind of propels the kind of dread and threat throughout the rest of the film. And it's something that I kind of want to talk a little bit in regards to my films, and how that point of view of character has informed me, and at times when I didn't know that the answers were about really putting the audience into point of view to solve narrative problems in my films, or to make you experience the film. I think, the other day I was editing *Assassin's Creed*, I'm working with this amazing editor, Chris Telferson, who edited *Moneyball* and *Capote*, and even *Gummo* and *Kids*. We were talking about exposition in the film, and how there was an, almost about a story to get across, and then Chris said something really interesting. He said, "I just feel as though the audience in this moment and scene needs to experience it, you know, needs to experience the point of view of the character. And to me that's just a great example of the difference between kind of literal narrative story and actually experiencing a story, and that to me is where it becomes cinema.

So I just wanted to kind of, I was gonna today just go through a few other little clips and then sort of backend with *Macbeth* and *Snowtown*, and then obviously open it up to you guys for some questions about, I guess my journey as a filmmaker. I mean it's, I came from theatre, and then sort of started moving into film through doing music clips and short films, and then really just lucked out in terms of a story coming my way in regards to *Snowtown*, which was about a place and a series of events from where I grew up, so I had a very personal and intimate kind of knowledge of that. And from then on *Macbeth* was a film that really just landed in my lap in a way, it wasn't something that I was sort of planning or wanting to do. So I'll be open to kind of talk about that through the Q&A, but I just thought I'd go through some sort of clips, talking about point of view and really kind of looking at kind of what's most interesting about it. So probably my, we'll go to this next clip which is *Gallipoli*. This was the first time that I sort of discovered Australian film and

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Australian voices, and this was a very, very powerful moment which inspired me to want to make films. And it's the end of the film, I don't know if you're aware of it, it's Mark Lee and Mel Gibson's character who are both two young Australian soldiers caught up in the front in Gallipoli, and they are about to go over the trenches to face their kind of fate and destinies. So I'll just play the, you know, this film's directed by an absolute master in Peter Weir. I was watching *Dead Poet's Society* the other day and the way he is able to focus on again point of view within a frame is quite astonishing. So I'll play the *Gallipoli* clip.

[Clip plays]

So this, I mean it's an incredible, powerful scene, and, but it took me a long while to kind of work out that the point of view of Mark Lee in this scene, and how much of an effect it has on the finale of this film. It's a character who's desperate throughout the whole film to kind of find his war, you know, to leave Australia and to find adventure and to do his duty. And there's something extremely powerful in the ritual of death in this, I mean it's quite religious in a way, the way Peter Weir's kind of filmed it. There's a dignity in the way each of them say goodbye, the fact that you never go up to the trenches, the camera stays down amongst these final kind of confessional moments between these soldiers who each individually sort of say goodbye or do a gesture, which you can sense in the sound they way they're writing the paper, and the way the knife goes in, and the way the ring hits the knife when it's kind of strapped on. Those sounds have all been amplified, you know, and they've all been amplified to make you understand what Mark Lee's character is hearing in that moment. Time stands still apart from the ticking clock of his little kind of timekeeping clock that his grandfather gives him.

You're then cutting back to Mel Gibson's character who's desperately trying to get to them to stop them. That, those cutbacks are kind of impossible, you know, Peter Weir's always kind of shooting them with, you know, Mel Gibson with long lens across the trench,

you know, 20 people in front of Mel Gibson as he's trying to kind of waver through those big wide shots on top of an impossible cliff with a donkey in front of him. They're juxtaposed with these sort of fatalist kind of shots of these soldiers saying goodbye. And then breath, you know, the breath of Mark Lee taking sort of final breath before he goes over, juxtaposed with the continuous breaths and the frantic breaths of Mel Gibson running through the trenches trying to get to them. And then that wonderful thing I think, you know, which I think you know such great filmmakers do with sound, is they take the sound out at the end. You know, you're expecting a kind of *Saving Private Ryan* moment of a kind of flurry of activity and action, and it all goes quiet and all we can hear is the breath of him and his footsteps. And somehow amongst all of that it becomes a very powerful moment of cinema that completely engages you with the point of view. And it was those, it's those sort of elements that you feel as though can just sort of fly by and you don't take much notice, but are actually subconsciously having a huge effect on you emotionally as a viewer, because they're directly related to the experiences of Mark Lee's character in that final moment.

I think Peter Weir's an incredible, I was watching *Dead Poet's Society* the other day, which I just mentioned again, and there's a moment before the boy shoots himself downstairs after he does the play, and his father forbids him from being an actor. And there's this beautiful moment of him kind of going down to his father's den, takes out a gun, and the father is about to hop on bed and the you know the mother's crying, and the father says, "Everything will be alright." And instead of sort of going to the bed and seeing the father and mother in bed talking to each other, he just stays on a pair of slippers, beautifully kind of lined up next to the bed. You know, a kind of life of order and a life of kind of comfort that completely is going to go against the sound, the tragic and brutal sound of a gun going off and his son's suicide. So it's, he's extraordinary at kind of doing those juxtapositions and they have enormous power. I think even in *Jaws*, I think the way that colour palette is and

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the kind of kid playing with the castle, you know and the little sort of singing rhyme, I think, you know, usually a kind of brutality coming off something that is calm and peaceful and almost domestic is very, very powerful.

I did a lot of that with *Snowtown*, which was, you know, essentially about some murders and brutality happening in a very domestic suburban place of Australia in broad daylight, so that to me was what was so horrifying about the events, was just how domestic these murders were when they were sort of taking place. The next clip I'm going to show you is *Beau Travail*, and it's, I was basically rejected out of film school twice, and this, and one of the exercises was that you had to show a clip that you really liked and then talk about it similar to this, and the guy hated my clip. And it was me and this other guy, and I was actually going to bring up *The Godfather* scene where Sollozzo is shot by Al Pacino in *The Godfather*. And the other guy kind of put this clip up, and it's an amazing clip, and could talk beautifully about it, and now I brought up this clip and really just said that I liked the dancing at the end. And it wasn't until probably three or four years later that I realised why I liked it, you know what was it about it that within each of the frames and the ideas in it that made me compelled to use it as 'this is why I want to be a filmmaker' to a film school. Anyway, I didn't get in, but we'll have a look at the clip.

[Clip plays]

So yeah, so you can probably tell why I didn't get into film school. But it's, I just, there's just something, I mean she's a beautiful filmmaker Claire Denis, and this character, Galoup, played by Denis Lavant, if you see the whole film he's an officer in the French Foreign Legion, and his whole life is about order and is about you know a kind of outlook on life which is incredibly restrictive. And he makes a fatal mistake, he gets jealous in this film and sort of causes the death of a young kid, a young soldier who becomes very good friends with his colonel, and he gets expelled from the one thing that he has in life, which is to be a soldier. So this end of the film is a kind of goodbye to that life, a kind of final kind of supper

with that life that he's led, and I just think it's kind of quite astonishing that his death instead of playing out with a gunshot, you know instead of playing out in a melodramatic way, is done in the complete reverse

So it's, you know, the, it's what you don't see in this scene, it's all about the bed and the practice of kind of folding the sheets, and the camera doesn't leave to go up to him. It's about you know cutting it off, and it's about how he folds those sheets, how he brings over the final kind of blanket. The way he clasps his hands at the back, that you sort of see right in the foreground as a kind of viewer the birds tweeting outside, just how normal and domestic and, I mean there's something very dangerous about the scene because of that. You don't see his face, all you're seeing is skin and you're noticing his heartbeat, you're noticing little movements next to the gun. He's holding the gun in a really comfortable way, it's not aggressive, and then that beautiful kind of farmed moment with the pulse, the little vein kind of pulsing away. And then the song coming in, *Rhythm of Life*, and then how that kind of dovetails into this crazy kind of heaven that he goes into. I mean if you're seeing this character through the whole film and then see him dance at the end like this is the biggest surprise. But essentially it's the most beautiful ending to, you know that there's this life in this character, you know that his circumstances and his job and who he is has kind of restrained an extraordinary celebration in him.

And I just love the way Claire kind of completely unexpectedly shows you that soul at the end with one shot, and it's a dance piece, and Denis dances unbelievably in it, and it's in this strange little kind of nightclub in Paris. And there's something that I think is really bold and beautiful about it that is much more powerful than if you'd played out the scene of a suicide, literally. Again its point of view, her taking you into the point of view of what this man is feeling in his mind in these last moments of his life. And those sorts of things I think stay with you much, much more than playing it out literally you know, as an observation. We've got 20 minutes? I

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might go onto *Snowtown* and *Macbeth*. I mean those are very particular clips and I didn't really sort of talk about them when I first saw them like that, but definitely looking back now they've kind of, they definitely informed how I approached point of view in *Snowtown* and *Macbeth*. So, this is the opening of *Snowtown*, and I'll just kind of show you and have a bit of a chat about how we got there with this.

[Clip plays]

So we were editing *Snowtown* and we had no idea how to start this film, and I kind of wanted to do a whole lot of really boring observed shots of mundane life in this town to kind of open it. It just wasn't working and I was, it was just shots of Jamie walking around having a hamburger or playing on the pinball machines, or his wife doing the pokies, it was a really, pretty uneventful opening to the film. And for some reason I decided in my mind that the audience had to be bored at the beginning of this film to kind of understand his point of view. And then my brother said to me, who composed *Snowtown* and also *Macbeth*, that, "You kind of don't have an opening to the film, you don't have a point of view that you're starting with." And he said, "Is there any way of kind of really laying out right from the beginning a very solid idea of who Jamie is, and what you want the audience to feel for him". And I had just been, I had been really just fascinated by a couple of films at the time. I'd just watched the redux of *Apocalypse Now* and I was really fascinated by the kind of premonition at the beginning of that film with Martin Sheen talking about Kurtz at the beginning of the film. So we were kind of fascinated by trying to find a sense of Jamie talking about his fate and the idea of meeting a monster, or having a dream about something that was beyond his wildest imaginations, and somehow setting the tone of something that's going to come crashing down, you know before you start getting into the characters and story, and it kind of sets up right from the beginning a kind of sense of dread. And so it was really interesting, as soon as we did it, and actually John Bunting the other character, the main seal killer, actually

said this in the film, we actually shot John saying it in the car as he was going out to the bank to possibly kill Jamie. And he says it as a kind of warning to Jamie, and it was something that was, that happened through the interviews of the real character John Bunting, serial killer, where he actually admitted to someone his greatest dream would be to kill someone, put a Chihuahua in their neck and then ring up the cops. You know, it's macabre and kind of ghoulish and extraordinary in its narrative. But we had John saying it and it didn't have any power, it just didn't have any effect. And we couldn't, we loved the idea of the story and what it brang, but we, but it just was wrong for this character to do it, it was too overt, you know because he was saying this as a threat while Jamie was in the back of the car. So Jed and I were discussing it and he said, "Well why don't you give that to Jamie?" Why don't you give that dream to Jamie, because it's his point of view, and the actual images at the beginning are the points of view of the car ride out to *Snowtown*, which becomes at the end of the film a very, very strong motif, because that was the landscape that Jamie and this other boy would have seen as they were driving out to these killings. And then at the end of the film you somehow kind of cycle back and use the same imagery, but you know in a very, very different way. So that was really interesting how, you know, starting a film with a really, really strong point of view, even though most of the film was a social realist piece and you don't hear Jamie say, you know speak in a voiceover at all through the rest of the film. It seemed to work at the beginning as a kind of destiny, as a kind of sense of setting up what he was going to become, which was a kind of killer, and the person who he was going to meet, which was a monster. So that definitely reshaped our whole film, and that came really late, like a week before we were about to lock off, and definitely set the tone of that point of view. The next clip is, that second one of *Snowtown*, the...

[Clip plays]

So this, I mean this was, the point of view in this scene was Jamie experiencing community for the first time. There was

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an energy that came into this place where suddenly things were going to get done, and John brought this charisma, and he brought this can-do attitude and empowered these characters. So all those actors apart from Dan who plays John Bunting were all I cast people that I cast off the streets in the actual town where it happened. So they had never acted before, and you know they, this scene we did in one take, and the reason I bring it up is it's quite an interesting story with it. We had like three or four cameras one because I knew that as soon as they started repeating things it would suddenly start to be contrived, whereas what I wanted was a real life debate about sexual abuse in this area, which because we were in the area and we were using people that were living in the area, it was something that was extremely passionate in their lives. And they had a lot to say, and we had a kind of a rehearsal for that, which was basically just beer and pizzas and all of us kind of getting together, and it was to just discuss problems in the area and so forth. And a lot of the energy and a lot of some of the points that came out of that rehearsal were kind of bedded into this scene.

But what was fascinating is that Dan, who plays John Bunting, who is a Sydney boy, was suddenly cast as John and had to come into an environment that's incredibly intimidating and be loved you know, and have some kind of control and power over these people. So Dan, I got Dan to come nine weeks before we started shooting, and he, he's a beautiful guy too, he's a lovely guy and he's got an enormous heart, but suddenly he had to play someone who was, you know, pretty kind of aggressive and powerful. So Dan kind of arrived and it was nine weeks there in the area, and lived in a hotel, and my whole aim with him was, you have to start becoming part of this community, you have to start going out and meeting people, and like Lou taking her out to dinner, she was the mother there. Jamie, Lucas, I want you to kind of you know go to his school every day and you know pick him up and drop him off and take all those young kinds to go fishing. And, you know, I want you to go into pubs and clubs around that area, and people start to recognise you and

see you, because that's what John Bunting was. John Bunting was, he was like a preacher, he was the complete opposite to what the cliché serial killer is. He was very, very community driven, everyone thought he was a good Samaritan, there weren't many people that had a bad word about John when we were researching the film. Because on the exterior he was doing good you know, he was getting rid of pedophiles in the area and he was you know helping these little families and getting someone's groceries. So Dan had to become kind of involved in this thing.

Anyway, he kind of froze after about four weeks, he didn't go to McDonalds and KFC like I told him to and put on 10, 15 kilos, he didn't kind of you know get out there in the community and meet people and start to kind of feel an energy there, he just sort of stayed in this hotel and read books about serial killers. And it was, yeah it was really kind of disappointing, and you know I realised that he was incredibly scared you know of this place that he was in. So we had a real challenge to kind of get there where he suddenly felt like he could walk down a street in this area with confidence, and everyone would look at him in a very powerful and charismatic way. So when we did this scene, when we were rehearsing this scene, which was really just you know chatting about particular abuse in the area, Dan froze, absolutely froze. Could not speak, you know people were speaking over him, and I got, at the end of the night after three or four hours I got really angry with him. You know I was kind of like, "Well you know, if you're going to freeze on the day, because we'll only get one chance to do this, you're going to completely undermine the power of the character." And he was saying, "I don't know whether I can do this, you know these issues and problems are really affecting me. And you know, and I don't know whether I can kind of be guiding people in that situation." And it took him a good kind of two weeks before we shot it to really start to understand the power of that scene and the point of view of that scene, distance himself a little bit, and allow people to speak, and motivate them to speak throughout the scene, but at the same time give you the impression

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that he was in control.

So it was a really big turnaround for, you know again point of view, a guy, an actor who desperately didn't want to be in this environment and in this film and was very, very intimidated by it, but then suddenly found a performance through being part of it you know. And a lot of that came from these first time actors giving him that. You know as soon as he walked on the set the boys would hug him and kiss him and you know hang off him, and Lou would always beam when she saw him for the first time, and you suddenly realised that the dynamic of what he'd created with these people was the character. So we were always just bending and twisting off that a little. Everyone knew that we were, you know that it was a film, but there was definitely an energy there that came from Dan as an outsider suddenly taking control of a place and an environment and having an effect on it, and that certainly rubbed off on scenes like this where it was one take, Dan had to drive it. If we'd gone into a second take it would have suddenly started to feel contrived. He had a few points he had to hit and then that was it, so we shot that like in four minutes, two cameras to make sure that we got all the coverage that we wanted. And again it was supposed to feel, it was supposed to have an energy and it was supposed to feel as though it was Jamie's POV about community. Suddenly this world that was dead was coming alive with a kind of passion. We might go into *Macbeth*, the beginning of *Macbeth*.

[Clip plays]

So this is quite interesting *Macbeth*, because when I signed on to do *Macbeth* it was like there was a beginning war scene in the screenplay that was probably about ten pages long, and you know it was very much kind of setting up the heroism of *Macbeth* as a warrior. And I found that really interesting, and we storyboarded it and worked out how we were going to shoot it, it was going to take three weeks with 200 soldiers and we're going to do it in the middle of the moors in Scotland. And then we realised, I realised within the first week that that wasn't going to

happen and I was going to have 30 soldiers and I had to do it in three days. You know it was quite a shock that that was what was being kind of proposed. But it's interesting because at that time I hadn't really fully investigated the idea of *Macbeth* possibly suffering from post-traumatic stress from a war, and the idea that perhaps the witches could have somehow been a manifestation of that trauma.

So just really through logistics, it wasn't anything else, I had to suddenly go point of view on it, and how do I completely and utterly tell this story and this epic battle and understand *Macbeth* as a warrior through him and through what he sees. And I had to be very, very specific about the moments and the elements in that war that I wanted to highlight and heighten, and somehow connect them through the witches' prophecies, so that those images of violence and brutality, those little kind of moments that had defined what *Macbeth* was, and definitely in my story wanting to set up his sort of post trauma and how that works into the prophecies of the witches. I had to desperately sort of try to connect that imagery to the witches and kind of make it feel like it had come out of the battlefield. So that was, that was just a really interesting way of using point of view to solve a problem that you'll all have as filmmakers, which is, "How the hell do I do this in the time that I've got and the money that I've got?" And you know I'm still having the same challenges with *Assassin's Creed*. You know it's a big budget franchise film, and it's never enough, it's just never enough. You know the budget and the weeks never fit the ambition in your head, and you'll be quite surprised at how you from, "Oh, well if I can get 80 percent of what I want," you'll suddenly realise you're at 50, you know and you're compromising half of what your vision is. But what's great about that and the way you can solve things are through point of view. You know, even in that clip of *Gallipoli* there, you never see 1,000 soldiers, you know the shots are very, very specific. It's down in the trenches, you go from one shot up the top there with the gunner about to, you know just before they go over the top, and then you follow a kind of really

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beautiful kind of side-tracking shot focusing on Mark Lee and the sound goes out. And there's just ways of creating scale, and there's ways of creating story and narrative completely and utterly through point of view, if you're really, really selective about it and assure about it. You know people won't even go, "Oh gee, that battle looks small," or, "it didn't feel big enough," or whatever. They won't even think about that if you're in point of view. And another film, *Raging Bull*, is a similar example of that. When you have a look at that sequence with La Motta fighting Robinson, there's hardly any people in the crowd, you know the shots are really, really selective to his point of view, what he would be seeing. So yeah, I guess that's it, we'll open it up to questions.

[Applause]

Q: Thanks. Thanks very much Justin, it was really interesting. My question is, at the beginning you mentioned about going from a place where you had done music promos and a couple of short films, I just wondered if you could perhaps chat about how you went from that to getting your first feature off the ground and how that came about.

JK: Yeah, I was working in the theatre for ten years. When I was 28 I became a theatre designer, and so I was around a lot of directors and actors, and then really just became a pest to directors because it was obvious that I wanted to direct. And moved from that after about ten years, in my early thirties I moved into, my brother had started a band and he needed a video clip, and I wanted to make something, so we went out and got some 16mm film somewhere and we just came up with a really, really simple idea, and we did it. And that was kind of it, I got the bug of cinema, and from then on it was doing, I did a short film for a short film festival in Australia called the Tropfest Film Festival where anyone could make a film for this one night that they have in Sydney. And then that progressed then onto me wanting to go to film school, I didn't get into Australia's film school, kind of devastated, "What am I going to do?" And then kind of picked myself up and you know started to just keep on making things. It really

was that, it was kind of around that time, I went from around that time when you really could only make a film on 16mm, was your kind of lowest budget that you were going to get away with, to then suddenly, "Oh wow, I can do this on a video." So I was just on the precipice where things, production-wise, became much easier, easier to do.

So from there I then made a couple of shorts that then got me into commercials, and I spent two years making commercials, and that's where I learnt an enormous amount craft-wise, and working with actors. And then I was approached by Warp Films who had just started an office down in Australia, to do *Snowtown*. And it was absolute fate, like they didn't know that I was, they were interested in me based on some video clips I'd done, and they had to same ethos as Warp here, which was like new filmmakers, new filmmakers, new voices, so I was very lucky to be around there at that time and then *Snowtown* landed on my desk and I said, "Wow, I come from this area." And I was living in Melbourne at the time and it was set in Adelaide. And I actually lost the project, I didn't say yes for about seven weeks because I was just so scared of it, but I don't think about the subject matter, just scared of making my first film. You know kind of like you know judging everyone else for years and years and years, and then suddenly when you have to do it yourself you're kind of like, "Okay, I better step up here," and I think I was completely intimidated by that, but then it just happens and you're on, and yeah I was just very lucky, there was a lot of timing there that worked out.

Q: Hello, it's on. Firstly, thank you very much for this, it was really, really interesting. Could you maybe go into more about your process with actors, because obviously your films are extremely visceral and cinematic, I'm really interested as well in how you work with actors, because the performances, especially in *Snowtown*, are so natural, and in *Macbeth* as well they're very real and intense. And you talked a bit about doing sort of a workshop and rehearsing, could you talk a bit more about your process with that? Do you always workshop, and were you able to do

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rehearsals on a film like *Macbeth* or *Assassin's Creed* for example?

JK: *Snowtown* was a different experience from *Macbeth* because it was working with people who hadn't acted before, so a lot of it was about using their own experiences, and I didn't overly rehearse that film, because as soon as we did they'd start acting. So a lot of it was about, okay, what's the key to this scene, there might be a couple of lines here and there that I need them to hit, but what I wanted them to do is, I just wanted them to be in the moment in the scene. And in fact Dan Henshall who plays John had the most difficulty because the others were so, they knew this world so well and they knew the points of view so well that they could just effortlessly be in it. Whereas Dan I think started it with, there's a fantastic story, Dan was once doing a take and he would speak opposite Lou, and then he would look out the window at the end of the take. And I kept on going, I was saying to Adam, my DoP, I was like, "Why is he doing that? I don't understand why he's always looking out of the window at the end." And Adam said, "It's because he's going to a commercial break." And I said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "Well he's been in a soap for three years, they kind of teach you to like find a cut point on soaps where you know they can go off."

And I went up to him, I said, "You're doing this thing, you know you're looking out the window at the end of each take." And he goes, "It's the soap, it's like the commercial break." And I went, "I fucking thought it was." And you could see the others would just be sort of in a scene with him and he'd look out, and Lou and that would sort of look out as well, and it was because I was so involved in what he was doing. And then I said, "You don't, just be, you know you just have to listen." That is the most important thing is just listen and be there, and come off what they're giving you. And I think you know, the biggest mistakes I've made I think with performance is too many takes, you know and too much direction. You know you have to load, you have to be really careful about how you load that cannon, and you know they when

you've got it loaded, you know in terms of kind of backstory and this is the scene, and mood and setting. Like you know when you walk into a space, you know don't have people on their phones, you know make it a sacred space, make it a space where those actors feel really comfortable, and then just don't over direct it, allow them to find their thing. Because when you've got two actors opposite each other, listening to each other, it is kind of gold.

And that was the same with *Macbeth*. *Macbeth* was very much about how do you keep a text which is incredibly well known and has been spoken you know millions of times, I didn't want to start to rehearse it like a play, I wanted to keep it very fresh for them. So we would talk about the scenes and you know there, with Marion, Marion did like to say it a lot because for her being French the English was really difficult, and there was a rhythm to it that she needed. But Michael was very much, Michael's process he reads thing 100 times and then forgets them, you know so he's never reaching for the lines or for anything in the scene, he's always just trying to connect to the other actor in terms of what's going on right there in that moment. And I think that's really important. There was one clip I was going to show with *Macbeth* which was, "Full of scorpions is my mind." And it was, Michael was really tired that day and we were at the end of a long shoot, and you know he was on the floor just playing with his knife. And you know Marion was really tired, and the energy I wanted from the scene was completely different from their tiredness, and you know their kind of like boredom. Not in terms of them as actors in the scene, but in terms of their characters, you know that these characters kind of had nothing to do. You know they were kind of, they'd done all the killings, and I was sort of sitting there bored just sort of waiting for whatever. And it was just a really lovely moment where Michael was so in a world and Marion came in and was so in a world that was opposite to what I thought, and then they did this scene, it was just beautiful, it was absolutely beautiful. But it came from an energy that was already there, and that was a little lesson I learned about just being

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open to whatever the truth of the day is. You know if your actors are feeling tired or whatever, actually sometimes there might be something really great about that because it will bring a vulnerability or something that goes opposite to the scene. Always be brave to flip things you know, don't hold onto your chickens all the time.

Q: Hello, thank you so much. I'm really interested in how you transition from a film like *Snowtown* a bigger budget with like loads of special effects and how the special effects sort of effect your creative process?

JK: Well it's kind of the same, I mean it's not, I mean you kind of have, you know you have a series of shots you know have got special effects, and I always like my effects to be really real. So we do a lot of real plates, I try to make feel as in-camera as possible. So hopefully you've got an essence. With *Macbeth* there was always an essence of what I wanted in the frame before I started putting in mountains or whatever. And *Assassin's Creed* is turning out to be the same, we've shot a lot of the stunt-work in *Assassin's Creed*, and a lot of the sequences for real in Malta. So it has a very real feel, and I think that's something I'm just naturally interested in. So your plate, what you originally shoot, you should try and get as much as possible, the tone and the mood and the feel and the point of view in that plate, and then let that dictate the VFX that you put over it and the tone of those VFX, as opposed to the other way around. You know you can get caught up in changing too much, and actually I was doing it the other day, changing too much within the original plate, and suddenly it looks artificial. And you do, "Wow, I went to Malta and shot this, you know and was on a roof the whole day watching someone jump from one roof to the other, why does it suddenly look like it's green screen? And you suddenly realise, "I've changed too much within the frame, and you've just to really careful about what you change.

Q: Hi, I was just wondering about between and *Snowtown* and *Assassin's Creed*, how did you find the change of creativity and control, because one's

quite big compared the the other one. Was there much?

JK: From *Macbeth* to *Assassin's Creed* or...

Q: *Snowtown* to *Assassin's Creed*. Did you find it less control and creativity at all?

JK: Yeah, it's challenging. It's challenging because you know you're dealing with a much bigger budget and much bigger investment, and I'm also dealing with a brand that is already set, so there's already an expected audience for that film in a way. But I think you know, I think you justly to, again it's story and narrative and point of view, and that's the thing that kind of guides you with it. And then you have to communicate in the best possible way why you think that is right, that's the effort. You just can't kind of go, "Oh you know they don't understand." You actually have to include people and really get them inspired about choices you might be making that are testing certain conventions. And I had to do that with *Macbeth* as well, you know to shoot it in the way that I wanted to do it, to do the verse in the way that I wanted to do it, there were a lot of discussions, really quite robust discussions about the approach. But I don't think you can be, I don't know, I don't think you can be an arsehole anymore in terms of just going, "Well I'm a genius and you don't understand." I think that there's too much money involved and there's too much, it's an obligation of a director to be able to sit there and communicate to anyone why it needs to be a certain way, you know and why the vision is going to work. So, I think it's a similar process.

[Applause]