

OXFORD LECTURE 1 - FINAL MASTER

HOW TO GROW A CREATIVE BUSINESS BY ACCIDENT

The legendarily bullish film director Alan Parker once adapted Shaw's famous dictum about the academic profession - "those who can, do. Those who can't teach." So far so familiar. And to many in this room, no doubt, so annoying. But he went on: "those who can't teach, teach gym. And those who can't teach gym, teach at film school."

I appreciate that Oxford is not a film school, though it has a more distinguished record than any film school for supplying the talent that has fuelled the British film and TV industries for almost a century - on and off camera. Writers like Richard Curtis, who brought us 4 Weddings and a Funeral, Love Actually, The Vicar of Dibley and Blackadder; or The Full Monty and Slumdog Millionaire scribe Simon Beaufoy; directors of the diversity of Looking for Eric's Ken Loach and 24 Hour Party People's Michael Winterbottom; writer/directors like Monty Python's Terry Jones and the Thick of It's Armando Iannucci; actors and performers ranging from Hugh Grant to Rowan Atkinson; and broadcasting luminaries like the BBC's Director General Mark Thompson and News International's very own Rupert Murdoch.

So, Oxford has been a pretty efficient film and TV school, without even trying. And perhaps that is Parker's point. Can what passes for creativity in film and TV ever really be taught? But here in my capacity as News International Visiting Professor of Broadcast Media (or if you prefer an acronym, NIVPOB - the final M is silent) I may be even further down Parker's food chain.

That said I'm not here to teach. I'm not a teacher. I'm a Visiting professor, though the speed of my visit suggests that a more accurate title might be the "Just-Passing-Through" Professor of Broadcast Media. I'm in the entertainment business. My company Kudos makes TV drama - series like Spooks, Hustle, Life on Mars, mini-series like Tsunami, Burn-Up and Occupation; movies like David Cronenberg's Eastern Promises and the Simon Beaufoy penned Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day. So I can only really aspire to do what I know best, what the best TV drama does - entertain you, stimulate you, make you laugh, make you cry. Well, I did say aspire. When did you last cry in a lecture?

Something else you might not have experienced in a lecture is a list of credits. In TV and film these are de rigeur, not least because our creations involve the work and energy of many talented individuals. Putting together this series of lectures hasn't been quite as complex as making a TV drama - and it's certainly been a lot cheaper - but there are a number of people I need to thank before setting off.

Firstly, News International for sponsoring these lectures. Secondly, Professor Vincent Gillespie and his committee for asking me to be here. I was looking

forward to seeing Vincent again, but I gather he's so horrified by what he might have unleashed that he is now 5,500 miles away at Berkley.

Next my colleague Emma Haigh, who has put enormous effort, time and great good sense into effectively co-producing these lectures with me.

Then, the many colleagues, friends, collaborators and co-conspirators who have patiently contributed insight, inspiration, embellishments and argument. I cannot mention them all here, but they include Law & Order creator Dick Wolf, 24's show-runner Evan Katz, former X-Files show-runner and partner on a new venture of ours Frank Spotnitz, Traffik creator Simon Moore, FX's President of Programming Nick Grad, AMC's Vlad Wolynetz, one of my predecessors in this post Anthony Lilley, my Shine colleague Joanna Shield, digital visionary Edo Segal, and in particular all of my extraordinarily talented colleagues, partners and friends at Kudos, without whose unique talents and Herculean efforts in the face of seemingly impossible odds I would not be here. And nor would Kudos. I cannot mention them all. But here in the audience are my close colleagues Simon Crawford Collins, who produced the first series of both Spooks and Hustle; Daniel Isaacs, who puts together the Byzantine financial and legal constructions that underpin all our shows; Derek Wax, who produced among other things, Occupation, regarded by many as one of the outstanding dramas of recent years; and Alison Barnett, our patient beyond imagining Head of Physical Production.

Absent friends include our other supremely talented and singular in-house Executive Producers: Faith Penhale, Claire Parker, Karen Wilson, Alison Jackson and Andrew Woodhead.

But singular gratitude must be reserved for my quite brilliant partner, Kudos' Creative Director Jane Featherstone from whom I have learned so much both by example and osmosis. Over the coming few weeks, when I say "we", it will not be a royal "we". Instead, this is a real "we," one that embraces all at Kudos, the writers, directors and production teams on our shows - and most particularly, Jane, without whom none of the Kudos shows would be what they are.

I make no apology for this lengthy list. It's heartfelt.

What I am about to talk about could only be of value or meaning when a group of extraordinarily talented people come together to conspire to make something wonderful happen. And then work harder than anyone will ever know or properly appreciate. It's a kind of alchemy, an alchemy of people - bringing them together, mixing them with notions and possibilities and watching the magic unfold.

So, before I begin...I appreciate that there might be some people here who have a "Life", who don't watch television, and who therefore have no idea why

I'm here. So, here's a small taster of the magic Kudos has unleashed - my academic credentials, if you like.

I showed here a quick, snappy 90 second compilation of clips and moments from Kudos' shows.

We have, as you've just seen, made quite a wide range of dramas and comedies. All of it scripted, none of it documentary or reality, though some of it is strongly rooted in rigorous research.

But for the purposes of these four lectures, I'm going to focus on one form only - that of the long-running TV drama series - hour-long scripted pieces, designed to return week-in, week-out in blocks of 6 or more episodes a year (in the US there may be as many as 24 in a year), peopled by characters that audiences get to know and care about - sometimes even more than their loved ones.

I am going to ignore TV movies, short-run mini-series or serials, sit-coms and soaps. The reason for this focus is simple. I believe the long-running TV drama series to be the great art form of the late 20th and early 21st century - right up there with the best of 19th century literature, and performing a commensurate role in the lives of their audiences as the novels of Trollope, Dickens and Conan Doyle did with their readers in their day. As many as 15 years ago, the American literary critic Charles McGrath was calling this form of television "the primetime novel." Much more a writer's medium than the movies or mainstream theatre, which he felt were increasingly concerned with spectacle, McGrath argued that TV - with its "unfolding epic stories instalment by instalment," its abundance of minutely observed details, and - at its best - dialogue every bit as classy as that found in the finest novels, it has "actually taken over some of the roles that books used to fill." He concluded: "more than many novels, TV tells us how we live now."

The drama series is also unique to television. It does something that other story-telling forms cannot replicate. They create a world and a group of people that you get to know over time, and keep coming back come back to.

Like their rivals in other media, most TV drama series are pretty mediocre, some even execrable. I'm interested in the ones that stand out from the crowd, the iconoclasts, those that tattoo themselves on a moment in time to make a lasting cultural impression.

Over the next 4 weeks I want to explore what distinguishes the great TV dramas from the merely good; how they happen; what these great stories - and the nature of their heroes - tell us about the world of which we are a part; how is our relationship with the audience changing? What is the impact on TV drama of an increasingly web-driven world; of reality shows structured like dramas; of the ratings dominance of so-called shiny floor shows; of shifting

financial models; of the global competition for eye-balls?

So, not much to get through.

Kudos is a creative business. Both these words – creative - business - are critical. The reason all this business stuff bubbles to the fore is that what we all do is a weird kind of creativity.

Being creative takes many forms. A 3 year old is being creative scribbling in a corner with a crayon and a piece of scrap paper. A poet, novelist, playwright or composer doesn't need much more to create his or her masterpiece, if that's what it's going to be. Some kind of narrative will emerge. You can publish a novel or even put on a play - relatively speaking - pretty cheaply.

What we do in television drama is expensive, ridiculously, madly, inexplicably - some might even say inexcusably - expensive. Only movies and computer games trump us on price, but when a single episode of The Sopranos is setting HBO back \$10m in its final season, there's not much between the 2 worlds.

So, we are - all of us - more than usually dependent on the kindness of deep-pocketed strangers. And huge teams of people. Which is why we cannot be **just** "creative".

I'm fascinated by how creativity happens in this strange group endeavour that the process of TV drama production shares with the movies. Dickens and Conan Doyle crafted alone to tell their stories. We are SO not alone. In addition to writers, directors, producers, actors, editors, designers, directors of photography and computer graphics wizards, we make what we make in the company of more than a 100 other technicians and crafts-people. Looking over our shoulder are financiers and broadcasters (our employers, effectively), all of whom have a point of view and have paid millions - literally - for the right to impose it. It snows on us when we want sun. A snap train strike cuts a shooting day by hours. A diva won't leave her trailer because she's decided she's cold. The pound collapses adding hundreds of thousands of pounds to an already impossible foreign shoot. A location is suddenly found to contain asbestos. A writer's dog is ill and a script is late (I'd love to tell you I was making this up).

How does any kind of creative vision survive all that? How - if at all - can you plan for innovation, let alone guide or lead it when it comes? How do you allow for creative risk in all of this?

Hitchcock famously said of the cumbersome and unwieldy process that is movie-making: "before we begin, it's always perfect in my head. What follows - the writing, the shooting, the editing and post-production - is damage-limitation." As I mentioned earlier, we TV and film people are all, like Hitchcock, part of a creative business.

From the outside, creativity can seem to be a somewhat mystical process, the

preserve only of a certain kind of genius. But it is of course something that almost anyone is capable of, requiring as it does the fashioning of something new, ideally with some sort of a purpose. It doesn't matter whether it's a piece of music, creative accounting or a new piece of software. It doesn't have to win a prize to qualify. It is this ability to create that distinguishes us from other species. As the economist Paul Romer wrote: "where people excel as economic animals is in their ability to produce ideas, not just physical goods. An ant will go through its life without ever coming up with even a slightly different idea about how to gather food. But people are almost incapable of this kind of rote adherence to instruction. We are incurable experimenters and problem-solvers."

Obviously, the visible creative manifestations of a TV broadcaster or a production company like Kudos are its programmes. These need to surprise, challenge, enlighten, inspire, thrill, provoke, amuse, annoy, terrify, illuminate, provide an escape from quotidian routine, hold a mirror up to the soul, move and entertain. Sometimes, too, they need to educate. None of that is easy to do. At all. Mediocrity is easy.

But to be excellent - to make things of real creative value happen - is incredibly difficult. (It's also incredibly difficult, by the way, to make something really bad. There are too many systems in place to prevent the really bad. Though, ironically, these same disaster-prevention mechanisms are also pretty effective at stifling the rather wonderful. They create a rock-like, risk-averse culture).

That said, they do happen, these extreme - some might say highly improbable events. The question is, can they be "made" to happen, or are they - as the business guru Nassim Nicholas Taleb would call it, Black Swans - highly random, unusual, unpredictable and, above all, unplanable? Can you learn from successes and mistakes to make it more likely that great things will happen?

Taleb calls this the turkey problem. "How," he wonders, "can we know the future given our knowledge of the past? What can a turkey learn about what is in store for it tomorrow from the events of yesterday? The same hand that feeds you can be the one that wrings your neck." Bearing that in mind, I will be talking about the future in 3 weeks time.

So, to get ground-breaking creativity to happen it's probably fair to assume that it's not enough just to put a bunch of "intelligent" people together in a building. Something else needs to happen.

When Thomas Edison opened his lab in New Jersey he called it an "invention factory." I wish I'd thought of that. It's how I see Kudos.

If you scan the literature on creativity, some words and phrases crop up over and over again. Creativity involves breaking rules, being subversive,

iconoclasm, taking risks (and having the confidence and self-respect so to do); it emerges from acts of rebellion, or an environment in which mistakes are allowed, even encouraged. Creativity is really hard work. It takes patience and persistence, sweat, if you like, and a lot of it. Ideally, too, there needs to be a right to fail. But it also needs a whole lot of luck.

Which is why I have called this talk HOW TO GROW A CREATIVE BUSINESS BY ACCIDENT.

It is the tale of how Kudos came to be the UK's leading independent purveyor of quality drama. I hope it doesn't come across as vain-glorious, but instead throws up some thoughts about how creativity happens and how it can be nurtured. It will also set out a stall for many of the ideas that I will expand upon over the coming few weeks.

Like many of my generation, I grew up on war stories - tales of incredible bravery in the face of insuperable odds that were usually rewarded with medals and acclaim, albeit posthumously. These were tales of men - mainly - risking all for some higher purpose. When I was small this behaviour seemed admirable. But as I grew older, the idea of hurling yourself out of a safe trench into a barrage of gunfire - even in a fight against very bad people - struck me, not as heroic, but...well, just stupid. Did these people really have any idea what they were doing? I began to believe not. And if they did, then they clearly weren't stupid, just mad.

You may wonder what this has to do with TV, or the growth of a successful independent production company. A kind historian looking at the corporate evolution of Kudos (as those of you who are Classical scholars will know, "kudos" is the ancient Greek word for praise or glory) might couch it in terms of one great risk taken after another, each one consciously and strategically designed to get us to where we are now.

But a less kind historian might characterise things more as a succession of moves - best described as naïve, but more accurately foolish or under-informed - that looked brave to the outside world, but which could only have been taken by a small group of people - albeit, passionate, immensely talented and exceptionally hard-working people - who had no idea what risks they were running. Making, as they did, one decision after another - based not so much on experience, as on luck and instinct.

I side with the latter historian, hence the title of this talk. And I should know, I was there. I led this potentially suicidal charge. And I'd love to tell you I knew precisely what I was doing or why. I didn't. I just wanted to make great drama, so I fashioned a space and gathered together the highly gifted people who seemed most likely to enable me to do that. This is what I meant when I talked about being an alchemist of people. And it's just about as scientific.

Last year Kudos made 46 hours of drama. This year it will be - if all goes well - closer to 66. We had 1 feature film out on release last year and we have another - a remake of Brighton Rock starring Helen Mirren and Control's electrifying Sam Riley - in production.

In 2003 we were named by the Financial Times as one of the top 50 most creative businesses in Britain. In 2007 and 2008 we were voted Best Independent company by our peers (not last year, because somewhat stupidly - if honestly - I cast **my** vote for the company that beat us...by 1 vote!).

Just over 3 years ago we were bought by Elizabeth Murdoch's Shine, and are now part of a dynamic and rapidly expanding global group, whose other programmes include Merlin, MasterChef, The Biggest Loser and Ugly Betty.

And, last month, the Daily Mail published a list of what in their view were the 10 best TV shows in any genre of the 21st century's first decade on either side of the Atlantic. You'll be pleased, I'm sure, to discover that the list was topped by Simon Cowell's X-Factor and Britain's Got Talent. Lost and The Wire (both of which I'll be discussing in future lectures) were 3 and 4 respectively. Two of our shows found their way into the rest of the top 10 - Spooks at number 5 and Life on Mars at number 9.

I'm not alone in thinking that we created a Black Swan or two...

It wasn't always like this. I set Kudos up in 1992. Then there were just 2 of us. And a dog. By 2000 it was still a breakeven business. Just. And I wasn't paying myself that much more than I'd been earning back in the early '90's as a commissioning editor at Channel 4.

We'd won a British Academy Award - a BAFTA - for an entertainment show we'd made in 1993, a Royal Television Society award for Psychos, a hard-hitting drama serial about a psychiatric hospital and an International Emmy for a BBC family drama called The Magicians House.

But just as medals are no real compensation for dead soldiers, prizes were no substitute for commercial viability. As the song goes, "your loving don't pay my bills".

We had come close to going out of business on at least 2 occasions. The first time when, despairing of the seeming impossibility of making independent production viable as a business, I took my eye off the ball and spent 3 years trying to get a youth cable channel off the ground. My heart was never in it. Rapture, it was called, and I think it still exists somewhere in the multichannel jungle, was the only project I have ever embarked on with a purely financial objective.

First lesson - *Creative business can never be cynically just about the money.*

The second time Kudos and I came close to apocalypse was when I financed the pre-production of *Among Giants*, our first feature film, also one based on a Simon Beaufoy script, on the Kudos company American Express card. Although everything was in principle agreed, I had no signed contracts, no money and I was, among other things, setting up a production office in Sheffield, hiring expensive crew and flying actress Rachel Griffiths 1st class in from Australia. (Rachel, as many of you will know, is now most renowned for her role as the gloriously complex Brenda in *6 Feet Under*, a series I'll be exploring in some detail next week). Anyway...I saw my life flash before me. I thought everything would come crashing down - house, company and family. I have never endured a more stressful 3 months. What was I thinking?

Lesson 2 - as Winston Churchill put it: "Play the game for more than you can afford to lose...only then will you learn the game."

And so, as the new century dawned, full of optimism and excitement, Kudos and I were in a quite different mood. We had no commissions. Not one. Money was pouring out. Nothing was even dribbling in. So, what turned things around? What inspired act of leadership on my or anyone else's part made all the difference?

Well, here's what happened. Crudely, Spooks happened. It started in 1997.

Our Channel 4 prize-winning serial *Psychos* was not recommissioned. Critics had loved it, but audiences ran for the hills.

Lesson 3 - *dramas about mad people are a ratings disaster.* (Curiously, an identically themed show called *Wonderland*, which ran in the US at almost exactly the same time was pulled after only three episodes. Trust me, this arena of psychic darkness is not populist subject matter).

Anyway, Channel 4 liked what we had done and asked us to come up with a precinct-based series idea for them. Just as I was rubbing my hands at the ease of the task, there was a qualification from them - we do want a precinct-based drama, but we don't want one set in either a police station or a hospital. In keeping with their remit, Channel 4 were looking for something risky, something brave, bold and original. No problem, I thought, never having considered for a second what a precinct-based drama was or why most of them were set in a police station or hospital.

Did I say most? As I began my research, I quickly discovered that ALL precinct dramas were set in cop or doc shops. Why? Because life or death jeopardy wanders in through their doors 24/7.

So, as I explored a tragically bereft range of alternative scenarios it became abundantly clear that a series set in a veterinary practice, a shopping mall, a hotel or a cruise ship wasn't quite going to do it - for me or for the channel.

Increasingly desperate, I stumbled into a local bookshop, curious as to whether novelists had chanced upon something that TV had missed. I flirted with sci-fi in general and spaceships in particular, before finding myself irresistibly drawn to the John le Carre section. What about MI5, the British secret service? They're a bit like the police, aren't they, but more so? As I mulled the idea further, I became increasingly excited.

One of the ingredients that hooked me was the notion of a group of people who had to lie for a living and then had to go home and lie to their nearest and dearest. In other words, a group of people whose whole existence, unlike docs and cops, was based on duplicity and deception. Rich possibilities for dramatic and emotional conflict, I felt. Not to mention the fact that we Brits have a disturbing talent for secrets and lies.

And so I dubbed the idea Spooks, the term le Carre had invented for the ghost-like members of the security services, that is now routinely used even by the spies themselves, and pitched a one line idea to Channel 4. The Channel were thrilled, we went straight into a fast-tracked development, researched the idea, brought in Psychos writer David Wolstencroft and waited for the greenlight.

The phone call came during Kudos' annual Christmas lunch at the end of '98. The light wasn't green, not even amber. It was red. They had decided to go for a series about lawyers instead.

Brave? Bold? Original? Happy Christmas to you, too, Channel 4. I wanted to shoot myself.

Lesson 4 - don't listen to broadcasters when they say what they want and in particular don't listen to broadcasters when they say they want to take risks. They usually don't mean it.

Suffice it to say, we spent much of '99 pitching Spooks to the 2 remaining broadcasters - BBC and ITV. Both turned it down.

Memorably - and bear in mind this was all before 9/11 - ITV gave as a reason for rejection - and I quote: "spies?! My dear boy, I mean, who's interested in spies? What do they do? And after the collapse of the Cold War, who's the enemy? There isn't one!"

Well, we'd anticipated that. After all, if you're trying to set up a brand new series, you want to make sure there are a lot of storylines at your disposal. So, we'd researched "enemies" and found at least a 100. In fact, halfway down our list - and I've still got it - was someone called Osama Bin Laden. He may not have been on the CIA's list but he sure as hell was on ours. He had, as you know, first tried to blow up the World Trade Centre back in the early 90's.

So, there we were. The end of the century. A great idea - at least I thought it was - rejected by everyone, a staff of 10, and nowhere else to go.

Spooks' problem was that there were no paradigms. There hadn't been a spy series on TV anywhere for more than a couple of decades. Therefore, went the Alice in Wonderland logic, they didn't work and audiences didn't want them. We'd just come out of the 90's where the gritty UK TV firmament had been dominated by cop shows: Inspector Morse (OK, not so gritty), Between the Lines, Cracker and Prime Suspect. As for those series that had been successful outside the police station, well, they tended towards the soft: Jeeves and Wooster (with Messers Fry and Laurie), Alan Davies' magician-cum-private eye, Jonathan Creek and The Darling Buds of May, which gave us the darling Catherine Zeta Jones.

Not a hint of a spook to be seen.

Economic ruin imminent, the sensible thing might have been to give up. It was certainly tempting. The legendarily aggressive movie executive, Miramax founder Harvey Weinstein tried to buy Kudos around this time, but at such a knock down price that possible bankruptcy seemed preferable.

It was around this time, too, that my accountant pointed out to me that in 8 years of Kudos' life I had made more money out of the family home simply accruing value by sitting there. Had I considered property as an alternative career?

Not knowing any better (like almost all my fellow independent producers, I have no business training, I set Kudos up just because I wanted to make drama, and genuinely not to make money) I brought in a brilliant young producer called Jane Featherstone to be Kudos' Head of Drama. Hitting targets faster than my lawyer could write them into a contract, she is now my partner, and has been almost since she arrived in the middle of 2000.

Her arrival coincided with what the former President Bush might have characterised as regime change at the BBC - a new team both in the drama department and at BBC1. I took Jane into meet them and we re-pitched Spooks. They were looking for a big, high concept series for primetime and asked us to re-invent completely the edgier Channel 4 idea for a mainstream channel.

It is impossible to convey to you the blood, sweat and tears that this process entailed. Jane Featherstone, who drove it, remembers it as "37 drafts of hell." So beating Dante by a number of stages. The graft paid off. By the middle of 2001 a wholly re-imagined Spooks had been greenlit by BBC1 and by September 2001 we were in pre-production on a 6 part series.

Lesson 5 - as it says in the I-Ching, "Patience is rewarded."

The great thing about TV, is that eventually people who say "no" to great ideas lose their jobs. Sometimes, if you're really passionate about an idea, you just have to wait for the nay-sayers to go away or die.

That said, although our dogged refusal to give up on Spooks was commercially risky for us, it's easy with hindsight to forget that it was for all concerned, an extraordinarily risky proposition. We took risks with it, but so did the executives at the BBC who championed it. There were literally no precedents for it on British TV. It was exceptionally bold commissioning. That is what it means to be a creative executive.

So, we were making a pre-9/11 spy show when the world changed and our scripts had to be changed very quickly. Spies, having been invisible since the Berlin Wall came down were now - in a post-Twin Towers universe - in the headlines every day. And if there had been doubts about the availability of an enemy, of infinite story possibilities in other words, there were no doubts now.

Jane and I were united in our fandom of the best US dramas - their pace, their verve, the quality of writing and acting.

But even with a stunning opening script, it was a struggle finding a director to interpret this vision. Jane met about 40 and was close to giving up, when a man called Bharat Nalluri, just back from a sojourn in LA, wandered into her office. Bharat had made a low budget movie thriller called Downtime. There was something about the edgy tension underpinning it that suggested a unique talent. Interestingly, Bharat had never worked in TV, and so was untainted by anything so mundane as "how you were supposed to do things."

He turned out to be something of a genius, and ended up directing the opening episodes of (and therefore creating the look for) Hustle and Life on Mars as well.

When Spooks launched it was hailed by press and public alike for combining the best of British TV with the best of the US. Through Bharat's lens, it was cinematic, fast, visceral.

But we then went one better. I'm going to show you now an extract from our second episode. It's strong stuff, so if you don't like violence don't watch. Really, don't watch. But here two members of the core Spooks team, established in the opening episode, have been captured by the racist leader at the heart of a plot to destabilise inner cities across the UK.

CLIP: Tom (Matthew Macfadyen) and Helen (Lisa Faulkner) have been taken captive by a group of racist thugs, who've discovered that they're MI5 operatives. Tom tries to call their bluff with dire consequences. In a truly shocking sequence, the leader plunges Helen's face into a boiling hot deep fat fryer and then shoots her. The clip begins at 44 minutes 25 and ends at 46 minutes 38.

Yes, in the second episode of a brand new series we killed one of our leads. In fact, not just one of our leads, but Lisa Faulkner (the actress you saw boiled earlier) was our highest profile lead actor - the one who, by virtue of being a ex-soap star, was the one most written about by journalists when Spooks launched. *And we didn't just kill her routinely, but horribly, violently and above all memorably.*

What had annoyed us about series drama was that - however well crafted - an audience never really believed that a protagonist was in danger. You don't have to be a terribly sophisticated viewer to know that a series lead has to stick around. They can't get killed. They come back next week, don't they? They have to.

As a consequence of that, for Spooks viewers things were different from the get-go. Danger meant danger and we've traded off it ever since - and gone on killing our leads.

That said, like many great moments, it wasn't quite planned that way.

As the start of production loomed ever closer, the episode two that had originally been planned wasn't working, so Jane pulled forward the only storyline in existence that was remotely strong - as it happened an outline for an episode 13 of what became a 6 part series - and sped that into a fully-fledged script. It was only then that the decision was taken to seed Lisa's character back into the first episode, so setting up the misdirection for the audience that, as a leading member of the team, she could...not...die. Which is why it was so very shocking when she did.

It had started as an accident, but it took a very clever producer to seize the opportunity to conjure from it a game-changing moment in television drama.

Lesson 6 - (and this is very much the theme of next week's lecture, where I will be focusing on some of the best of the past decade's TV drama from the other side of the Atlantic) - *rules are there to be broken; confound audience expectations and don't do what everyone has done before.*

Then, if you fail at least it's glorious failure. So much TV fails because it has tried to second guess the audience. All too often mediocrity is the result. Creativity doesn't happen on a top-down basis. It cannot be tinkered with or engineered. It is far more likely to emerge from bold experimentation. This is the place where luck happens. Not from a place where the likelihood of failure is so eroded, that the chances of success are hobbled from the get-go.

It's worth saying, too, though it didn't feel like it at the time, that Channel 4 and ITV did us huge favours by turning Spooks down when they did. This was another of the accidents that I referred to earlier. I'm certain that although Spooks was conceived as a pre-9/11 show, it only enjoyed the spectacular success it did because it touched a post 9/11 nerve.

And Spooks continued to anticipate the zeitgeist. Yes, we were well researched, well (and deniably) sourced and read the papers, but luck played a huge part, too, in the fact that series after series, show after show, Spooks' stories about torture, extraordinary rendition, racial tension in the inner cities, financial crises and many more ideas of the moment appeared in our "fictions" just ahead of the news. Uniting all this was a set of heroes designed for a new world order, perhaps better characterised as a lack of order. The moral certainties that had seemed clearly defined post World War 2 and well into the Cold War were suddenly, come the new century, muddy, murky and ambiguous. Who were the bad guys really? And even if we knew who the bad guys were, maybe there was just a smidgeon of their cause that had some basis in reality. In this morally ambiguous universe, heroes cannot behave as they once did.

As happens sometimes in Spooks, our protagonists - good people in the eyes of the audience - do bad things. Very bad things. Heroes? Or anti-heroes? In 2 weeks time, the emergence of a 21st century anti-hero will be my theme.

A recent article about Kudos described it as The House that Spooks Built. This is to some extent true. It provided a creative and commercial foundation from which all else followed. Above all, it formed the building blocks for a creative team at Kudos that remains with us today. A hard core of us have been together for nearly a decade. We have grown a shared culture in which all are invested in the success of what we make.

Lesson 7 - and forgive me if this sounds a little gnostic, but Robert Louis Stevenson expressed it perfectly when he said: "don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds that you plant."

Spooks' series 8 climaxed just before Christmas. Series 9 is in pre-production.

Our next hit series for the BBC, Hustle - about a gang of high-end conmen - came out of a brief chat in the back of a cab between Jane Featherstone and Spooks director Bharat Nalluri. The idea was never written down, but verbally pitched, one of our favourite writers attached and it was on air 18 months later.

Hustle would never have happened had it not been for the success of Spooks. There had been no series about con men, so it couldn't work, could it? No broadcaster had declared a desire for a con-show, which meant it was not what anyone was looking for.

Like Spooks, Hustle was high octane, but unlike Spooks it held 2 fingers up to the weary, soap-like naturalism that had dogged so much British TV drama for decades. With its ironic, post-modern nods, winks and asides to the audience, its freeze-frame expositions and writer Tony Jordan's gleeful wrong-footing of the audience, it was like nothing else on television.

Lesson 8 - if nothing else, at least be different

Here's a clip from the first episode, in which our gang reel in their "mark" as the victim of a con is known.

This clip opens as the "mark" is lead into the office by Stacie, with Albert. Mickey welcomes them and remarks that "what I'm about to show you, maybe foolproof, but it is illegal...would you like me to continue?" At this point the "mark" is frozen in time, as he's pouring coffee, and the rest of the cast walk out of shot, behind the desk to join Mickey. The next lines of dialogue are delivered into the camera, as if the team are talking just to you, the audience – "you see the first rule of the con is, you can't con an honest man..." Once the team have finished explaining the principles of a con, they return to their positions, the mark unfreezes, and all continue as if nothing had happened. This clip runs from 34 minutes 08, to 35 minutes 51.

There is a case for the proposition that *Hustle* resonated with audiences both in the UK and internationally because - once again, accidentally - it hit the morally ambiguous zeitgeist. This is not why it was conceived, but you could argue that this is the age of the conman as hero. Our leaders lie to us, yet we go on voting for them. As they said in the clip, you can't con an honest man. We are conned every election year, so what does that make us?

To some extent, too, *Hustle* is a metaphor for the relationship between story-teller (the conman) and audience (the mark). In most TV drama this is a very straightforward relationship, one in which - unlike most marks - the audience is entirely complicit. They willingly enter the web being spun by the story-teller and are happy to follow the narrative as it unfolds. The story-teller's tricks of the trade - the writerly equivalents of sleight of hand, the generating of suspense, mystery and surprise - are governed by the fundamental convention that you can do anything, but you can under no circumstances lie to your audience. The camera provides a god-like omniscience, a silent third person narrator that is above all else reliable. It creates the illusion - as it is supposed to - of an objectively observed reality. It is, needless to say, all a seductive trick. It's the most mediated, manipulative and contrived of all experiences. Spooks functions in this way. For sure, characters frequently behave with staggering, even bewildering duplicity within this framework, but the story-telling is always honest.

Hustle does something quite unusual for TV drama. Like the marks, we the audience are not so much seduced as actively and willingly conned. Critical information is routinely withheld. This renders the narration unreliable. But it is at least what the literary critic James Wood classes "reliably unreliable." While the rest of television is poker-faced, detached and objective, *Hustle's* narrative tone is ironic. And while almost all TV drama is at pains to lull you into forgetting that you are watching television, *Hustle's* characters address us directly. Brecht would have been proud of us. His approach has never been invoked to such populist effect. This is at the heart of what makes *Hustle* such

an unusual piece of entertainment.

But there was another accident at play in Hustle's success.

Those of you as old or even older than me will have noticed Robert Vaughn as one of our regulars. If, like me, you grew up with The Man From UNCLE, you might understand how childishly thrilling it was to lure him into the show. He was our first choice. But, bizarrely, the BBC vetoed him, claiming that British audiences didn't like American actors in "their" shows. Then, two days before principal photography began, his replacement failed a medical, and there was no time left for the BBC to object to our original first choice coming back in as a late substitute.

Robert was the only "name" in the show. We attracted a mountain of press when Hustle launched - 95% of it about the Man From UNCLE coming back to the BBC. Without the oxygen of that particular publicity opportunity Hustle might easily have come and gone without anyone noticing. It didn't, though, and series 6 of Hustle is currently on air. (By the way, two more episodes to go of the current season, Monday nights, BBC 1, 9pm). We are also developing a Hustle movie for Fox.

I spoke earlier of the happy accident of Spooks' history of rejection. Well, that happy accident played an even larger part in the history of Life on Mars, our most recent primetime BBC series. Life on Mars launched in 2006 - 4 years ago. With season 3 of its successor, Ashes to Ashes about to launch, Life on Mars lives on.

It had started back in 1997 when I persuaded the BBC to give Kudos some money for Tony Jordan and a couple of fellow-writers - Matthew Graham and Ashley Pharoah - who had all worked together on Eastenders, to spend a week brainstorming some new drama notions for BBC1. The sensible place to do this would have been a conference room in a non-descript motel just off the M25. But sensible and creative stimulus do not inhabit the same universe. (Nor for that matter - and I say this in a loving way - do sensible and Tony Jordan). He insisted on Blackpool and the bounteous distractions of its off-season seafront.

I joined them halfway through their week of amusement arcades and soggy chips to find etched on their white board the immortal words "suck carrots in hell!" For a moment I feared this might be the sum total of three days' creative brainstorming. It turned out to be a characteristically mischievous log line for an idea about a man who sells his soul to the devil save his daughter's life. But they had also come up with Life on Mars.

Life on Mars was always a mad idea - a cop from the present day has a car accident (another important accident in Kudos' history), and when he comes round he finds himself in 1972; is he dead? Is he mad? Is he on drugs? Is he in a coma? Has he really travelled back in time? Who knows?

So it may be no surprise to discover that it took us seven years to get that idea green-lit. On Life on Mars, our original contracts with the creators go back to 1998. Every broadcaster said no, then said no again and in some cases, no once more. But after the success of Spooks and Hustle, a couple of BBC executives had - in terms of their own careers - another somewhat risky thought: hmmm, this notion is insane, but maybe Kudos can pull it off.

Lesson 9 - (this goes well beyond patience) passion is rewarded. As Margaret Boden writes in The Creative Mind: "creativity involves not only a passionate self-interest but self-confidence too. A person needs a healthy self-respect to pursue novel ideas, and to make mistakes, despite criticism from others. Self-doubt there may be, but it cannot always win the day. Breaking generally accepted rules, or even stretching them, takes confidence. Continuing to do so in the face of scepticism and scorn takes even more."

On Life on Mars? Seven years of scepticism and scorn. And while on the subject of scepticism and scorn, that "suck carrots in hell" idea - 13 years after first being pitched - is now finally in development at the BBC.

So, we have learned to be very committed to our ideas, to be so tenacious that the truly great creative notions will not die, but find their right time, place and supporters.

Here's a scene, shortly after Sam's accident, when he wanders into his old precinct, somewhat confused and yet to meet Gene Hunt...

Starting at 13 minutes 36, Sam wanders into his office, now back in 1973, dazed and confused. There's a fug of cigarette smoke, everyone's wearing unusual clothes; his desk and PC have gone. Sam snaps "what the bloody hell is going on here? This is my department. What have you done with it?" This outburst stirs something in a central office and out of the door, through more cigarette smoke, as if exiting a saloon in the wild west, walks Gene Hunt. "Ok, surprise me. What year is it supposed to be?" asks Sam. Gene pulls him into his office and throws him up against the filing cabinet and punches him in the stomach - "they reckon you've got concussion...don't ever waltz into my kingdom acting king of the jungle." "Who the hell are you?" asks Sam - "Gene Hunt, your DCI, and it's 1973, almost dinner time, I'm 'avin' 'oops!"

LIFE ON MARS has been a huge critical and ratings success. It has captured the imagination of audiences in the strangest of ways. Like its successor Ashes to Ashes, Life on Mars works on a number of different levels. One of its blackly comedic charms undoubtedly is the prism of hindsight it provides, through which we gaze anew at what we have become. The computers and mobile phones of Sam's 21st century world represent a severing of any connection we might once have had with the instincts and physicality so viscerally embodied

by the 1970's creature that is Gene Hunt.

What also resonates with audiences - perhaps uncomfortably - is that we live in a world where we can't catch criminals if we play by the rules. In fact, the rules governing our behaviour don't work across the board, whether on a personal or a political level. Politicians tell us that we are helpless without them. But the experience of ordinary people, the day to day injustices great and small that dog our lives - lead us to feel that we are helpless with them. Democracy gives us an increasingly scant illusion of control over our destinies.

Gene Hunt, a man for whom rules were made to be abused before being broken - is a different shade of the new anti-hero I alluded to in Spooks, one perfectly primed to explode into the moral vacuum in which he finds himself. He's all the more insidious, by virtue of being very funny. And he's partly very funny because his religion is political incorrectness.

Which I think is another of the great reasons for Life on Mars' success - its staggering and riotously liberating political incorrectness. Political correctness has given us a kind of sense of humour bypass and has all but killed the sitcom on both sides of the Atlantic. It's no surprise that Larry David's inspired antihero should have risen above the pack in Curb Your Enthusiasm. But the long-delayed Life on Mars hit a public exasperated by what they could no longer say or do (or even think) in public and ready to enjoy once more the wicked pleasures of what used to be.

So in addition to shooting first and asking questions later, drinking alcohol from breakfast onwards and smoking in offices, the characters make jokes about women, gays and ethnic minorities. It's offensive of course, but the defence for writers, actors and producers is that we're very sorry, but it's all in the service of authenticity.

Life on Mars is also, of course, just a great cop show, there's a terrific love/hate relationship at the heart of it, it's funny and it has its water-cooler debating point each week as to what has really happened to our 21st century protagonist.

If Hustle played games with unreliable story-telling, Life on Mars took things further still. Sam is our narrator, we are inside his head, he's in his own story, one possibly entirely of his own making, and we, like him, don't know what his status is - mad? On drugs? In a coma? Dead? Really travelled back in time? This makes him, as James Wood has it, "unreliably unreliable." We sympathise with him, and we understand there's no malicious intent on his part. But he is wholly untrustworthy. While there are many precedents for this in literature - most famously in Knut Hamsun's Hunger or Faulkner's As I Lay Dying - there is no precedent for this in television drama series, certainly none that connected so emphatically with huge primetime audiences. Spooks or Hustle's varying degrees of "economy with the truth" is one thing, but the opportunity in Life on Mars for narrative dishonesty, one that minute by minute is in danger of

breaking the bond of trust with the audience, is huge.

But when it works, as it undeniably did with *Life on Mars*, a beguiling narrative ambiguity opens up, so allowing each member of the audience to come to their own interpretation as to what might be going on.

As I will be discussing in more detail over the coming weeks, those stories that tell us everything, that leave no room for an alternative interpretation as they unfold will never be as satisfying as those that intrigue or set up a puzzle through a judicious withholding of information. But withhold too much, set up mysteries that are never able to be resolved, and you have the televisual equivalent of the prick-tease. The old adage that 99% of pleasure is anticipation only holds good if that anticipation delivers.

The status of the narrator was, though, merely a symptom of what made *Life on Mars* so unusual in the British televisual landscape. Even more than *Hustle* before it, this series was a radical departure from the soapy, naturalistic drama traditions of UK TV. The last Manchester-based drama had been *Clocking Off*, set in a factory, which had an almost documentary realism about it. The last distinctive cop series had been Tony Garnett's *Cops*, similarly rooted in gritty truth. Once again, there was no primetime precedent for this breakout series in its triumphant parting of the ways with naturalism from the get-go. Because when you abandon naturalism, the conventional rules of story-telling go out of the window. Anything can happen. There is an in-built ambiguity in imagined worlds. A natural mystery. And it doesn't necessarily make for comfortable viewing. But it does have to make sense in terms of its own logic.

Would *Life on Mars* have been as successful if it had been commissioned when we first pitched it? I doubt it. *Life on Mars* found its time.

Lesson 10 - Sometimes, even, failure and rejection can be your friend.

And now, because of the secondary accident of one of our leads not wanting to continue, *Life on Mars* ended after only two series, so enhancing a cult status that further series could only have diminished. The third and final season of the follow-up series, *Ashes to Ashes*, is about to air. For those of you who've not seen it, here the mercifully unreconstructed and unrepentant Gene Hunt, now older, but certainly not wiser and relocated to London in 1983, is joined by a female cop from the present day - confusingly being played by one of the former regulars from *Spooks*, though not the one you saw boiled alive earlier.

In talking about growing a business by accident I am only semi-serious. As I hope I have demonstrated, much that happens is lucky, but I fervently believe that - if you can't necessarily make your own luck - and this is

Lesson 11 - at least make for yourself a place where luck can happen and put yourself there.

The place where luck happens, where great TV series are sculpted, is a place where first and foremost a team of exceptionally brilliant people have been brought together. They then have to work frighteningly hard with passion, intensity and ruthless attention to detail in order to have even the faintest chance of breaking the mould. Luck alone is just an ingredient, sometimes a catalyst. But accidents without that oh-so precious human component is...well, just that - an accident.

It is in this equation that the group of people Jane and I value above all others are our writers. As they say, failure is an orphan, success has many parents. But without our writers we have nothing. Their inspiration, their imagination, their madness, and their accidents...are what make all this possible. As the journalist Red Smith once said: "There's nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein."

I want to show you one more moment from Life on Mars that illustrates just how brilliant these people are. Sam - our cop from today - is standing on a rooftop in 1973, having been persuaded by a psychiatrist whom he believes to be a voice from today, that by killing himself he can return to the present.

Sam stands on the edge of the roof of the police station, several storeys up, waiting to jump. He believes he's in a coma and he's going to take the "definitive step to get back to the present" by throwing himself off the building. Annie (the WPC that Sam's befriended) finds him and begins to talk him down. She explains that the psychiatrist Sam had spoken to wasn't a psychiatrist but an ex-boyfriend – who thought Sam's predicament was a big joke, and didn't expect him to take his "advice" literally, and jump. Sam is utterly confused. He's been hearing voices from the present, whilst living in the past. As Sam takes Annie's hand he feels something strange – "what's that in your hand?" "Sand, I was running up here and I fell against the fire bucket." "You see, why would I imagine that? Why would I bother to put that kind of detail in it?..." Maybe he's not in a dream, after all. Sam asks Annie what he should do – "Stay." This clip runs from 55 minutes 40 to 58 minutes 14.

In a way the writer Matthew Graham is paying tribute to his own cleverness with that exchange about the sand. But who can blame him? What a fabulous piece of writing.

I know this talk was titled how to grow a creative business by accident. The business bit is an accident, the creativity not.

As I have endeavoured to explain, Kudos is peopled by a team who love what they do. Passionately. These shows are now just part of what we make. In addition to these gorilla returning series, we have made over the past years a Roma Fiction Prize-winning thriller about climate change, a gut-wrenching drama about the aftermath of the 2004 Tsunami, a harrowing TV movie about a

paedophile, and the recent Prix Europa-winning Occupation 3-parter for BBC1 - none of these pieces commercial or ratings-grabbing. We just wanted to make them.

The finale of the first ever episode of Hustle summed things up nicely.

The team are toasting the success of their first and last con back together, "the end of an era"...but Mickey reveals he had no intention of retiring (this was the ruse he used to get his old gang back together, one last time.) "It's not all about the money, is it Mickey?" asks new boy Danny, "Here endeth the first lesson" says Mickey as he raises his glass. This moment ran from 57 minutes 18 to 58 minutes 12.

When they said "It's not only about the money" that's lesson 1 reprised.

Kudos is a place Jane and I have built where the right kind of accidents happen - most of the time. Not everything we do works, of course. Could it be better calibrated to commercial success? Maybe. But keeping a creative spirit at the forefront of a creative organisation is absolutely critical. It's also tough, and can often seem scary. Richard Florida writes in his influential bestseller *The Rise of the Creative Class*: "the creative ethos marks a strong departure from the conformist ethos of the past. Creative work in fact is often downright *subversive*, since it disrupts existing patterns of thought and life."

And he goes on to quote the economic historian Joel Mokyr who said: "Continued outpouring of creativity 'cannot and should not be taken for granted...sustaining it over long periods is not automatic, but requires constant attention. Creativity," he concludes, "is an act of rebellion."

Rebellion? Actively encouraged at a broadcaster? There's a thought.

But at the very least, that "constant attention" means for all creative organisations - Kudos, our fellow producers and broadcasters, too - being places where individual passions can be indulged, where it's not all about the ratings, where it's not all about perpetuating or growing the organisation for its own sake (think of this as "better recipes, not more food"), where it's not all about the money (or the lack thereof); where only the very best ideas are made, where more risks are encouraged - celebrated even - and where there is, above all, a right to fail.

Failure is of course the wrong kind of accident, so we naturally devote much effort to "not failing."

I'm going to end this talk with the final moments of the first series of Spooks - our attempt to ensure the BBC commissioned a 2nd series, and my attempt to ensure that you come back next week.

This clip begins at 56 minutes 23, part way through the final scene of the

first series of Spooks – Tom has arranged for his house to be installed with a top level security system, so his girlfriend, Ellie, and daughter, Maisie, feel safe. This system has malfunctioned and trapped them inside the house...along with a laptop that contains a bomb...Tom is stuck outside, unable to get in to the house, and is desperately talking to Ellie through the letterbox, and over the phone, to help her defuse the bomb. But this bomb is not set up in the usual way and it seems there's no way of defusing it. The scene finishes with the bomb clock counting down, Ellie and Maisie are trapped inside and Tom looks on helplessly through the window...