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Seán Crosson and Mark Schreiber

***“If Irish cinema is going to be really great it has
to stop worrying too much about being ‘Irish cinema’”:
Q & A with Lenny Abrahamson and Mark O’Halloran***

Director Lenny Abrahamson and screenwriter and actor Mark O’Halloran have established a formidable partnership in recent years that has produced some of the most distinctive and celebrated work to emerge in Irish cinema. Their low-budget debut film Adam & Paul (2004) enjoyed commercial success in Ireland and critical acclaim internationally, winning awards at the Sofia International Film Festival, the Gijón International Film Festival, the Evening Standard British Film Awards as well as the Irish Film and Television Award for Best Director. Their follow-up feature, Garage (2007), won 11 major international festival awards including the C.I.C.A.E. Award at the Cannes Film Festival. Their contribution here was given as part of a public interview chaired by Seán Crosson and Mark Schreiber on the occasion of the 7th EFACIS (European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies) Conference, University of Vienna, 5 September 2009.

CHAIR: I think I would be right in saying that one of the reasons why there has been this increased interest in Irish film over the last ten years is, to a significant part, due to the work of Lenny and Mark, and particularly their feature films *Adam & Paul*, *Garage*, and their mini-series *Prosperity*. If I could start with you, Lenny, at the beginning: your film work goes back to the eighties and early nineties; indeed you made a short film, *3 Joes* [in 1991], which was quite successful, winning awards at Galway, Cork, and Oberhausen. Could you talk to us a little about your own beginning in film, and how you first became involved?

LENNY: I suppose I first became involved in film as a fan in the early eighties when I was still in school; just an avid telly-watcher like every teenager probably then. I remember that BBC2 were broadcasting, occasionally, in the times of night when nobody was expected to watch, these great pieces of European cinema; so you’d see Renoir and Fellini films. I was just very struck by the new space that was opened up for me by these films, and I had this fantasy of ‘wouldn’t it be amazing to be able to be involved in that?’. But Ireland at that time was a very different place – although it’s not as different to the Ireland of now as it was to the Ireland, say, of a year and a half ago. There was no Film Board at that point – it was between the two cycles of the Film Board – and saying that you wanted to make films was a bit like saying that you wanted to be an astronaut or a fireman, it was like a fantasy. So I progressed on an academic track and I studied philosophy in

Dublin. But I started, just when video became available as a cheaper tool, to mess around with a video camera, and I set up a group in Trinity for students to make films. That was the beginning for me, and I just kept doing it parallel to my academic life. Then, at the end of my undergrad stint I went over to the States to do a post-grad but I deferred for a year and made *3 Joes*, which we made using money that Trinity had put aside from the location fee for shooting *Educating Rita* in Trinity. And so they had this fund for the visual performing arts. I think we got two thousand old pounds from that, and that's what we used to make the first film. And that was really when I started to think, 'well maybe this is really a possibility'. So after a year at Stanford I decided to head back home. I always say that I think I'm the only filmmaker ever to leave California and go to Dublin in search of a career in cinema.

CHAIR: You mentioned that you studied philosophy, which is an interesting parallel with filmmaking. Has that background in philosophy informed your filmmaking?

LENNY: I think that whoever I am that's interested in film is also interested in philosophy; it's the same person. I suppose some of the things that interest me in cinema are very fundamental aspects of the possibility that the grammar of film allows. I'm very interested in creating scenes which have a kind of weight, an existential weight, a 'here-and-now-ness', which I think cinema can really do. It doesn't often do, most cinema really is just drama onscreen, but some cinema does have that kind of weight, and there are many complex parallels between the two things, and I'm happy to live in that space.

CHAIR: When you returned from America going back to Dublin, you also entered the world of advertising, doing advertisement clips for television. One of the most famous ones is probably the Carlsberg ad in the nightclub.

LENNY: I was hoping that you weren't going to mention my dark and dirty secret.

CHAIR: The world of advertising seems to be a lot different from that of an aspiring filmmaker, who has to look for money all the time, and you were working with these big budgets. Could you comment a bit on your experience in advertising and the difference to filmmaking, and also on your work with Johnny [Speers] who eventually became the producer of *Adam & Paul*?

LENNY: When I think about myself at that point, when I came back from being away in the States, I was in my early twenties and I had a very intense desire to make 'great cinema', serious cinema. So my journey then, if you were making a film of it, would have to be a kind of downbeat satirical comedy, because I tried for a while to stick to the most ascetic principles of pure artistic expression, and it was a very lonely phase. I think I wasn't

ready to make the sort of films that I wanted to make, and I was also very aware that I had to shoot things. And so I went to the other extreme and I started to make TV commercials, which are purely instrumental pieces of work, they just have a function for somebody else. But for me it was like a kind of boot camp, just technically, to be shooting. As a filmmaker, one of the things that's different, I think, to, say, life as a writer is that it's really hard to actually do it, to get an opportunity to do things, to see them through from the idea to the object at the end. Filmmakers maybe do their thing once every two years, and that's not healthy. So I just wanted to be shooting. And it was a kind of culture shock. For me, learning about how the corporate world worked was just extremely interesting. I don't think I ever would have known how a vast number of people spend their time, and how the mechanics of that world work; and it *is* as ridiculous and as funny and as venal as any spoof on the world of advertising. In terms of money, which is the obsession of every filmmaker, I made that Carlsberg commercial just before I shot *Adam & Paul* – the Carlsberg commercial was 60 seconds long, and the budget was 1,000,000, and *Adam & Paul* is an hour and a half and the budget was 400,000; and that's to get it through to the cinema and everything. So the differences are vast. Whereas on a commercial you have people running around offering you multiple cappuccinos and mochas till they're coming out your ears, on *Adam & Paul* we were just lucky if we weren't arrested or beaten to death on Marlborough Street. So they're artistically incomparable. But I don't want to be unfair, because actually, making something is still making something, and commercials are extremely difficult. There is a kind of discipline to having to deliver a complex story and set-up in exactly the right time. In a feature film you can say, 'well actually my intention was that I wanted that bit to be languid and I wanted it to be long'. It's very easy to hide behind the contingencies of your own desire. But in a commercial there's somebody standing there who has paid lots of money and it *has to* cut, it *has to* work. And so I feel that as an apprenticeship of a certain kind it was very useful for me.

CHAIR: Is there any particularly important aspect that you have taken away from working in advertising that still would inform your filmmaking today? Is there any valuable lesson that you may have learned?

LENNY: I think that I'm aware of the destructive impact of having more than one agenda in any creative endeavour. Commercials are a kind of negotiation between a whole bunch of people, all of whom have a different impulse. The director wants to make something lively or fresh or good or that will help their reel; the client wants to flog more cornflakes, and the producer wants to make sure it comes in on budget. So with features I try just to work with people who want to make the same film as me. Also there is a sort of discipline on a commercial shoot in terms of dealing with crew – the kind of managerial part of directing, which is a huge part of it – and

people do it in different ways. Some people succeed in doing it by just sitting back from it, but other people are very hands on, and I learnt, I think, a kind of crew craft on commercials. On shoots I'm still quite disciplined about the way I shoot, in a way that maybe isn't always the case in the freer environment of Irish filmmaking.

CHAIR: I was also thinking about the aesthetics. If you watch the Carlsberg clip closely, there are certain elements which come back in terms of the way the camera works with the characters, for example.

LENNY: I'm horrified that you say that. It may be true, in which case there are some elements that are too much a part of you that are always going to come out. For me actually, what making commercials allowed me to do was to get out of my system any of the machismo of directing that you see sometimes in young filmmakers going to make their first feature, which is, 'I want to do something where there is no edit for the first twenty minutes of the film'. Or there's a show-off dimension: they want to swing their camera around, they want to impress other filmmakers. Because that was required of commercials I did a lot of it, made lots of glossy-looking things, and so when it came to making *Adam & Paul* there was no niggling voice saying, 'but wouldn't it be *sexier* to do it this way or that way', and for me it was a sort of exorcism for all that machismo.

CHAIR: Right. Can we switch to Mark? If you could comment a bit on how the two of you met in the run-up to *Adam & Paul*, and how the experience of working together on that film was for you?

MARK: Well, I didn't go to university; I went to drama school instead, which was a very delinquent thing to do. I became an actor, and I was a theatre actor in Ireland for about ten years. I worked in the Gate and the Abbey and things like that. I got to a certain point where I had spent three quarters of my career dressed in eighteenth-century costumes for no particular reason, and I was wondering, 'what's going on here?'. So I decided to start writing plays. I wrote a few short plays that were put on, and Johnny Speers saw one of them. He was a friend of a friend of mine, so we knew each other, and he introduced myself and Len. He asked me did I have any material that would go towards making a feature film and I said I had, which was sort of a lie. Because I'm from the West of Ireland, when I moved to Dublin first of all I was made acutely aware of the heroin addiction that was going on in Dublin city. I had never seen junkies before, for instance. I moved into the north inner City, in Parnell Street, and I was deeply shocked by the heroin addicts. I felt there was almost two time systems working in Dublin, one which was sort of 'junkie time', which was all in slow motion, and then there was this crazy dance going on in the middle of Dublin and everyone was just busy, busy, busy around their days. And I would meet friends of mine in Dublin and go, "my God, did you see that junkie over there?", and they would go, "oh? Oh, yeah yeah yeah". I

became an avid note-keeper, and so I kept notes on things I had seen. We've talked about this a lot, but there was one particular thing I saw one day, which was two women, both heroin addicts, fighting over a Choc Ice, which is a sort of ice cream, and one had the Choc Ice in her hand and the other had her hand over the other one's hand, and they were pulling the Choc Ice, one to the other, going, "it's my fuckin' Choc Ice! No, it's my fuckin' Choc Ice!". And then the Choc Ice fell off the stick onto the ground. And there was something incredibly funny and incredibly sad and incredibly moving and incredibly childlike about it. So these were notes that I had put together and I said to Len that this was something I was interested in. I also was interested in Laurel and Hardy; we both mentioned *Way Out West* as being a film that we completely adore, and it's a deep influence on *Adam & Paul*. And then he introduced me to the work of Aki Kaurismäki, which we watched. We just began this process of talking about what kind of film we wanted to make, and how *Adam & Paul* would become that film. And we found that, although we had very different ideas about what we wanted to do and we had very different tastes, there was this sort of middle ground which we shared that became what *Adam & Paul* became. We had these great discussions and I began scripting it. It took ..., well, I think I have eighteen drafts of it on my computer anyway, and it became this to-and-fro between us. It was a really gorgeous creative process. It only took a year, but it felt like five hundred years. I'd come along and go, "I've finished!", and he'd go "no you haven't!".

CHAIR: You're also very active in drama and theatre. Could you comment a bit on similarities and differences in working in those two media as an actor and a writer? That's another big issue: if you write the script, as you did for *Adam & Paul*, and then act in it. Was there any difficulty doing this or did it come quite easily?

MARK: I don't think there's much difference to acting in theatre as to acting on camera. On camera it's much more intense and it's sharply focused. It's basically that you're filming the best bits of the rehearsal process that a theatre process is about. In the theatre process you rehearse the whole thing, get it all right, and then try and get it right every night for ten weeks, which is painful, whereas in film you've just got to get in there and be very focused on set, and with the director you focus in on the ideas. I mean, the idea that I was going to act in *Adam & Paul* ... I was originally going to act in it, and then I stepped away. We had somebody else involved and I was going to play another part. Then they disappeared, and I wasn't really right for the part that Tom [Murphy] eventually played. And then we found Tom, who is a great friend of mine, and when he read for us he just was so spectacular. I think basically in my head I was writing it for him; I didn't realise it at the time but I was. And then we were looking for the other one and there was two weeks to go, and it was like, "Mark, you *have*

to act in it.” So I had to go on this terrible, terrible crash diet for two weeks. But once I was on set there was never a clash. I was like Worzel Gummidge¹ – there was the writer head and the actor head: “I got my acting head on, Aunt Sally.” So on set it was just the acting, and basically on set actors sit around grumbling about the director, and the director grumbles about the actors, and we all grumble about the writer.

CHAIR: Can I ask you a bit more about the late Tom Murphy? Of course, it was a huge loss, not just to Irish film but to Irish theatre as well, when he passed away late in 2007. One of the great strengths of the film is the extraordinary relationship that’s evident within the film itself, between yourself and Tom onscreen.

MARK: I met Tom on the very first paid theatre gig I ever got. It was a tour of Britain in Joe Dowling’s production of [Sean O’Casey’s] *Juno and the Paycock*, in which I had one line, which was “Duz yez want any coal blocks?” It was an incredibly stunning performance, it was nominated for an Olivier Award. It was the definitive coal-block seller; people are afraid to go near that part now. Tom Murphy was playing Johnny Boyle, and I had never seen him before. I don’t know if you know the part of Johnny Boyle? It’s an incredibly difficult part to play. He’s one-armed, he has been shot in the hip, and he moans throughout the play, moans, moans, moans, and right at the end of the play when his sister becomes pregnant he pipes up: “she should’ve been driven out of the house she’s brought disgrace on!”. And then he gets shot at the end! So it’s an incredibly hard part to deliver, people usually go, “ugh, he’s just hideous, we hate him!”. But Tom brought this dark intensity; he had this voice on him. I remember watching the first read through and thinking, ‘he is amazing’. And I had to be his understudy, so I sat around undermining him a lot, and hoping he’d fall down the stairs. And eventually we ended up going out, we were together for eight years. We weren’t together when we were making this film, but we were still best, best, best buddies, so I think that’s what you see onscreen. Weirdly enough, we *were* Adam and Paul on the set. I’d go, “Tom, would you get into place [...]”, and Tom would just wander off. But it was a joy being on set with him, because he arrived the first day and he was just on it, he just was superb. And then two years ago, he got diagnosed with cancer and he died very suddenly thereafter. I think he’s a huge loss. I think that the performance that he gives in *Adam & Paul* is certainly the best performance by an Irish actor in modern Irish cinema. What’s so brilliant about it is that as an actor he had no ego. He’s not going out there going, “this is me! I’m performing for you!”. He inhabits this character in an egoless way and his truth is profoundly true, and sometimes critics are too stupid to recognise it as being great acting, they think he just *is* that. A lot of people thought he was a junkie; he actually was an incredibly sophisticated, artistic man who was able to inhabit things in a very pure way. One of the things when he

passed on was the idea that we've lost all these great performances, we've lost all this fun that we were going to have. He also made the craziest career choices. Tom won a Tony Award on Broadway, and I went over to visit him straight afterwards, and I was going, "you know, God, you won a Tony Award! You're set up like, we can buy a house!", and he immediately changed his name professionally from Tom Murphy to Jordan Murphy, because he thought that the Tony Award was ground zero and now he was going to move on. And I was like, "you fuckin' eejit". But anyway it turned out that there was someone else called Jordan Murphy, so he had to change his name to Tom Jordan Murphy, and I think there was someone else called Tom Jordan Murphy so he changed it back to Tom Murphy. So if you see him in various films he's credited as being Tom Jordan Murphy, Tom Murphy, Jordan Murphy. He was cracked, but brilliant.

CHAIR: It's evident throughout your work that you're focusing on seemingly insignificant small characters and their seemingly insignificant small lives. Why did you make that choice to keep that theme throughout all three pieces?

LENNY: It is true, it is across the three pieces. It's not exclusively, I think, what we're interested in. But I suppose there is a sense in which every life contains the same things really, and when you concentrate on small and largely quiet things you can see detail. I think both of us are quite wary of drama in the usual televisual sense of strong characters who are defined by a few clear psychological 'wants', or the Syd Field method or way of thinking about cinema drama.² We like to concentrate on shaping atmospheres and moments and subtexts which are not understood by the characters themselves. We're also interested in characters who are not hugely self-aware. One of the things that you're told as a mainstream filmmaker and film writer is that the audience needs to know what is at stake for your character. You often get notes like: "we don't understand why he became like this, can we find out something about the character's childhood which makes sense of how they behave?" But I think when you meet somebody on the street, somebody you've never met before, or if you're introduced to somebody, you immediately get a very strong, concrete feeling for that person, even without knowing anything about where they came from or what led them to be what they are, just in the way that they are there and then. As Mark always says, nobody needs to know the back-story that explains why Charlie Chaplin is a tramp in order to understand the meaning of his character. Anyway, to go back to your point, I think we were just interested in very ordinary characters in situations in which, although there are *huge* things going on, those things are going on in a microcosm. You need to look at them through a microscope to see what's happening. That was something that just appealed to us. Plus also on a more social, political level, we made *Adam & Paul* and *Garage* at a time when

Ireland was busy congratulating itself about what a fabulous little country it was. And many things were massively better. So not that I dismiss that, but it just seemed that there were lots of other stories that weren't being told, and it was appealing to tell those.

MARK: I think that there was a certain inevitable essence in the life that Adam and Paul were having on that one particular day – they had nowhere to go to the toilet, they *had* to get something to eat, they *had* to get drugs, and there were issues in the background, like they had fallen out of their peer group – which played out in tiny ways, so a fight over a small piece of bread or a carton of milk could mean so much more. And I suppose it was influenced a lot as well by *Waiting for Godot*, which also sounds like a very pretentious thing to say, but it is. I stole a lot of lines out of that – I can steal from the best! But it's that kind of condensed essence of who we are as people, and you don't have to build a huge big story to do it, you can do it in the smallest way by having two boys who want to score drugs on one particular day from sunrise to sunrise.

CHAIR: As well as the extraordinary capturing of these characters in the film, Dublin itself is almost like a third character, and I get the sense that the setting, and getting that authentic sense of place, was very important to you.

LENNY: I gathered a lot of visual references early on. That's something we do: we watch a lot, we talk a lot, and we gather some images and get a collection of things which somehow seem to capture what it is we're talking about. The early wave of New Irish Cinema was very aware of itself, as "we're making a film in Dublin, therefore we must have the Dublin shots and Dublin locations." In a way that, if somebody makes a film in New York, they don't feel they *have* to have a shot of the Empire State Building. However, the way that Dublin was constructed in film early on was very crude I thought. So I just tried to go out and look at the city graphically as a person who was just interested in its textures. So we found very small places that just had something about them which made them interesting, or made them somehow add to the scene. So we avoided a lot of the classical setup, the "Fair City" [*RTÉ soap opera*] opening sequence of images of Dublin, and just found things which I thought were more interesting.

MARK: Well, Lenny had a rule at the start which said, 'no Ha'penny Bridge and no horses'. So we had a lot of laneways. But if you ever wander around the centre of Dublin on 'junkie watch', as I would have called it, the boys themselves would hang around on street corners, or in laneways, so it was following their geography of Dublin as well.

CHAIR: You already hinted at Beckett as a model or influence; there is also, it seems, a lot of Joyce in *Adam & Paul*. Not just in terms of the story – a *Ulysses* in the 2000s – but also in terms of certain characters. I was reminded of Joyce with the man from Bulgaria sitting there; there's a por-

trait of Joyce which looks just like that. Laurel and Hardy and slapstick also seem to come in. There seem to be a lot of allusions or background moments that you pick up from various sources.

MARK: Well, I think that the Beckett influence, in a weird way, has been overplayed. I think that Beckett was hugely influenced by vaudeville, and this film is hugely influenced by vaudeville as well, *via* Beckett et cetera. The Joycean thing, I mean, if you set something on one day in Dublin with people wandering around it's a no-brainer. I battled through *Ulysses* in my early twenties, and I can't honestly say I went, "ha, I referenced chapter four here". But I suppose there is a certain influence. The Bulgarian scene comes from something much simpler. My mother's grasp of geography is fairly basic, and she thinks anywhere that isn't Germany or France is Romania. So she'd always meet people from Eastern Europe who had moved to Ennis and go, "the Romanians moved in." And I'd say, "Mam, they're from Bulgaria, I think." And she'd say, "I bet they're from Romania". So I liked the idea of Irish people commenting on other people's nationality, like "You bloody Romanian!" "I'm not a fucking Romanian, I hate the Romanians as well". It became this kind of looped joke in a weird kind of way.

LENNY: The other thing about that is there's a trope in *Adam & Paul* about people, no matter how low down the ladder they are, trying to find somebody just one rung lower. So, for Adam particularly, their relationship with the kid in the sleeping bag or the Romanian is a way of defining himself as superior, of thinking, 'at least I'm not X or Y'. But the thing about vaudeville and slapstick is sort of important I think, because people sometimes talk about *Adam & Paul* as a black comedy – and I understand what they mean, and in a sense they're also right – but it's a term I don't really like, because it suggests a kind of pact of acknowledged cleverness between the audience and the filmmaker. A black comedy is: 'we're going to laugh at stuff we shouldn't, and we're clever enough to know what we're doing.' What I like about true vaudeville – right back to Yiddish cinema from Poland where you see where a lot of vaudeville came from – is that what you get in that is a kind of tenderness, a comic tenderness. It's like good slapstick. When you look at Laurel and Hardy walking along, they're two people but they're also two puppets. There's something in slapstick, as opposed to black comedy, which allows you to deal with very difficult and dark things in a way which is human and tender. So the things I want to avoid are, on the one side, black comedy and, on the other side, a kind of earnest social realism, which is not possible to achieve. It's an illusion that you're ever going to arrive at something and say, "Well now we've got to the real." But every generation thinks it finds it, by being just that bit more candid than the previous one, until there's jadedness about that and you move one step further. There's a genre of filmmaking recently, which I call

‘art-sploitation’, which is very vicious stuff but in a very kind of high-art way. But for me what’s beautiful about the slapstick tradition is that there’s a presentation of all of us as children, which is a very beautiful way of understanding adults, and Adam and Paul really are two lost children. For us that resonates; that has resonance for everybody, no matter how sophisticated they may appear. So I think if there’s anything innovative in *Adam & Paul* stylistically, it’s just the taking of that slapstick tradition and the slowing down of it and the darkening of it.

CHAIR: I read somewhere that the Bulgarian is actually a Romanian.

MARK: It’s funny, because at the time Brian Friel was producing a play he wrote about Janáček [*Performances*] and this great Romanian actor called Ion Caramitru came over to perform it, and he was wonderful in it. He was involved in the Romanian revolution of 1989; he came on national television to announce on Christmas Day that the Ceauşescus had been killed; he became the Minister of Culture. And I delivered the script to the Gate asking would he play this part, not realising he was Romanian, in which he had to deliver all these lines: “I am not a fucking Romanian”. And he came in to us and he was incredibly lovely; we said, “God, if we could have you it would be brilliant”. But it was only when he came on set that we realised he was Romanian.

LENNY: Also that he was this *hugely* respected figure. But I did show the film at the Sofia Film Festival, and it went down a storm, and that scene they loved. But it also went down extremely well in Romania. He has a film festival in the delta, and he showed it there and people loved it, so we got away with it.

MARK: It’s just the idea of you sitting in the cinema and your Minister for Culture pops out saying, “I’m not a fucking Irishman!” ... Or if Michael D. Higgins popped up going, “I’m not from Galway”. He’s currently the artistic director of the Romanian National Theatre, and he’s a fantastic, fantastic man.

CHAIR: Let’s move on to the second feature film, *Garage*. Here you move away from inner-city Dublin – which, especially in the Celtic Tiger period, was often shown as this ‘nouveau riche’, glitzy, wonderful place – and go out into a setting which has not been represented much, especially in recent Irish film and television: this totally different dismal little town in the rural backwaters. Could both of you comment on that choice of setting?

MARK: Well, I’m from Ennis, which is a small town in the west of County Clare. I’m the eighth of ten children, in a three-bedroom semi-detached house on the edge of the town. So I had grown up in a really traditional rural Irish family. I would disagree with you: I think that the countryside has been represented a hell of a lot in Irish cinema, but it’s always been represented wrongly as far as I’m concerned. It used to treat the coun-

tryside as being one big long joke, and I lived in that 'joke' for seventeen years, and it wasn't very funny. And there was this idea that there were traditional kinds of themes that would be done in an Irish country drama. It was usually an American or an Englishman moving into the town, falling in love with a beautiful girl, and there was a village idiot. There are about fifteen films you could pick that would have that in it. And I think that what we were interested in was taking that village idiot and making him the centre of the film, and make an incredibly serious film about a ridiculous person. That's where it all came from.

LENNY: The film has an ambivalent relationship with the town, because I don't think we completely dismiss Josie's view that it's a good place, in the sense that I think we're both aware that characters like Josie need small places where they can belong. And the town, for him, functions, albeit in a way which is lacking. He doesn't have any outlet for sexual feeling, for example, and he's lonely, and there are very bleak aspects of his life. But at the same time, it is a place that he feels he belongs in. And also I think that both of us have a perverse desire to take topics which look like they're going to make the worst film ever made and try and make a good film out of them. The gritty urban Dublin drama possibly gave birth to some of the worst films ever made – not naming any names. You know, "where everybody's talkin' to each udder like tha'", and there's all sorts of drama, and there's a drug dealer chasing everybody: the urban drug story. In the same way, there's also the rural isolation story, which has been done; there are a couple of good films, but also a number of very bad films made of the same thing. But it is a real thing, and therefore it should be possible, we always feel, to make a film work which is also about that. Just to give a recent example: I think both of us, despite what I say about our desire to go towards the difficult topics, would have shied away from a hunger-strike film, and yet Steve McQueen made an amazing film with *Hunger*. Of course, it's possible. I think we just thought, 'no you can't do those images, they've been done to death, they've been claimed by too many bad dramas to rescue them'. But in a less ambitious way we wanted to rescue the Irish rural drama from various bad attempts at its execution.

CHAIR: And very successfully so. Can we talk about your choice for the main character? People knowing Pat Shortt's career wouldn't automatically link him with that role, and people must have been surprised to see him there, and then stunned by his performance.

MARK: Well, Pat Shortt was always in my mind when I was writing it. I think we made the decision when we were talking about these ideas that it was going to be Pat Shortt. If Pat Shortt had said no, we probably would not have made it. It was written for and about what he does. His own TV series *Killinaskully* gets Christmas Day ratings throughout the year when it's on. A lot of people really hate it; it wouldn't be my cup of tea either. His

stage performances – they’re not really my cup of tea either. But what I know about Pat is he’s incredibly talented and he also understands rural Ireland massively. His observational skills in *Killinaskully* ... if you’re from rural Ireland you go, “I know exactly who he’s taking off now, I know exactly what he’s doing”. I think he just turns it up to eleven, as they say, and that’s kind of what I don’t like. But there was nobody else who could have done it, and we needed an actor who exudes a sort of persona that makes an audience go, “I love him” – and Pat has that in spades, audiences just adore him – because we had to have the character basically take the audience by the hand and take them to a dark place, and only Pat could deliver that, I think.

LENNY: Maybe two things to say: firstly, this was said to me in Britain (*Garage* was also funded by Film4), and other people have said to me, “well, Brendan Gleeson”, because there’s a list of bankable names, and if you want the cuddly big buffoon character that’s Brendan Gleeson. If you want the glowering, dark character, well, you have to go for Gabriel Byrne, or whatever. And for me, what that turns cinema into is basically a child playing with action men. You still have the basic dummy and say, “let’s put him in a World War II uniform, now we’ll make him a scuba diver”, and you just see the same people recycled. Also, Pat is a performer more than an actor, and I love working with performers because it’s possible to create a character as subtle and as complex and as truthful as Josie *without* talking about psychology. We talked about how he moved, how he walked, how he sounded, what he did. In other words, we were using the script as where we wanted to get to, but we built it from the outside in, rather than from the inside out. Instead of trying to talk about how he felt in a scene, we talked about how he seemed like in a scene, or how he would look to you, or how he would behave, and, as Mark said, I don’t think there’s anybody else who could have played that part, and I don’t think the film would have been half the film it is with anybody else.

CHAIR: We talked about capturing Dublin as a place and a time, but as you said Mark, rural Ireland is such a dominant motif in international films about Ireland, when you think of *The Quiet Man* and so on. Could you talk a little about the process, when you embarked on *Garage*, of working in that space and capturing that space itself in a way that removed it somewhat from that international context?

LENNY: Again, I think the trick, and it’s sort of obvious really, is to just stop everything else and just go and look at it. That’s the way I try to work. We all have a sort of huge library of visual motifs – how do you do the Wild West? Or how do you do rural Ireland? – and that’s always on a continuum, one end of which, in the Irish case, is the buy-it-off-the-shelf Irish pub that you find everywhere with old Guinness posters. So what you do is you just look. If you really go to a place, you always find it’s more

complex, more varied, less easily defined, than the shorthand images you have of it. So one thing happened which was very important in the process of *Garage* when we started looking for locations. I had in my mind those 1950s garage facades that still exist all over Ireland. The ones with a high arch, and a sort of castellated front and a shed out the back, because I remember those from when I was a kid. And they're sort of picturesque, they're what you'd expect. They're down, they're wrecked, it's not 'cottagey', it's not 'chocolate boxy'. But actually I was never happy every time I saw one. But then when I saw that bizarre 1970s garage exactly as it is in the film – because we did almost nothing to it – it just seemed so much truer. It was its own place; it wasn't 'representing' rural Ireland. So the key is, *not* to represent, if you can, as a filmmaker, and try, at least in these kinds of films, to go against whatever the dominant motifs are in the audience's head. And yet, the audience then always recognises it as truer, in the end.

CHAIR: It seems another dominant aspect running through both *Adam & Paul*, and *Garage* is the importance of, and stress on, the physicality of the characters. Especially with Pat Shortt, it's amazing the way he moves through space. Why is there such a strong sense of physicality in your work? Is that a conscious choice, or does it, perhaps, relate to your work in the theatre, Mark?

MARK: Well, I think the work in the theatre influences the writing. It's kind of nice when you create a character and then you kind of slowly sort of hobble them a little bit, like for instance Pat's limp. My mother had just had her hip replaced, so I decided I'd stick that into the script. My mother's a huge influence. But the presentation in both of the scripts is theatrical.

LENNY: Yeah, it's true, and it's worth saying that maybe that's the thing that defines the flavour of our work. It's a mixture of things that I referred to in my last answer, which is a kind of a determination to be specific, honest, and real, as opposed to looking for visual stereotypes, for easy shorthand ways. *But* then there is this sort of puppeteering, front-on presented, vaudevillian dimension as well, and it's funny that we both, very fortunately, have a love of both of those, and I think we have found a way of bringing those two styles together. So in *Garage* you are absolutely in a real place in that town, and at the same time you are dealing with a character who has a series of defined movements, who is immediately visually recognisable. In the Chaplin tradition you build a character that has a series of key notes – the cane, the hat – then you see those and you know they're easily caricatured. Well, Josie's built in the same way; he's got the limp. Pat came up with the forward arms, which is like a sort of a symbol of 'readiness to help'. So he is this profoundly helpful, but massively incapable character, and that's all expressed in that quasi-martial position.

MARK: I think in both cases, in *Adam & Paul* and in *Garage*, they are very finely defined archetypes ...

LENNY: Yes, I think that's absolutely true.

MARK: ... because everyone who's seen *Garage*, especially from Ireland, goes, "Jesus there's a guy in our village who *is* Josie". So we're taking an archetype, but we're specifying him and giving him life.

LENNY: And then sometimes we're breaking that. If you are watching *Adam & Paul*, if you think you are watching a Laurel and Hardy film, it becomes a comfortable film to watch, and it's funny and people kind of relax with it. But then it turns that on its head about two thirds of the way through, it goes in a direction you didn't expect. And I think that's the same with *Garage*. So you can play with those expectations and also invert them.

CHAIR: For Mark, was it difficult this time not to be acting in the film, not being there in front of the camera?

MARK: Well, you kind of are not in the gang, which is very difficult. I arrived down for the first day of shoot and ended up just kind of standing on the sidelines and talking to somebody like an electrician who's supposed to be doing their job, and they're kind of like, "who the fuck are you?". And I was supposed to stay the whole day but I went home. I went home and I started writing; *Prosperity* is what I did, I was so upset. But when you hand over a script and it's signed on, it's like you drop your kid off for the first day of school and you're told to come back when they've finished their PhD. Whereas with *Adam & Paul* I was part of the gang, with this one I wasn't. But then the joy of that was when I went in and saw a cut around Christmas time. It wasn't quite there, but it had arrived fully formed. It was almost a year on from when I had finished writing it, so it just came back to me and I was floored by it, absolutely floored by it. So that was a really great joy. Whereas, when I watched *Adam & Paul*, I just watched myself for the first run of it. I went, "Jesus, what did you think about that bit? I don't know ... Am I good there, or am I not good?". So this one just had a much fuller joy, I think.

CHAIR: I think it's appropriate that maybe now we delve a little bit into the European connections in your work: in *Garage* you have the trucker going to Bruges, in *Adam & Paul* you have the Bulgarian. You've talked about how European filmmaking has been an influence on your work in particular, Lenny. You mentioned Robert Bresson, Bruno Dumont and other directors who have been important for your style and aesthetic.

LENNY: I suppose whom I find myself drawn to as a filmmaker tend to be European directors, and also World directors from South America and so on. And by that I just really mean films that are not necessarily wedded to the classic three-act structure and the usual supposed rules of character development. And there are a number of directors from Scandinavia, such

as Kaurismäki, who is the master of downbeat existential comedies where nothing much happens and yet you can't stop watching. I find his stuff really compelling. And then probably the biggest influence for me is Bresson, just the simplicity and the purity of his filmmaking. And we very consciously felt that if Irish cinema is going to be really great it has to stop worrying too much about being 'Irish cinema', it just has to be true to its place. And immediately for me that puts it in the company of the best European cinema. As regards the music in *Adam & Paul*, Mark came up with this extraordinary idea of the Bulgarian jacket, and that just sparked me off thinking about Klezmer music from Eastern Europe, and then Balkan music, and just the idea of being free to use the materials of your culture. Anyways, I feel like I have the rights to that whole European culture. I think we both feel that way.

MARK: I think with *Garage*, for me writing it, my influences might be different from Lenny's. Lenny introduced me to Bruno Dumont, and I think his film *L'humanité* had a way of representing a village, which is so spare and so beautiful and so ugly at the same time, which was very interesting. But I also watched *The Last Picture Show* quite a lot when I was writing this, and there's a scene out by the lake where Josie meets Mr. Skerrit, which is my Irish representation, in my head anyway, of the scene in *The Last Picture Show* out by the lake in which Sam The Lion talks about riding across the water on a horse and this crazy woman he was in love with. I picked up the idea from that. I thought the idea of being beside an ugly lake and talking about something very profound was very beautiful. So there are all sorts of influences, and generally not Irish influences. We don't need to watch Irish influences because, you know, we are Irish and we're steeped in the culture, obviously. I think if you become too insular you end up just ... 'climbing up your own arse' is the phrase I would use.

LENNY: And also for some reason, and it is true in the academic Irish Studies world, the word 'identity' is very popular. Or 'identities', which can be given with an even more meaningful inflection; 'stories of ourselves' and all these kinds of strange phrases. I don't think of my work as addressing those questions in the way that would sometimes seem to be the dominant mode of discourse. And so, yes, the influences come from anywhere. In your own toolbox when you're working there are some pretty basic tools as well as the more refined ones, and it's not always easy to explain why it is that a certain scene from a really otherwise very uninteresting film has had a big influence on how you decide to shoot something.

CHAIR: One final question on your decision, subsequent to *Garage*, to work in television for the mini-series *Prosperity*. Why did you decide to work in that area, and what were the differences that you noticed?

LENNY: Well, *Prosperity* was really Mark's baby, so I'll let him ...

MARK: Throughout the Celtic Tiger, for most of it I was on the dole, so I was very divorced from the prosperity that raged through Ireland, and I had this idea of writing a series, or a film, I wasn't sure which it was, called *Prosperity*. I wanted to write one day in Dublin where everyone has a shit time, because I had been very poor for a long time, so I *was* having a shit time. Actually I was having a great time, but all I could see when I walked out into the streets of Dublin – especially O'Connell Street and Parnell Street around where I was living – was just incredible social disenfranchisement. People were having a really tough time. And there was this idea around at the time that, because unemployment was really low, people thought that poverty had gone away and that the only people who were poor now were the lazy or the stupid. That was a genuine feeling that people who were in charge had, and I thought that was vile. It's interesting, actually, artists were criticised for not tackling the Celtic Tiger and not writing about the Celtic Tiger. Well, I think *Prosperity* is about the Celtic Tiger in a very obtuse kind of way. And the reason that people didn't write about the Celtic Tiger as a thing itself is that it was an illusion, and we all know now that it was an illusion. It didn't actually exist. It was people building hideously ugly apartments and selling them on to each other, and building this big Ponzi scheme, and eventually destroying the country. So *Prosperity* was this idea I had, and Jane Gogan, who was the head of drama – she had just arrived in RTÉ –, rang me up and asked if I had an idea for a series. So I went to meet her at the Merrion Hotel and I went, “look, this is an idea I have”, and she said, “ok, you're commissioned”. And then I had to ring Ed [Guiney, producer of *Garage*] and Lenny and go, “will ye help me?”, and Len said yeah. Lenny had seen the stories that I had picked for it anyway. Originally there were about ten stories, and then we whittled it down to six, and then eventually just with the constraints of budget et cetera, we whittled it down to four. It was written in a very tight time scheme. It was written basically from January to the end of March, and it began shooting in late April, which was incredibly pressured. It was four hours of television, really depressing stories, and I was at my wit's end by the end of it, I was so depressed. I think it was a very difficult type of television for people to watch. It is very slow, there's very, very little story. It's taking the style of *Adam & Paul* and really driving it home. A friend of mine said watching *Prosperity* was like being held in a headlock for an hour every time he watched each episode. But I think that's what we wanted to make at the time.

LENNY: And in terms of working for television, from my point of view, I didn't have a particularly bad time making *Prosperity*. RTÉ were fine, they didn't interfere, and in that regard it was very painless. But I don't think I would rush back to make television. I'm very proud of the films, but it's a really, really difficult way to work for me, because the schedules are punishing. And because we didn't really have the budget we needed, I

couldn't shoot the episodes sequentially. I actually shot all of *Prosperity* in parallel, pretty much. So if you can imagine keeping four very different films in your head and moving from one to the other, sometimes on the same day. I was wrecked afterwards. And I felt, Mark is right, for television it's incredibly slow, but it is so much faster than our other work. It's just weird how television eats pages. We worked it out on the basis of looking at the number of pages in the script for *Adam & Paul* or *Garage* and the length of the film, and we came up with what we thought would be an hour's television. Mark would say, "yeah, I think that's an hour", and actually it turned out to be really forty minutes. It's because, as you direct and work on a television show, in your mind, you've been a television viewer – we all have for so many years – and you have this image of somebody sitting there in their own home, having not made the investment you make if you go to the cinema where you've made the effort so you will give it time. In television, no matter how sophisticated an audience, you'd be amazed how close to the remote control people's hands constantly hover. So there's a sort of awareness of that, and I think we pushed it just about as far as we could push it with *Prosperity*. But as a director, television's much more constraining in all sorts of ways.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Pat Shortt seems to be always the actor who is in a central focus as regards *Garage*, but I thought that the acting of the fifteen-year-old boy as a supporting actor was equally strong. Is he an actor, and how did you find him?

LENNY: Yeah, Conor Ryan. He is amazing in it, I think, and it's one of the most natural performances by a teenager I've seen, not just in Irish films. He wants to be an actor, and he was involved in a drama group in Limerick where he's from. His real love, believe it or not, is musicals, musical theatre, and I personally would have to be sedated to be taken and sit through most musicals. Looking for that actor was really the toughest casting decision we had, the toughest challenge. So first of all a casting director went around the whole country and met every drama group, every student group that were interested in acting. We didn't do a full schools trawl, which is where you go to classrooms where there are class kids generally who haven't specified an interest in performance, and usually there's a good reason for that, because it's a nightmare, it's just an absolute nightmare. So it's nice if you have people who already have an interest. The problem then is many of them will be sort of, you know, ridiculous ex-Billie Barry stage school kids. The Billie Barry school is a kind of child acting school in Ireland which churns out people who do lots of smiling and performing. So I went out to Limerick to meet a group of teenagers, and when he walked into the room he looked exactly as he does on screen, and I remember just thinking 'please, may he be strong', because he looked so perfect, just so delicate and pale. And he was. I had to allow him not to

perform in the way that he thought was what I wanted. But Conor's one of those extraordinary actors who can just say the lines and mean them. I did a lot of physical work with him and Pat to just get them extremely relaxed, so that when you do finally get to shoot that scene, for example where they're sitting out at the back of the garage, it does feel like they've been there for three hours drinking cans, it doesn't feel like I just called 'action' and we started. But yes, I think he's planning to go to drama school. He's a lovely kid and he's got a great talent, so I hope very much it works out for him.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I would like to go back to *Garage*. Could you explain the horse, which is another important character in the film?

MARK: I think we needed something to show Josie's wholeness, and I think that that's what the horse represents.

LENNY: I love animals as well, and I was down in the country and I was passing a friend who lives in Arklow along a sort of ugly road, and there was a horse behind a fence. And then also a friend of ours called Michael West wrote a play called *Foley* in which a man feeds a horse an apple, and it always struck me as an image which was very beautiful. So what happened was the horse was there through the script, but the idea of the horse coming back at the end was only something that arose during shooting. We knew what Josie was going to do at the end of the film, but how we ended the film was the biggest question after that, because unless you do something transformative at the end, I think, it just becomes this linear tragic *cul de sac* of a film. So we were trying to think about just images of nature, and I just said to the production that I wanted to have a day on the railway and bog location, with Pat, with the horse, and the crew, and we would just work for the day. And I shot all sorts of things, and I did have a lot of sequences cut at the end. And eventually I just reduced it and reduced it, which tends to be what happens in editing with me, until what was left was the simplest version. That shot of the horse walking to the camera was just something that was given by chance, in the most wonderful way. We'd had the horse with us through the shoot, he'd been in lots of scenes, and he got used to the fact that wherever we were the apples were as well. So then we set the camera up in the middle of the track and said, "look, let's take him down to the end of the track, and we'll let him off and we'll just take shots of him in the distance on the track". And his owner did it and hid in the bushes, and then the horse just sort of looked down at us, and then did this long, perfect, absolutely symmetrical walk, bang centre of the tracks, and stopped and stared into the camera, and it was an amazing moment. To be honest, moments that are amazing on screen are very, very rarely amazing on set. They are if you're looking through the camera, if you really know what's going to happen and where it fits, but mostly it's, "is that OK?", "Yes it is OK, let's move on to the next thing". But that was one

where everyone was really quite stunned by it. And it became this important image, because for me, looking into the eye of an animal like that, you can't say anything about what the animal is thinking, or what it is like to be the animal, and yet there's an incredible sense of the reality of another creature, another centre of things. And that, for me, is a big motif in *Garage*, which is that you can't know what it's like to be inside Pat's character, but at the same time, you feel that there is a deep, and impenetrable, and ultimately unpossessable reality about a character even as simple as Josie. And in more obvious ways it's also an image of freedom. So it just became the central image, and what we found now was that as the last image of the film that got locked there, and then everything else was worked backwards from that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: One of the problems for Irish film in the past fifteen years has been achieving an audience outside of Ireland, and I was just wondering, seeing that *Garage* was a production supported by Film4, what was the reception of it in Britain? Did it get a cinematic release and was it shown on television, and if so how was it received?

LENNY: Yes, it did get a cinematic release in Britain and on TV, and the reviews were incredible. We got lots of five star reviews and 'film of the week' and all sorts of stuff. And the audience was reasonably good in Britain. It was always going to be a smallish arthouse audience, but it was in the Curzon in the West End, it was in the Roxy, it was in lovely cinemas in London and then around Britain. It did very well in France, it was released all over France by a very good distributor. It still plays in cinemas; it's in Rome at the moment. So compared with *Adam & Paul*, which, sadly I think, didn't get the release it could have gotten internationally, because people were afraid of the material, *Garage* has done well. It's been bought by the Sundance Channel, who are going to open up a cable network all over the place. So, yes, it continues to have a life outside of Ireland.

MARK: I think that in a lot of ways, Irish films are stymied a lot by being in English. I think that if *Garage* had been in French it might have done a lot better in Britain than it did, or it would have got a release in America. But the fact that it's in English, they expect you to go into the cineplexes. So I'm going to write my next one in French.

CHAIR: If the script were right, would you do something in Irish?

MARK: I have about three words of Irish, so I can't honestly say I would.

LENNY: I directed an ad in Irish, actually, for *Foras na Gaeilge*, the Irish language authority. I learnt the script, so I know how to say "oh, he's cute" and "go ahead girls." But that is, unfortunately, the extent of my Irish. But you know, I wouldn't rule it out.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Talking about television, what do you think of *Heimat* [a series of 30 episodic films by Edgar Reitz which view life in

Germany between 1919 and 2000 through the eyes of a family from the Hunsrück area of the Rhineland]? Is that a reference in *Prosperity*?

MARK: You know, I've never seen *Heimat*, because it's just so huge that it's a big undertaking. But last year I watched fifteen hours of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* [Rainer Werner Fassbinder's fourteen-part television adaptation of the Alfred Döblin novel of the same name], which was just the joy of last winter, watching that. And there's something great about the penetration that television has, you get to so many more people. Unfortunately, I think that RTÉ has had a less than coherent – oh my God, I shouldn't say this, but – a less than coherent policy about making drama. First of all you don't know what the parameters are, about what they want. And then when you give it to them they tell you that they wanted something else completely anyway.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'll ask the obvious one, which is 'what next?'. What are your current plans?

LENNY: You're not the only one asking, I can tell you.

MARK: I spent all of last year writing a television series, which is not going to be made, which is very disappointing. Just because RTÉ has run out of money, the same as Ireland. I went back to acting; I did a play last year in the Abbey Theatre [as Lord Goring in Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*], and this year I acted in a film in New York [in Maurice Linnane's *A Kiss for Jed Wood*]. I'm currently finishing a screenplay which is something totally unlike anything that me and Len have done before, and I'm not sure if we will make it. It's a post-modern romcom set in London, a third of which is in animation. That would really fuck with people's heads! But beyond that, I think the long-term project that we're talking about is a story of an eleven-year-old boy growing up in a family of ten children somewhere in the West of Ireland in the early eighties ... my mother's going to kill me. But it's set in the summertime of 1981, when Ireland is ploughing into a terrible recession, and the hunger strikes are on, and Ireland is being torn apart politically, and it's about family being torn apart. The older sister becomes pregnant, and the older brother decides to emigrate; at that particular time in Ireland those were the two things that you didn't want to happen, because if somebody emigrated they didn't come back, and if a girl got pregnant she wasn't coming back either. It's about decisions, and it's seen through the eyes of an eleven-year-old boy, who's possibly a flaming homosexual. And a third of it will be set in a caravan somewhere near Spanish Point.

LENNY: I've written a script half set in Poland and half set in Ireland, which is about a Polish father and son who decide to come to Ireland to make money at *just* the moment when the Irish economy implodes. It's quite a Kaurismäkiian road movie, *sort of* comedy. But I'm in this funny state where, because I've written it, and it's in with the Polish Film Institute

at the moment, I'm like Mark with his post-modern romcom, I don't know if I want to do it – which obviously is pleasing the producers no end, having paid for the script. Ah no, that's not fair, they're very good about it. But I also have one other project which has an Austrian connection and which is an adaptation of a non-fiction book by an author called Gita Sereny, who wrote the definitive biography of Albert Speer [Hitler's chief architect and minister of armaments], as well as a number of other great books. It's a document about a man in a very important position in a very terrible place in the Second World War. I think that will happen, but I think it's two years away. It's a bigger film, and it's going to take an awful lot of research and work to finish it. But we're very committed to making something together as soon as we possibly can, and I suspect it will be the film Mark described about his childhood, which is called *Us*.

MARK: Just for my mother's sake: it is *not* about my childhood. But my mother did say ... after having a terrible row with me about me writing this, she then went, "who's playing me?". So I said, "Helen Mirren". But I'm also writing something else: I'm going off to Cuba to write a musical about Cuban transvestites. What's great is, you've been on the dole for twenty years and you do two films, and then people actually believe you actually can do things. They go, "what do you want to do?". And you go, "um, a film about Cuban transvestites?". And they go, "why don't you go to Cuba for a while?". And I go, "thanks a million!". So that's what I'm doing.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Coming from a country which is rather steeped in animation film, I'm delighted to hear that, Mark, your film will have animation, so I'm looking forward to that. I also wondered what you thought of *The Secret of Kells*?

MARK: Yeah, I just saw it. I thought it was terrific, I really enjoyed it. I particularly like graphic novels and the kind of indie comic world, but I love animation anyway, full stop. I think it's fab.

LENNY: I haven't seen it yet but I'm looking forward to seeing it ...

CHAIR: Finally, I want to ask you both for your reactions to the recent threat to the continuing existence of the Irish Film Board from the report of *An Bord Snip Nua*. I understand you have both been involved in attempts to prevent this happening.

LENNY: I'm delighted that the government have decided to continue supporting film and the arts in general, proposing only small cuts. If the film board had been cut severely or abolished it would have been a disaster. I think people involved in all the arts made the case for continued support very articulately, and I'm glad to see that we were heard.³

Endnotes

- ¹ Worzel Gummidge was a fictional scarecrow with interchangeable heads originally featured in children's books by the novelist Barbara Euphan Todd, before being adapted for a television series by the British channel ITV from 1979 to 1981.
- ² Syd Field is a screenwriting 'guru', famous for articulating the Hollywood screenplay paradigm of the 'three-act structure' in books such as *The Definitive Guide to Screenwriting* (2003).
- ³ The Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes, popularly known as "An Bord Snip Nua", under the chairmanship of economist Colm McCarthy, had been published in July 2009 and recommended that *Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board* be abolished. Lenny's response was given in light of the government's continuing support of the Film Board, demonstrated in the budget subsequent to the interview.