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Interview: Professor Alan Marcus discusses Director's Cut

By: [Tadas Cilcius](#) | Published: Oct 29, 2014



What brought you to the film world?

I was studying Fine Arts at the University of Illinois, and in my third year I took a cinematography course. The process of making a 16mm experimental black and white film was so stimulating that I changed my degree to focus exclusively on filmmaking and the study of cinema. That first dramatic short film, *Old Age: a true story* (1980), won awards, including the Chicago International Film Festival, and was shown on television, so it encouraged me to make film my profession. My actual introduction to the film industry started at the bottom in Hollywood, working in the mailroom of 20th Century Fox. Two years later, after graduating from University and directing several music videos, I was fortunate to be hired as a writer/director/producer at the ABC-TV and CBS-TV networks in Los Angeles.

What is your favourite director and film?

Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959), because of its classy stylised form, elegant cinematography and mise-en-scène, clever narrative, witty and sexy script, and superb performances by stars Cary Grant, Eve Marie Saint and James Mason. Hitchcock was a perfectionist; highly imaginative and a consummate *auteur* – as evidenced by the extraordinary range of films he made.

What films did you create?

I made around thirty programmes when in my 20s, working in American and British television, including directing a Channel Four documentary we shot above the Arctic Circle in northern Sweden, *People of the Four Winds* (1989), which was fascinating to do. In the last ten years, I've made 15 experimental films that focus primarily on post-traumatic sites, such as Auschwitz (*In the Birch Grove*, 2012), Hiroshima (*One Hot Day*, 2011) and Guernica (*One Market Day*, 2011). Without the aid of interviews or narration, and relying instead on close observation and use of metaphor, the films explore how people's contemporary engagement with these iconic sites potentially transfigure their meanings.

When and why did you launch Director's Cut at the University of Aberdeen?

At University we study and analyse films, but it is difficult to directly engage with the filmmakers and broadcasters, especially in Aberdeen, which is away from the main production centres. The Director's Cut was launched in 2007 to stimulate a dialogue with innovative and highly creative artists working in different areas of the industry, including directors, composers, actors, producers, agents, writers and presenters. We've expanded through offering community outreach events at the Belmont, and the Glasgow Film Festival, and having a number of the events broadcast on BBC Radio. Twice we've also

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staged a Junior Director's Cut online filmmaking competition.

Tell us about the most interesting interviews with directors and screenwriters. Did you ever need to travel and meet them at their studio/home?

Sir David Attenborough appeared on our first Director's Cut series before an audience of 900 people, 300 of whom were watching on a large screen in an adjacent hall, because the main auditorium was sold out. He is a fascinating individual – as you can tell from the webcast, which like many of our events is archived on the Director's Cut website. That was a fun interview to do – they all have been in different ways. Including the masterclasses and main events, we've done 35 Director's Cut interviews.

In your last event you interviewed Thomas Weber and Niki Stein. What was your main question to them and why it was so important to find this out?

It is quite an ambitious project to create an 8-part television series on Adolf Hitler, especially in Germany. I was interested in how Niki Stein as a filmmaker, and Tom Weber as an historian on the project, would interpret earlier efforts to portray Hitler, and what they propose to do differently.

What's next?

It is a credit to the series, now entering its 8th season, that we have been able to attract some of the most interesting practitioners in the film world, such as Gurinder Chadha (*Bend It Like Beckham*) and Academy Award-winner Kevin Macdonald (*Last King of Scotland*). We have very exciting plans for the Director's Cut, including some big names and both British and international creative artists. Full details will be released soon on our [Director's Cut Facebook page](#) and [main web site](#).

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