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The 2007 State of Cinema Address

By Peter Sellars

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Hi, everyone! It's so great to see all these cool people in one room. Thank you. And it's really incredible to be invited to deliver a speech called the State of Cinema. That's quite awesome, so, Graham, thank you. Glenda, thank you. Thank you, Carol. Really fantastic. To the San Francisco Film Festival, congratulations on 50 astounding years. [applause]

To deal with the state of cinema, I first want to deal with the state of the state. That would be California. And deal with the question of - at this moment, where all over the world governments are the problem, not the solution - how we need to create as artists another possibility for a new set of states to which we can belong, adhere, subscribe, and it does have something deeply to do with what we believe in, hope for and care about.

To me, the very exciting moment of being alive at the beginning of the 21st century is that technology exists to create a basis for real democracy. And I really would like today to discuss the technology of democracy as it's unfolding around the planet. I would like to discuss the alternative globalization that is underway in cinema, and the amazing fact that we can actually now begin to hear from very far corners of the world - their own histories in their own languages in their own images.

Nobody is the subject of an anthropological survey, and digital media now puts traditional epic oral storytelling into the mainstream of world literature, consciousness and image flow. And that is just astonishing.

To begin with, just a couple of things. Obviously, the record on globalization is unattractive and corporate-driven monocultures, which is what we are seeing all over the world, with Monsanto perfecting the Terminator seed and making everybody buy it. I mean, it's an attack on the basis of life. An attack on fertility itself. The idea that you create a seed that does not reproduce. I don't know in human history a deeper attack on life. It makes the Nazi ideology seem somehow primitive because this idea that life itself can be owned, patented and terminated at the will of a corporate control mechanism is, for me, unmatched in human history. That we lived in the generation that invented this and imposed it on the planet. Sixteen thousand Indian farmers have committed suicide since 2004 as the Monsanto Terminator seed is not only imposed on their farmlands but on their lives. What's being terminated is not just a seed; it's human hope, it's human life force.

Before there's culture, there's agriculture. This question of what do we cultivate? Why does culture exist? It exists because a human being, like a seed, needs to be cultivated. That seed can prosper and flourish with the correct cultivation, or it falls by the wayside, or gets torn up or down, or never has a chance. Culture was invented knowing that every one of us as human beings needs to be cultivated. We are not just who we are. We are our friends. We are who we

surround ourselves with. We are all of these profound, profound sources outside us that shape the real world. And we're on the planet to be transformed, not to be who we thought we were, but to be who we could never imagine.

Now, this question of globalization at the moment, this corporate-imposed control of the message, this monoculture, where there is one basmati rice and it's owned by one corporation instead of 500 basmati rice strains which have been developed by farmers all over India, for specific conditions, for specific soil, for specific weather, for specific altitude, for specific flavor. There are 500 basmati rices that you can taste; not just one. Diversity, cultural diversity, is at the heart of what democracy's about. It's not about one voice; it's about many voices. It is about how those voices work. Democracy was invented in the West by the ancient Greeks, where it lasted about 12 minutes.

I'd like to say just a couple of things about the way it worked, because the Greeks realized that democracy doesn't work by itself. It actually requires culture. And they mandated public art and the theater. Mandated it. Not, it was a possible leisure alternative. Actually if you voted in Athens, you had to attend the theater. It was mandated for every voting citizen because democracy, as we all know, is not a guarantee of anything much in itself. It's easy to buy, easy to force, and in 1933 in Germany, people voted for Hitler. And then repeatedly thereafter. It's not just that he moved in in tanks, it's that's what people actually wanted. That's what people chose.

So democracy by itself actually needs something to accompany it that creates an informed voter, that creates people who are exposed to another set of reality stories, possibilities. So the Athenians mandated the theater that was just outside the city, actually in a grove, at the end of an entire series of healing rituals, and crazy all-night drug hallucinogenic experiences. The theater was a giant ear, carved into the side of a mountain. It was primarily a listening space. Early architecture was not the architecture of vision - of looking - of what something looked like. It was about sound. And it was carved into the side of a hill, a listening space where 5,000 people could hear one person.

Athenian democracy was somewhat imperfect in that, well, only men could vote so if you were a woman, a child, a foreigner, or a slave - too bad! Meanwhile, in the Greek theater, the title of every play: the name of a woman, a child, a foreigner, or a slave. Every play was about what could not be said in the Senate. Every play was about what was missing in the official discourse, and was the story of somebody who did not have permission to speak. And for that person, a 5,000-seat listening space had been carved into the side of a mountain, so that every voting person could begin to hear the story of this daughter who felt she had to kill her mother, or this mother who could not bring these children into the world and killed them rather than let them grow up in this world.

And the culture of how these stories were presented in music, poetry, and dance was not this culture of exploitation. In Oedipus Rex you're not allowed to show Oedipus tearing his eyes out, even though in our current commercial film culture obviously millions are spent in the special effects department on the exploding eyeball close-up. In Greek theater you were not allowed to show that. Because the point is not, What does an exploding eyeball look like?; the point is, Why would you want someone tear out their own eyes?

In America, we're obsessed with special effects and we don't want to know about the causes. The Greeks were always about saying, What are the causes? What causes this? Where does this come from? Why do people behave this way? What is driving these acts that are so painful for all of us? And you can't just create legislation about this, this is deeper. This is between mothers and daughters. This isn't something that can be legislated. This is something we have to all deal with together.

Democracy is about keeping all of that information alive and present. And it's about understanding that there are no people and non-people. Obviously, in America - and increasingly all over the world, in a two-sided operation - there are legal and illegal human beings. And once somebody has been declared illegal, they have no rights of any kind, they're not human. They're subject to deportation. They're subject to every manner of abuse, as you know from the people picking our strawberries here in California.

What's inside that strawberry? Somebody who's not allowed to receive a minimum wage, who can't have a drivers license to get to the field, who's living on the edge of the field in a plastic bag, and who will be deported as soon as the season is over. And if you don't think you can't taste that in your strawberry, if you can't taste the history of injustice, and pesticides and chemical fertilizer in that strawberry, that karma comes right through the fruit we're eating. That karma comes right through your underwear that was made in Honduras or Bangladesh. The closest things to your body are bringing that karma directly into your life. It's intimate.

Americans are taught to think we're at a distance from this, and in fact, it is your underwear and it is the strawberry. There is no distance. It's the closest thing to your life.

This globalization has resulted in, of course, a new kind of slavery, slavery which is different from previous slavery on the planet. We have 27 million slaves at the moment. In Mali, you can get these beautiful beads for about \$35. They're beautiful. They're from the '20s, a beautiful period in African bead history. When you bought a slave in the United States in the 1840s, a young African American - a 20-year-old African American, a 19-year-old who would work for you for the rest of his life - cost, with adjustment for today's prices about as much as a Buick: \$40,000, something like that.

So, it's an investment. You save up, you invest, and you take care of that person because that person is expensive and an investment. The new slavery has something very special: disposable people. Like, right now in Mali, where Bamako was made - and please do not miss that film; it's one of the great films in the festival this year - in Bamako, I can purchase a 19-year-old African young man for \$35 for the rest of his life.

The new slavery is that people all over the world are desperate in ways they have never been desperate ever before. That's why people are here one more time in those strawberry fields against every odd lined up against them; people are just desperate. People will work for anything. Women will sell themselves for anything. All over the world. Right now. And the new face of globalization is terrifying, and it's built on a little human misery and human disposability, because you just get another one. You work somebody to death, and then just get another one. It's cheaper than feeding the first one. And usually, at the moment, in the current forms of slavery, most people are worked to death in one or two years. Then they're just replaced by someone equally desperate.

This culture is pretty serious. A culture where there are people and non-people. If we're talking about the humanities, I think our job as artists is to say what is human, what is not human, who is human and how is everybody human. Forgive me for again going back to Germany in 1933, but obviously we've been through it here in California - the law against the overcrowding of the schools: Oh, we just don't have enough money! Oh, we're in economic difficulties, and therefore these Jewish kids, these Gypsy kids, and these kids from homeless families have to be removed from the schools!

As you know from the immigration law from 1996, there are deportations. And I'm grateful to the San Francisco Chronicle, by the way, for yesterday putting a human face on deportation on the front page, but at the moment the law from '96 is, among other things, a double jeopardy. If you came to America in 1957, you served a two-month sentence for alcohol-related things in 1958, you can be rearrested in 2006 in the middle of the night, full SWAT team breaking down the doors of your house, taking you away in handcuffs in your underwear and deported retroactively because you have one criminal thing on your record.

And, of course, where I come from in Los Angeles, where the gang mantra is, No justice, No peace. Of course, America constantly - is trying to create peace all over the world, but skipping over the justice part. What does it mean, if you're, under the anti-gang ordinances, one of the 11,000 people on the LAPD gang list? You do not get to ask why you got on that list or how you got on that list. If you are on that list, it is a crime to carry a portable phone or a pager. It is a crime to be seen in public with one other person on that list. Walking your sister to school, the two of you are subject to a double sentence because you're within 500 feet of a school yard. Kids are being locked up facing 80-year sentences for jaywalking, spitting on the sidewalk. And, as you know, anyone convicted of graffiti in California, is not allowed ever to go to college.

The Golden Gulag, as Ruth Gilmore has called it, here in California, we're building more prisons than any civilization in history. We have now outdone Mao Zedong and Josef Stalin. Since 1984. And we're about to build more prisons. The Bureau of Prisons is the largest department of the state, with 57,000 employees, it is the single largest department in the state of California. We are happy to spend \$35,000 a year keeping a young Black man in a supermax isolation cell which deprives him of all human contact. Just the invention of these cells is pretty incredible, as a measure of our society. That we could even think this up. That you would deprive someone of all human contact.

These young men are kept in a cement box with no window, nothing but artificial light, and the meal is delivered three times a day on a computerized system. Twenty-three and a half hours, you're in the box. For one half-hour the door opens and you walk down a narrow corridor, you go into a cement box twice the size, completely empty, and there's a screen on the top, and there's daylight up there, although you cannot see the sun directly. For one half-

hour you're in that, and then, when the signal is given, you go back to your tomb.

Kids are in this for seven years now, eight years now, and of course a lot of people have just simply gone mad. A lot of suicides. The way you get to see a human being is by not returning your tray on time, and five people in armor and tazers come and beat you to a pulp and chain you to the toilet for three days. This is the state of California. We're about to extend this entire system. We know the deportations are going on full blast. On Pico Boulevard, the cops just stop. On Culver Boulevard, where I live, they just stop any car that looks beat up and pick on something. Now, because they're in cahoots with the new immigration laws, for something on your fender, or your headlight, or something, you can be deported within 24 hours. Of course, what that does to your family, what that does to everything else is incredible. And because of the way that the law is written, it is not subject to review by any judge. So, you can't get a lawyer.

So, state of the state. All of those groups who say, 'Why were the German people silent?' And now I have to ask, 'Why are the American people silent?' The German people were told that this other set of people were just not human beings, so it didn't matter what happened to them: 'Pay no attention as these people just suddenly disappear. As this apartment is suddenly empty. As this job is suddenly available. They're illegal people; they do not have the right to be here. And they need to learn the value of work.'

To watch all of this ideology be resurgent in this day is pretty heavy duty. I have to say, for me, I'm constantly searching as an artist for how we respond. One of my favorite stories and one of my favorite texts is - I don't know how many people here know Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy. From the sixth century, late Roman Empire, when the Roman Empire was at the end of the line, one of the last Roman emperors was Theodoric, a Goth, and things were so corrupt and so disastrous, they said, 'We need to at least lift the tone a little bit here. Let's hire a major philosopher to be chief of staff and let's get some integrity back into the administration.' So they hired a man named Boethius, who was a great philosopher, who actually wrote beautiful six books on the philosophy of music, based on Pythagorean principles of harmony in the universe.

And they invited this man to be chief of staff for one of the last Roman emperors. He, of course, like any of us would, says, 'Oh, my goodness! They're asking me. They want a philosopher, they want a wise person. How beautiful.' So he showed up at the office, and soon enough began to say, 'Oh, you cannot take these people's homes away from them. That would not be fair. It's not just.' And he starts to be very mean to have around the office because he can't get anything done. The guy has integrity.

So, they eventually have had enough, and they frame him and put him away in a dungeon where he lives the last five years of his life in a subterranean chamber with all sensory deprivation. Like a supermax at Pelican Bay. After a while, it's just too annoying that he's still alive, so they go in with big clubs and they just beat him to death, and turned him into putty on the floor. And then they don't have to worry about him any more, because he saw too many things.

In these five years, when he was buried alive - I don't know how; on toilet paper or what - he wrote a manuscript. A manuscript called Consolation of Philosophy. The manuscript is the story of him sitting in his cell and then a woman walking through the walls of the cell and singing to him about the nature of justice. And they would sing songs to each other through the night in this subterranean cell. So, of course, I'm right now working on a new version of Consolation of Philosophy for the state of California.

My favorite part of the story is that, five centuries after this man was eliminated and silenced, Consolation of Philosophy was the most copied manuscript of the Middle Ages. At a time when there was no publishing industry, and if you wanted to have a text, you had to copy it out yourself by hand, it was the most copied text. And now, 15 centuries later, it is the only text written in the entire sixth century that you can get in paperback in an airport. I really love that!

Which brings us to the digital age and the stories that no one thought you would ever be told. And the access that you never thought you would have to certain communities. And the communities that were actually going to live, be silenced and never heard from again by the rest of humanity are actually the stories now that we're all looking for, gravitating towards. And the stories that actually have the life force that we're so thirsty for. And that we're hungering after.

I want today to talk about a new brand of cinema. Maybe I'll just mention one thing on the way to that, which is practically speaking, just to describe to you for a moment, The New

Crowned Hope project, and again thank the San Francisco Film Festival for programming Darratt and Opera Jawa. I just want to describe for a moment because, of course, this is the time all of us are looking for alternatives. What are the alternatives? How do the alternatives work?

The alternatives work always, small. The alternatives work supported within small community networks, and out of those community networks, in particular because of the digital age, we can begin to work globally and across the planet. But just like you are going to make a deal with a farm to get your vegetables, and increasingly more and more people are actually realizing that the more hands-on you are in relation to everything coming into your life, the richer your life is, and actually the higher quality of it is.

We're in this period now where people resisting mass industrial food and mass industrial cinema. And where the alternative becomes both more delicious, and more nutritious, and more satisfying morally, in that your moral sense is being satisfied. By 'morally' I don't mean the religious right notion of people watching how you live. I mean just the sense of living well in the deepest sense of the term. And what it means now is that we're actually making a contribution to the planet, not adding to the damage. And a whole generation now is looking for a way to live with another footprint that actually is going to help and not add to the damage.

What's exciting now is it takes a little ingenuity, it takes a little looking, it takes a little connection on the Internet, it takes a few things, but in fact most people are actually making this move. More and more and more and more. San Francisco, of course, is one of the hotbeds of people saying, 'We are looking for something else,' and not stopping until they find it.

Let me mention, the city of Vienna invited me to run a project for the 250th birthday of Mozart, essentially ten million euros, which is an astonishing budget, unheard of for the culture here. And what can you do with that? My deal with the city of Vienna was, 'The first thing, we will not play one note of Mozart.' And Mozart was soooo relieved!

What we're going to do is look at what Mozart was working on in the last year of his life. Unlike the image of Mozart in Amadeus, which is like some dopey frat boy or something, just this cheesebag. In fact, Mozart was one of the most politically engaged artists in history. He was part of the Masonic movement in Europe, which was the movement that was imagining the Europe beyond autocracy. A Europe without kings. And, of course, the key movers in that movement are commemorated on the U.S. one-dollar bill, which has the complete staging for Mozart's Magic Flute, because Mozart's fellow Masons were Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington. These were citizens, intellectuals, who said, 'There has to be a way in which we can create a representative society. A democracy, not an autocracy. And let's debate those issues.'

Mozart was already writing his first music for the Masonic movement at the age of 19. He wrote more than 25 pieces for Masonic ceremonies. This group was primarily responsible for the American Revolution and then, more painfully, in 1789, the French Revolution, which, when they tried it in Europe, turned very bloody, and where justice did not necessarily prevail, but a kind of reverse terror set in. Which meant that the intellectuals in Europe had to say, 'Well, wait a minute. What are we doing? We ended up bringing down these kings, but what are we putting in its place? And don't we have to step back and think more deeply about that?'

And they didn't have a Thomas Jefferson to say, 'All people are created equal' and to suggest a larger sense of the pursuit of happiness. Mozart went through a very interesting transformation. In Don Giovanni he wrote a sound track for the French Revolution. You see the upper classes raping the lower classes - literally and figuratively - and you see it end in the flames of hell. You see everybody who is left alive saying, 'Jesus, what was that? I am really scared.' That's how it ends. Because we are unprepared to go further.

Then an interesting thing happens. Because Mozart has been so clear with his political affiliations in both Marriage of Figaro and Don Giovanni, he's effectively shut down and not given any more commissions. The musicologists say, 'Now, wait a minute, none of this is in Mozart's letters.' and of course you have to explain that at this time in Vienna, anybody writing anything in a letter that resembled the language of the French Revolution was automatically held for questioning and frequently not released. And so exactly none of this could be put in a letter.

Mozart could no longer get work in Vienna and he went on the road and he became an economic migrant going from town to town, hoping to get a commission and send money back to his family in Vienna. Sound familiar? He spent a year of his life that way, and for even

Mozart it was emotionally devastating, what it means to have to leave your home and go looking for work and hoping to send money back to your family. For one year Mozart was silent. Even Mozart could not write a note of music while he went from city to city looking for work. That's the emotional devastation of that experience.

He came back to Vienna at the beginning of 1791 empty-handed. And then his music took on a new phase. The last year of his life, a new complexion. Gone is the military music, the anger, the fury of Don Giovanni, the bitter irony. He begins to write something new. In January of 1791 - a very cold January - he writes a song called Longing for Spring. Longing for Spring has a really long political history, in Czechoslovakia, in Poland, in China. It's, of course, an image used by artists hoping for a political thaw.

In Chinese art it's exemplified in poetry and ink painting by portraits of the plum blossom. The plum blossom is the first blossom to come out. It blooms in February at enormous personal cost. Surrounded by ice and snow, it arrives early to say, 'This evil winter will not last forever.' And, usually, it's destroyed by March. Eventually, June arrives and the world is transformed in a way that was unimaginable in all that ice and snow.

Mozart's song Longing for Spring, this plum blossom [addresses] why the plum blossom was important for Chinese art and poetry. This image of somebody saying, 'This will change. This will not last forever.' Mozart writes The Magic Flute. Magic and transformation. Trials by fire and water of a young generation. That in your country the bus system doesn't work, the health system doesn't work, the banking system doesn't work. What does work? Magic!

If we ask ourselves in our own lives, 'What are the most amazing things that happened in our lives, the things that couldn't have been predicted?' Could you have predicted Nelson Mandela would be president of South Africa? No. And that's what art is about. It's preparing people for the unlikely. Preparing people for what looked impossible, and actually is achievable. For this incredible reversal of night becoming day, of winter becoming spring, where the world actually is reversed. It looked impossible, but it is possible.

So, art is about preparing people for the unlikely, not the likely. Mozart's last opera, La Clemenza di Tito, is truth and reconciliation Mandela-style. It's about the late Roman Emperor Titus. Act One, he's assassinated by terrorists, and they set fire to the capital. Act One curtains with the capital in flames. Act Two, he miraculously survives, says, 'Find me the people who did this.' There's a giant search for the terrorists. Dragnet. They're eventually rounded up, brought in front of him. And he does three things. One, he deals with their issues. Two, he invites them to join the government. Because, until they have representation and responsibility, no one will be safe. Three, he figures out, Is there a way that forgiveness could be possible? That's Mozart's last opera.

Barenboem invited me to stage it in the late '80s. I said, 'Absolutely not. It's so utopian, it's not even dramatic.' And then Nelson Mandela became president of South Africa and formed a government with the people who tried to kill him. Invited people of every stripe to join that government and created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in which the victims and the perpetrators faced each other and told their stories and searched towards a path of reconciliation and maybe forgiveness.

Suddenly, Mozart's last opera became overwhelmingly powerful in what it means that, in the 21st century, our generation are the children of Mandela, where a new type of leadership is required all over the world, in these cycles of civil war, in these cycles of genocide. And finally, Mozart's last work, the Requiem. What will the ceremonies for the dead be in our generation, when new mass graves are uncovered every week? What is the song? What is the ceremony? What is the gesture we make in our lifetime for the dead and for the living? That permit both to go forward in peace. That recognize those who are killed, needlessly, facelessly. And then create the conditions for the perpetrators to come forward.

What are those ceremonies?

So for New Crowned Hope I invited artists from all over the world, particularly artists from areas of conflict: Cambodia, Paraguay, Congo. Where, in the bus, the person sitting across from you tortured your sister in the camps, and there's nothing you can do. There will be no justice process. What do you do? How do you respond? Only arts and only culture create the possibility to turn the page of history, and give people a new piece of paper on which to start writing again a new society. And at the same time have the spiritual, emotional and historical weight to acknowledge what has gone before. And to process it, and not just be in denial, and not just suppress the rage.

So we commissioned seven films, six features, working together with Simon Field and Keith

Griffith. Simon was the head of the Rotterdam Film Festival and we, of course, wanted to work with Rithy Pahn from Cambodia, whose S21, which is one of the most incredible films - have people all seen that film? Oh, may I just ask you to please go see Rithy Pahn, the Cambodian documentary maker. Incredible work. Two films ago was an incredible film about Alcatel putting in the phone lines in Cambodia. French company very happy they got the contract. Of course, as they're digging all across Cambodia, it's corpses, putting in the phone lines.

His S21 film is, I think, one of the greatest films and one of the greatest documents in human history. S21 was an image you can't get over. It's a high school in Phnom Penh that was made into a killing factory, which... there is already an image. Probably 14,000 people were killed in this building. They just kept rounding people up and pushing them into the building. The building is now empty and it's a kind of holocaust museum at the moment, but in Cambodia there's no money for a holocaust museum, so it's just very simple. You can walk in and there are a couple of little signs.

Rithy Pahn was one of a small group of artists, I think fewer than ten people survived who went through that building. They were mostly artists, because they were painting people's portraits and doing things that were helpful. Rithy Pahn did something quite incredible. He made a film in which he found four of the former guards and four survivors. The documentary film takes all of them, invites them back into the building, which is now empty. He asked the guards to re-enact what they did every day in this empty building, for the four survivors. I don't know another document in history that then has what comes next.

The survivors ask the guards, 'What were you thinking? How could you do this?' Those answers are overwhelming. In all of human history, it's one of the most overwhelming documents. S21 - it's an overwhelming film - which gets us to something we don't normally feel we can do, which gets us to a type of bearing witness, a type of embodying history, recognizing history, processing history and craving a space for a future that only film can accomplish. And places us not at arm's length from history, but quite the opposite: right in the heart of it. And invites us to place ourselves in the place where you have to make the hardest decisions of your life.

As Americans, actually, we are in that place right now. It's just that the commercial culture around us conspires to never make you think that that's really where we are. That the decisions that are in front of us every day have this type of weight. And that the body count and the devastation. On our watch, world poverty has tripled. Tripled. Fifteen hundred years from now, they'll be saying, 'What were those people thinking? Did they not notice? How could they not know? How could they not see? How could they not deal. It's unthinkable. What were they looking at? What were they talking about? What was so important for them?'

One hundred years from now no one could imagine what it is we spent our time doing while presiding over plagues and starvation, the like of which the planet has never seen. And, as you know, with our friend Mr. Wolfowitz at the World Bank, our structural adjustment programs, which actually will not permit African countries to hire more doctors or more nurses or more teachers. They're in the midst of an AIDS epidemic and their financial agreements with us are, You are not allowed to hire more doctors or more nurses. So our profit margin is maintained, they are not allowed to hire more doctors or more nurses in the middle of an AIDS epidemic.

New Crowned Hope. I like the sound of the words for this time in history. It sounded to me like great Jamaican beer. New Crowned Hope. I could see the label. In fact, Mozart's last gesture was this New Crowned Hope. After the French Revolution, of course, they shut down all the Masonic lodges in Vienna and the secret police shutting down everything, arresting a lot of people, [making] sweeps. A couple of highly placed citizens went to the emperor and said, 'Look, things are bad enough here. You're making it look like a police state. At least for purposes of show, allow one of these lodges to reopen.' And so one lodge was reopened.

For that opening, Mozart wrote a 20-minute cantata about world brotherhood. He conducted it for that opening, and that was his last public appearance, his last public performance. Two days later he was in the bed he would die in two weeks later. The name of that lodge was New Crowned Hope. So I wanted to make a festival that was about a new crowned hope in a new century. How do we move forward? Where does the hope come from? Where does the energy come from? Where does the vision come from?

Film is the greatest art form at the moment for penetrating deeply across the cultures, across the world, and it's the art form that has the lifeblood of the gestalt flowing through it right now. Film is making an incredible impact all over the world, so the key was to commission filmmakers and invite them to work as artists. I have to say that the other artists I was working with primarily were architects and chefs, because filmmakers, architects and chefs are

usually considered the service industry, never allowed to quite do what they had in mind. You know, the best buildings are based on the best clients, but in fact the pressure from the client is hideous.

So we wanted to be a good client and invite filmmakers and architects and people creating food to work from a place of love, to work from the place of necessity, to work from a place of vision, to work from a place of something that's necessary. We went back and forth creating a list of the filmmakers. Of course, that was one of the most fun things. And then talking to a lot of filmmakers. It became clear that some people weren't available, some people didn't quite have something we need, some people had something in mind immediately, some people had something in mind over a little bit of time.

Garin Nugroho, the producer of *Opera Jawa*? How many people have seen that, so far? Oh, great! I just want to mention Garin Nugroho as an example of one of the powerful new filmmakers of this generation. Working in the largest Muslim country in the world, he's been courageously taking on issues that the Indonesian government would rather he stay away from. The San Francisco Film Festival showed one of my favorite films, *Of Love and Eggs*. I hope people saw that here, a Muslim sex comedy. That's unthinkable, and only Garin would have the nerve to make it with 20 women in the cast all appearing in anything from a full chador to bikinis. And you're watching their choices and how they choose to appear and present themselves. And that is again not the generalities of politicians, but what art shows you are specific lives, specific choices, specific situations and how each of these women is dealing.

One of the other overwhelming images of *Of Love and Eggs* is that Garin had the film narrated by a girl from Aceh province. As you know, Aceh province is constantly in the midst of a rather unpleasant forced takeover by the Indonesian government and there's been an independence movement going for 34 years there. Really, longer, but the current one. Garin, as the film gets underway, it's all narrated by her. She's a 12-year-old girl. She keeps trying to draw the top of a mosque. Nobody knows why. Across the film. She has a terrible speech impediment and it's because, of course, during one of the raids the Indonesian soldiers cut her tongue out and she doesn't know where her family is and she's living without them. Only Garin Nugroho would have a film narrated by a woman whose tongue was cut out, and say, 'You still are able to hear what Aceh province is trying to say to you.'

And, of course, he sets the film in the worst neighborhood in Jakarta. Terrible, bad. People living in a really horrible slum, and the film's all around the mosque inside the slum. It's hilariously funny. Garin makes the whole film, not with a hand-held camera shot in the grime of the streets, but makes in a studio and makes it like a '50s studio movie, everyone dressed fabulously and lit perfectly. So they have their dignity, they have their joy, they have their pleasure in their own humanity. Anyway, San Francisco Film Festival, thank you so much for showing that film in America because you're one of the very few people who did.

Garin is exactly the kind of filmmaker you want to commission. Garin has made *Opera Jawa*, which is showing now here, again. Please don't miss it. It's astonishing. I think of it as one of the first films of the new 21st century. It's a new world and it's not only the political subject matter that Garin goes right into the heart of, but also Garin as an artist is creating a new language for film. He's invited ten Indonesian installation artists to create the sets for the film. So, the film doesn't look like any film you've ever seen.

Movie sets are usually quasi-realistic. This is way out there. And you're suddenly in this whole other zone of pure art in the midst of political repression. And the primary actors are the great Javanese classical dancers of this generation. You're seeing this incredible dance language connected to cinematic language, and suddenly cinema speaks a new language. For me, the joy of cinema at this moment, the beauty of the state of cinema at this moment is, cinema was invented by a certain set of people in a certain culture at a certain moment of history and we told our stories our way. Finally, the technology is such that a new set of people have taken on this technology and are now telling stories their way.

One of the most maddening things about our information system is that it's the Western correspondent standing in Tiananmen Square telling you something. But you're still not a Chinese person. You're still not placed deeply and seeing the world through Chinese eyes. And the way our correspondent system works, is you're always seeing the world through Western eyes - wherever that person is standing - and so you're not actually getting a different view of the world. The power of new aboriginal cinema is that you're actually seeing the world through the eyes of a young aboriginal woman. For the first time in human history. And you know what? The world looks different.

Atanarjuat, the first film in the Inuit language, is an overwhelming breakthrough. It's like

Homer's Odyssey suddenly joins world literature in our lifetimes. A new epic becomes part of the heritage of all culture in our lifetimes because of digital technology. We're suddenly being able to see the world not just from the Western correspondent's point of view. And, finally, from Africa, getting images that are not just images of crisis, because that's the only thing we see when we go there. 'I'm standing here in the middle of crisis.' Please don't miss Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's *Daratt*, which was filmed and shot - which we also commissioned - as a truth and reconciliation film. It's filmed in Chad during the state of emergency, while the Sudanese army was invading from the South. And Haroun, who is a magnificent artist did something so astonishing. In a city that was occupied by an invading army, he just turned the camera the other way and kept shooting. He did not let an invasion break his concentration or his seriousness of purpose.

We can make a connection to Africa that is not just 'continent of crisis.' And once you do that, it becomes 'continent of hope,' but 'hope' in a real way. I would just say again, Cornell West talks about how optimists are people who have no idea what they're talking about. Whereas people who've actually been on the ground, in the situation, suffering, have earned the right to hope. And that's what separates hope from optimism. These are films of hope.

I hope some people were able to see at Yerba Buena Apichatpong's *Syndromes and a Century*. All of the New Crowned Hope films that we commissioned turned out to be, surprisingly to us, quite quiet films. *Daratt* is very quiet. It's very interesting, because we live in the age of the action film, the blockbuster, the film that comes at you like a tsunami. And all of these filmmakers have chosen something else, which is actually to give you your own space. Give you the space to think and feel. Give you a landscape within which to process, not just react. So we can get past our reactive state and move into a deeper space of feeling and reflection.

Apichatpong's working in Thailand. A very courageous gay filmmaker where it's illegal even to think you might be gay. His films take a very different approach to what cinema can be. People saw, perhaps, his *Tropical Malady*, a film widely hated and widely loved. For me, it's one of the most important films because it's about shaman practice, spirit possession and actually recognizing how it's at work in your body. And it uses film technology as a way to connect to traditional Thai spirit possession. You suddenly realize film has a whole other set of possibilities that D.W. Griffith never imagined.

The new film, *Syndromes and a Century*, is quite astonishing because he quietly sets about making something about his parents, who were doctors in a small rural clinic when they met and they were having their courtship. Apichatpong makes the first half of the film in this little clinic in the village, and in the second half of the film in a huge modern hospital in Bangkok. What's amazing is that the second half of the film, all the dialogue and all the situations start repeating, and you go into this astonishing Buddhist timespace of reincarnation. This astonishing *deja vu*. This astonishing, 'Something else is moving in the world, invisible.' The film is very low key and at the same time totally shifts how you're experiencing everything in your life.

If you have a chance, see Tsai Ming-liang's *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone*, and, of course, I should just say one more thing about Bahman Ghobadi - who people know from his incredible *A Time for Drunken Horses*, and what was billed as *Marooned in Iraq*, but is really *Songs of My Mother's Homeland* - making these films from Kurdistan that show Saddam's devastations and bizarrely, Bahman still ends up not being able to get a visa into America by Homeland Security even though George Bush could use him as a poster. Nonetheless, to have films of Kurdish language for a culture that has no country, no border. Four languages, split across Turkey, Iran, Syria. Bahman is creating the culture of hope.

I think you all saw *A Time for Drunken Horses*, which was just devastating. And then Bahman realized you couldn't give that to the Kurdish people. You had to give them something that also had the life energy of keeping a culture alive. So his next film had hilarious comedy in it, and this just unbelievable life force. He made *Half Moon for New Crowned Hope* very moved by the fact that Mozart died thinking himself a failure. So he made that film about the Kurdish people, about what this generation will not live to see. And at this moment, what looks like it will never happen, and what it means to keep something alive for a couple of generations on.

This idea that cinema is part of turning the page, cinema is part of a new possibility of hope, cinema is part of gathering in small groups and reinforcing a sense of where we're coming from, but also where we're going. And what it means to hold the images in front of us to say, 'We're not there yet, but it's where we're going, so let's not stop here. Let's keep going there.' That idealism is actually what art was invented to do. To hold in front of you something that you aspire to.

We're coming through a period where that has not been fashionable. Where artists have

thought, 'OK, what we have to do is say how awful everything is.' That has not led to such a good situation, and in fact it's what television does. And you can find it in the newspaper. So maybe art can do something else, which is not just say how awful everything is. Because you can pretty much figure that out already. It's what's on the other side of all of that. What lies on the other side of that mountain range? Which is where we're going.

Thank you.

[applause]