In the Beginning was the Image
Conversations with Peter Whitehead

Part One

A lot of people are not drawn to anything except constant movement.
They can never sit still.
They can never rest.
I suppose they can never just be.

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The early Sixties in London, if you're talking about the cinema, you're talking about Bergman, Godard, Fellini, Antonioni. That was the cinema, completely. There was nothing else. And you'd just wait for the next one. I would see them all five times, six times. Just go and see them every two or three days when they came out. And that's what I was brought up on. God knows why I ended up making documentary films.

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When I'd been in the army I'd made quite a lot of money one way and another being an army officer, doing funny things on the side like buying and selling MG sports cars. I ended up having a little car and I used to drive off to Sweden. As a consequence of that at one point I married a Swedish girl. Called Brit, of course. It had to be Brit. It just had to be Brit. I think I picked her up on the Autobahn somewhere north of Hamburg. I can't quite remember now. God, anyway... That didn't last too long. It was fun at the time. I used to have a house full of Swedish girls in Cambridge. They all used to come over, they all had sisters and cousins. I was very popular. My parties were very popular. Cambridge was great, though I didn't do terribly well on the academic side. But Bergman... I published *The Seventh Seal*, didn't I? In the end I published *The Seventh Seal*. Yes...

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I started off with the ambition of being a musician and at school I was the school organist. I then went into the theatre for a bit when I was at Cambridge, did some journalism, and then the first thing I really believed I would do was write novels which I never quite managed to finish. I always used to go on long holidays to Greece to finish them and never quite finished them. And so I tried a lot of things.

It was only about three years ago, in fact, that I decided to do film. In fact I got a scholarship to study painting. I took up painting during one of these phases. I got a scholarship to study painting at the Slade School of Art in London, which had a film department.

That's quite an apprenticeship. Didn't you work as a news cameraman?

Yes, the first thing I did in film was make a scientific documentary because I'd studied science. Once I'd got into filming, the essential period I think in my filming life was about nine months I spent as a newsreel cameraman for Italian television in England. This was an ideal apprenticeship because I was absolutely on my own. They were a very small unit and would ring me up at ten o'clock in the morning and say, "The Prime Minister is going to be at the Tower of London at half past ten. Make us a twelve-minute film by five o'clock to go out on Eurovision." And I'd say, "Well, what's it about?" And they'd say, "We don't know." So I would simply arrive and have to make a film. First of all I had to learn to film instantaneously and capture things, which I think is a very good thing in a cameraman. I had to learn how to look for essentials. I had to learn how to edit it in my own mind because I knew those poor fellows in the editing room were going to look at this film and go, "Cut it here, cut, cut." And they had to cut it in ten minutes flat.

So you had to help them?

I had to help them. Eventually I tried to do it all in one take so they didn't even need to edit it. It was a bit presumptuous, but that was the absolutely perfect training because you were dealing with reality. You were learning to see how things really happened. I can't think of a better way for a person to be trained if he ever wants to make films that are not Hollywood films, but films that relate in some way or other to the truth.

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I'd come down from Cambridge and I was in London working for Italian television, filming things going on in London. Allen Ginsberg arrived from Prague and gave a poetry reading and within three weeks I was in the Albert Hall filming seven thousand people who'd come to hear Ginsberg.

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I did not go along to the Albert Hall on 11 June 1965 to make a film about a moment in history that was going to encapsulate forever all the issues and problems of the Sixties, or about American imperialism or culture or protest. I went along to hear a bunch of poets and I had no idea what they were going to recite. Nor had anyone else. It was afterwards, when we came away from it all, that we had to say, "Well, who are these seven thousand who have emerged out of the woodwork, and the two and a half thousand people who were turned away? Who were all these

people who came to hear these poets, and why?" And then people began to say – and I think absolutely correctly – that this was the first moment of a certain kind of revelation or opening of a certain kind of new consciousness that had been rumbling around amongst an awful lot of people, which was this unease about what was going on in relationship to the Aldermaston March, the atom bomb, the war in Vietnam and so on. It just came to the surface. And it was suddenly evident that this was not just a bunch of Beat Poets in Better Books when forty-five people turned up and got stoned. This was suddenly a very collective, public, communal event.

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The American critics of their own country, the poets and writers, came over in a kind of celebration saying, "Hey you guys, we've all got a problem and we're articulating it in this kind of way, and we've got to deal with it now. How are we going to deal with it?" And when we all left that night we'd had an illumination. I think a lot of people came out and said, "This is not nonsense. This is not crazy. This is not mad. This is serious. This is the beginning of something serious."

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I shot forty-four minutes of film, which were reduced finally to thirty-three minutes. That's a pretty good ratio. It was fascinating to go there not knowing anything about what was going to happen, to film it in a completely newsreel situation, not at all aware of what I was going to get. That was one thing. And then working with forty-four minutes of material to make a thirty-three-minute film, using every single bit that was usable – it being a complete editing job – was something else. I came out of this experience really being fascinated by that difference, which I exploited in a later film, *The Fall*.

I made part one of *The Fall* about the camera, which is where you're passive. You are there with a camera as a member of the audience. I was just capturing it. Then of course once you've captured it you have to make a film out of it, and that is a totally different process because you're active. It's completely opposite. In this way you're rather feminine with the camera. You're responding sensually, emotionally, instinctively. And in that situation I had no control over anything. In fact there was one moment when Allen Ginsberg grabbed me and threw me onto the floor and said, "You're in my way, get out of the way" just as I was crawling over to do some filming.

The second part, when you're editing, you're very masculine, very rational, technological. You're chopping, cutting up. You're doing exactly the opposite. Later on, especially with *Charlie is My Darling*, the film with the Rolling Stones, there are some long sequences in one take, which I like most in the film, in this little confined room where I go from one to the other.

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I say to myself if I am making a film, it is my film, my vision, my voice, my subjectivity. If in making this film I can't make a film that no one else could make, there's no point in doing it. I think there are probably twenty seventy-minute documentaries around – or might have been – that were shot by people in the Sixties about the era. But I think mine are the only ones that have ever survived. And the only reason they've survived is because they haven't been wiped or burnt by the institutions that made them, or because they were so personal. My films are totally personal and the fact that I made them and kept them in a tin in a barn means they now exist today. My half a dozen films were all made in that spirit, even though with *Charlie is My Darling*, give Andrew Oldham his due. He just said, "Right, here's two thousand pounds. We're leaving on Friday morning. Do you think you can make a film?" "I'll have a go." So I shot a film and put it all together. But it's not like any other pop film that's ever been made, is it? No way.

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I'd made the film *Wholly Communion* and it had shown in London. Everyone was talking about it because the event that I'd filmed, the poetry reading at the Albert Hall with Allen Ginsberg and all these people, everyone had known about it, seven thousand people had turned out, two thousand people had been turned away. So everyone wanted to see the film. It was perfect. Andrew Oldham, manager of the Rolling Stones, heard about this and was thinking about making a film with the Stones, or knew that the Stones would sooner or later have to make a film. He'd heard that I had made the film almost like a member of the audience. I'd gone along with a silent camera without lights or anything. Anyway, he sent for me. I get a phone call one day. "Hello, is that Peter Whitehead? This is Andrew Loog Oldham speaking." And I said, "Well, this is Peter Lorrimer Whitehead speaking." He said, "Don't you know who I am?" I had to admit at that time I didn't know who he was. Anyway, he said, "I am the manager of the Rolling Stones. I'd like to meet you."

I didn't dare tell him that I'd never, ever listened to a Rolling Stones record in my life. He said, "You made this film, apparently everyone likes it. Is it true you can make a film without lights? You don't need a tripod, you're just sitting there and nobody quite knows you're there?" I said, "Yes, this is the art of the new kind of film. The director can become invisible. This is what I rather like doing, just being there and filming. I'm a newsreel cameraman." He said, "How would like to film the Rolling Stones?" I said, "That sounds like quite an interesting idea. What kind of a film are you thinking about?" He said, "We're going on tour of Ireland, two big concerts in Dublin and Belfast, and if you can make a film like that, you could just come along and make a film." I said, "Yes, exactly. Very interesting."

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I like his hair.
Just his hair?
I just like him, I don't know why. He's very nice.
You don't know why?
I don't know, I just like them singing.

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So I arrive Friday morning, having set up the whole thing, and go the office and I'm introduced to the boys. We all get into some cars and drive to Heathrow and we end up in Dublin. And I must admit I was knocked out by the music, the sheer power, just to see two thousand kids crammed into this theatre, all of them going berserk. It was the Orphic mystery. It was a bacchanal, the most insane thing. I'd never, ever been to such a thing, which I think was a great advantage. I had no expectations or anything.

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So we all got on terribly well and came back and I started putting it all together, Then Andrew said, "We're off to America, do you want to come?" So I said, "Yes, why not." We flew to America and I filmed the whole session of them dressing up as women. They had decided to dress up in drag. I was to film the photo session. Brian Jones dressed up as a WAF officer, Mick Jagger dressed up as a black singer. It must have taken a lot of courage to do.

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It was, of course, at the time when they'd been prosecuted for the drug bust in Sussex and they'd been tried and were going to prison, and had appealed against their various prison sentences. As far as we knew on Monday they were going to go into that court and they were going to be sent to prison. Their new song was "We Love You." I got around with Mick and Andrew and they said, "We'd like to film something." I had the idea that as far as I was concerned, their trial had been as symbolic as the trial of Oscar Wilde had been. The attitude to Oscar Wilde in his time about homosexuality was very little different to the attitude, I felt in the Sixties, to pills and cannabis. It was exactly the same kind of hypocrisy that was going to send them to jail. I said, "Right, dress Mick up as Oscar Wilde and we'll do a send-up of the trial." We took a few events from the bust. I believe Marianne Faithful had been found in some slightly questionable state, and we filmed the whole thing. The following day they were let off. The appeal was accepted and fortunately they didn't go to prison. I was delighted they didn't though I

suppose knocked a bit of wind out of my film. But then the BBC banned it, which was the best thing they could have possibly done because then everybody wanted to see it.

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The one I like most of all, the one I get a bit of pleasure out of when I occasionally look at my films, is the sequence of Mick Jagger and Stones in slow motion cut to "Lady Jane."

Why?

"Lady Jane" is a very sentimental love song. It's actually about class. It's a very sweet song, and the images, through being stretched and rather grainy and slow-moving, are also rather sweet. But of course they are violent images, so there is a nice contrast between the song, which is sweet, and the images, which are superficially sweet. The song is really about class consciousness, it's really about tension. It's really about a working-class guy in love with an upper-class girl. So that funny tension in the song is highlighted by the tension in the images which is of these sweet young girls flying through the air colliding, in mid-air, with Mick Jagger. I remember talking to him about this. I said, "What do they do when they get there? Do they kiss you or do they hit you?" And he said, "Well they don't really know. They look at you with complete surprise." There are some shots in *Charlie is My Darling*, there's no doubt about it, those boys who get up on that stage, they want to kiss Mick Jagger and Brian Jones, but when they get there they feel so damned silly, they don't know what to do, so they hit them.

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You only define yourselves as a group by the enemy, and what was the enemy? I could say "British Culture" – mainstream culture – which is still the enemy. On the other hand, there is always the fringe. We were, I believe, in the Sixties, dealing with America. *Wholly Communion* was about American poets. We went along to see American people, American Beat Poets who were part of the American counter-culture, attacking American mainstream culture and politics. And here they were, imposing their culture on the rest of the world. You drop bombs on Vietnam and then you follow it with Cadillacs and refrigerators. We were dealing with American arrogance that assumed that American culture was better than Buddhist culture and could be used as a means of destroying an entire country in Southeast Asia. *Wholly Communion* was about Beat Poets. *Charlie is My Darling* was about the Rolling Stones. They were, for some curious, unbelievable reason, seeing themselves as buddies of Buddy Guy and Little Richard. Why on earth do a couple of guys from the London School of Economics end up cavorting around a few pubs in Richmond thinking they're Little Richard? What did we have in common with Chicago blues, for God's sake? We did have something in common, British working classes, British

counter-culture, or the Left here in England, together with the Blacks in America and the Left and the Beat Poets and so on. What were we against? The institutionalisation of imperialism against the Third World, in one form or another. That was the essential link throughout the Sixties. Even if you were a woman and a feminist, you were going against the old monotheistic, patriarchal, Tory, right-wing, British elitist shit.

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Certainly I was trying to be critical of what was being said about it, not what was going on. What was going on struck me as being very important and I did set out to document it. In the film I did show up some of the hype, a popular word now. It was being hyped by the media. For me the Sixties was about protest, the influence of American power on British culture, it was about the Vietnam War. I tried to show in the film a balance between the two sides. I think I came out seventy-five percent basically in terms of showing what I believed in, which was the fact that it was a period of protest. The whole feminism thing was a period of protest. What was really going on was that we were protesting the values of the institutions. It was revolution against a lot of ideas. The whole so-called "Swinging London" thing was five percent of it.

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To me, funnily enough, it may sound ridiculous, but it has to do with the loss of the British Empire.

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"The London Scene" is a series of episodes, or short documents, perhaps. What is the statement that you felt you were saying throughout the whole picture?

I call the film "A Pop Concerto for Film." So each of my sections came over, when I finished with them, as movements, and each one had a different title. Now, what I was really saying about the subject is I think best described by my change during the course of making it. I set out to make a film that was just merely a celebration of London. It was a question of trying to catch the moment and the style of something that was very visual and very exciting. This was the aim only for a very short time because I realised that was very superficial and there was something very important behind all this, and that's what I tried to get at. Everyone, at the particular point when I started making my film, was talking about Swinging London and miniskirts and all this sort of thing. Suddenly it had exploded on the world scene. How had it happened, and why? I felt, as an Englishman, it was my responsibility to show something rather more than what other people would see, which is that a lot of people, largely young people of my age – and not-so-young people of my age –

have been working for the last ten years creating what is for me a sort of cultural revolution. It has been going on since John Osborne first did *Look Back in Anger* when the theatre started to break down the old image of Great Britain and the Empire and so on, and post-war England was changing. It is all these people who have been working for ten years in their various different fields, whether it is pop music, fashion, design, film or literature, and so on. These are the people who have been subtly selling what they believe in, in terms of what is English now. I tried to get through to the real people who have been working unconsciously.

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The real mood and ambiance of *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* is not just that it's debunking, spoofing everything that was going on. It's trying to examine the mythology that it was a swinging time, everybody was having fun. Some people were having fun. Some people are having fun now. They were having fun in the 1890s. They were having fun between the wars. They were having fun during the war. There are always some people who are going to have a lot of fun, thank God. But what was going on in the Sixties wasn't very funny.

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I do believe that it came out as quite a dark film. People were expecting from the title that it might be all jolly and funny and superficial and Swinging London and Flower Power. It isn't that at all. The very idea of Swinging London was an invention of *Time* magazine. Nobody thought Swinging London was swinging. Everyone thought they were having a wonderful time. I didn't think it was actually particularly a wonderful time at all. For me the Sixties was the Aldermaston march, the war in Vietnam, "bomb culture," to quote the title of a superb book by Jeff Nuttall, the Dialectics of Liberation at the Roundhouse with Stokely Carmichael, Allen Ginsberg and a load of other people describing what was going wrong. The only miracle about the Sixties was that it was a moment of extreme change that managed to get through without savage violence. It was a revolution.

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This isn't the first generation that has questioned the moral values of the last generation. But I think it is one of the first generations which has not had to worry about the material things, because if you are hungry, you haven't really got much time to worry about morals. When I say morals I mean like fighting wars and whether it is right for society to do that. If your stomach is full of food you can start worrying about them, and this is what has happened. People are worrying more and more, and they have less and less work to do. As the years go on they will have hardly

any work to do because there will be machines to do it for them, which has already happened. So they will have to work four hours a day and the rest of the time they have got to do something else. That "something else" isn't going to be what people think. It isn't going to be just jumping around and swimming and reading books and going to movies because you get very bored with those things, very quickly.

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Obviously after I had made *Charlie is My Darling* other people came to me, primarily *Top of the Pops* because they had shown my Stones promos and occasionally needed a film when they couldn't get the group into the studio. That's how it all began. I got phone calls from all kinds of people. Mike Jeffreys rang me up and asked me to film Jimi Hendrix. I became the first person ever to film Jimi Hendrix. He rang me up and said, "This guy is coming over, he's a black guy, he plays the guitar with his teeth. Would you make a film?" And I thought, "Crikey. Well, OK, it's worth doing."

I didn't take them seriously for a moment. I just did them in the spirit of the Sixties, for fun. I wasn't that young and I wasn't into pop music so I didn't get carried away by them. I did it, as I say, for fun. If I didn't like the music and didn't like the person I just couldn't do it, so I said no. There was quite a lot I said no to. Now, of course, looking back, all the films I made with serious pop groups like the Stones and Led Zeppelin are an important aspect of my work, and I don't deny that.

When I was at Cambridge and gave up science and all that, I decided to go to the Slade School of Art to be a painter. I got a scholarship there and had some time to waste, six months I think. I was living in a house where a bunch of young guys came in and used to rehearse, and the daughter of the house was having an affair with this rather dishy-looking young singer/guitarist called Syd Barrett. They used to play what I thought at the time was this ghastly music outside my studio door. So I would put up my Wagner and Janácek as loud as possible. While they were doing their whatever-it-was I'd be doing Janácek's *House of the Dead* and Wagner's *Das Rheingold.* Anyway, Syd used to come in and talk to me because he was a painter too. I had an exhibition in Cambridge, and the following exhibition was a joint exhibition with Syd Barrett and a young guy called Anthony Stern. I didn't hear anything more about it until I was in London a year or so later and Anthony Stern rang up and he said, "Do you remember Syd Barrett and the boys?" I said, "Yeah, that terrible music wafting through my door." And he said, "No, no, they're successful now, they're playing in London. Let's go and see them tomorrow, it'll be great." So we went along. "Hey, I'm Peter Whitehead, I remember you" and all this kind of thing. And then I went to UFO where they were playing and I remember really liking them. For me it wasn't remotely connected to pop music. There was certainly a long improvisatory quality about them. I always joke that I'd created the Pink Floyd sound because Syd had to listen to all my Bartók and Janácek, so it stretched to his improvisations. Not quite true, I'm sure.

By the time I'd finished my film *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* I had a choice then of using the Rolling Stones or Eric Burdon or Jimi Hendrix, whoever I had contacts with. But I felt that Pink Floyd's music was ideal for what I wanted to do. One way or another I managed to persuade them to go into a recording studio. They had never been in to a recording studio so they were delighted. I was prepared to pay, £85 for two hours. I said that I wanted the song "Interstellar Overdrive," which I had heard a couple of times. That was the perfect music for my film.

At the time I took them in for £85 and recorded them I had no idea they were going to become as successful as they did. I would have said they would fade within three months, the same as everybody else.

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Can I tell you the definition of an independent filmmaker? He never makes any money out of it. Period. If you are truly independent you probably can't make any money out of it. That was my experience of it, anyway.

Independent. OK, I won't be quite so facetious. After *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* I was offered three Hollywood features by Sam Spiegel. I read the three scripts and thought "Forget it." I met these guys and these bloody producers came round and said, "Look, we loved your films, now listen..." I just thought "Whatever is the meaning of independence, I just could not make films with these guys." That's just the way it was. I just wanted to enjoy making films the way I wanted to make them, from beginning to end. I photograph them, I finance them, I write them if I have to, I edit them, put them together, then instead of selling them I shelve them for fear they may not be any good. Nothing to do with integrity. It was a certainty that I could not go through with the whole process, dealing with these people, dealing with these scripts, ending up making a movie.

I live in the present, you know. It was a question of "What do I do today?" Other people might say, "Well, if I make two or three films, in five years time I can make my film!" They go through the process and end up finally being satisfied being an assistant director. I needed to make a film today. I can't sleep at night unless I have done something. I needed to do it today, here and now. I needed to be getting on with it. I don't even know what the word 'integrity' could mean applied to that kind of decision. I didn't like the people, I didn't like the films I was offered, I knew I could not go through the system.

I never owned anything until I was forty-five or forty-six. Didn't own anything. I still don't own anything now, actually, except a camera and a few bits and pieces and a kiln. Certainly it was of no interest to me whatsoever to own anything. Things hold you down. If there is one thing I believe in it is independence and freedom, for God's sake.

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This is uncanny, so uncanny. I believe in the uncanny. Have I ever told you my stories about Pakistan? Well, that's for another time. You'll have to come and relax me to tell you that story.

But this one is weird. Well, I was a Godard fan, that's for sure. *Alphaville* was advertised at the London Film Festival. I came out from that film demolished. I couldn't figure out why. It was just from the first second to the last a complete trance. It was just total, that loss of self where the boundary between subject and object just goes. OK, I was already in love with Anna Karina. She was a female archetype of the female, and Godard's actress. This somehow sucked me to an even greater degree. Really, when I have had this happen to me two or three times in my life it's total. I really do get demolished. I was ill – psychologically ill – for weeks, and I had the idea, in a way, I suppose, to build up some kind of attachment, connection, and yet detachment to the film. I decided that I would try and get the rights from Godard to translate the film and publish it as a screenplay. I thought it would be my way of controlling and handling it. Anyway, I was interested in the idea of publishing screenplays. I loved film and it just seemed to me the logical thing to do. This kind of thing did not exist in England.

I discovered the film was going to be shown by George Hoellering at the Academy Cinema in London. I knew him because he'd shown my films. Hoellering said, "I'll speak to Jean-Luc Godard." I got the message back a week later that Godard would be only too pleased. Was there any money involved? And I said, "Yes, I can give him £200." And Hoellering said, "Oh, he would be very pleased." So he rings me up the next day and says, "Yes, that's wonderful. £200, of course you can have that. There's only one problem. There's no script." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, Godard just shot it. There isn't a script." I said, "Well, how can I publish the script if there isn't one?" He said, "We open next week. The only thing we can propose is that you take the film print when we've screened it here and we will lend it to you with his permission. You can sit on a Steenbeck and translate all the action into English. If you want to go to all that trouble then it's entirely up to you. Godard is arriving on Friday and is going to be staying at the Hilton. Godard says if you go there at four o'clock in the afternoon with the contract and sign it and give him £200, you've got the deal."

So I arrive at the Hilton at four o'clock and ring up to his room. Nothing. So I wait till half-past and keep going back to the front desk saying, "Could you please ring up to Jean-Luc Godard?" "Not there, sir, not there, sir." So I go and sit down, and one other character is in the lounge. I am looking across, there is this little guy reading the newspaper, and I think, "I'm sure that's Godard." I sort of creep around and it is Godard. My hero, the man I worshipped. At last, finally, my sort of intellectual father-figure. This is it. So I walk around the back and come up behind him. I didn't want to frighten him because he looked so scared. I went over and said, "Monsieur Godard?" He sort of turned round like this and said, "Yes?" I said, "I'm Peter Whitehead." He said, "Who?" I said, "Peter Whitehead. The screenplay?" And

he said, “Oh, yes, yes. You have the contract?” So I said, “Yes, hold on, yes.” I was expecting to be upstairs in this suite with Anna Karina serving me tea, wafting around in a negligee. And I said, “Well, fine, yes, here it is.” “You have the money?” I said, “Yes. Do you want to read it?” He said, “No.” So I gave him the money, cash, and he goes like this... “Très bien. C’est lourd, huh? Très bien. Merci. Au revoir.”

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After making *Wholly Communion*, the next film was *Benefit of the Doubt*, which happened because of the other two films. Peter Brook was in the Royal Shakespeare Company, creating a play, which he going to eventually call *US*. He and a couple of writers and the actors were doing a living theatre event. One of the poets in the Albert Hall is Adrian Mitchell and the poem that he read there was about the Vietnam War, a very bitter savage poem. In fact it got the biggest cheer, I think, of the evening, apart from Ginsberg.

> *Heard the alarm clocks screaming with pain*
> *Couldn’t find myself so I went back to sleep again*
> *So fill my ears with silver, stick my legs in plaster*
> *Tell me lies about Vietnam*

Eventually Adrian Mitchell was involved in the writing of the play with Peter Brook, which eventually became *US*. They were planning a series of tableaux-type scenes. Michael Kustow was working as the assistant to Peter Brook. He rang me up and said, “We know about your films *Wholly Communion* and *Charlie is My Darling*, and we would like to show them to our actors. Can we see them?” Peter Brook took the films off to show them to all his actors and all the collaborators who were creating the play, and clearly they saw lots of connections. When the play started and became a success, they then decided to make it a kind of agitprop political cultural event. They were saying that it was not just a play they were putting on. This is dynamic, organic, fluid. This is going to create dialogue, it’s going to be interactive and we’re going to open ourselves up. We’re going to explain why we did it, how we did it, who was involved, in an attempt, obviously, to create a dialogue around the whole issue of Britain's involvement in the war in Vietnam, which was embodied in the title *US*.

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...and recognising the fact that no play, no finished, formed work of art existed, and that finished and formed works of art cannot be hired or bought, and it is no use going to an author and giving him a sum of money and saying, “We order from you, as from a shop, the following masterpiece.”

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I ended up filming, in one day, in the Aldwych Theatre, fifty minutes of the three-hour play. I decided to interview the people involved, the actors and Peter Brook.

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The urgency of the war in Vietnam for somebody living in London today is that this is our war, and the question of it being our responsibility is neither pious nor theoretical. This is a complex of people to which, for better or for worse, we do belong, with whom we have no intention of taking up arms, who are fighting a war which we either condone or struggle against. For us to take the illusory position of saying we in England are not American, we have nothing to do with America, therefore we can judge, to me is evasive and hopelessly naïve.

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I want it to get worse! I want it to come here! I would like to sit in an English house among the floral chinzes and the school blazers and the dog leads hanging in the hall. I would like us to be tested. I would like a fugitive to run to our doors and say, "Hide me." And know if we hid him, we might be shot. And if we turned him away, we would have to remember that forever.

I would like to know which of my nice, well-meaning acquaintances would betray, which would collaborate, which would talk first under torture and which would become a torturer.

I would like to smell the running bowels of fear over the English Sunday-morning smell of gin and the roasting joint and hyacinths. I would like to see an English dog playing on an English lawn with part of a burnt hand. I would like to see a gas grenade go off at an English flower-show and nice English ladies crawling in each other's sick. And all this, I would like to be filmed and photographed so that someone, a long way off, safe in his chair, could watch us in our indignity.

*

"Would it require actual physical occupation by American land forces to effect the conquest of China itself?"

"If you seek conquest, yes. Certainly not all of the real estate, but all of the key areas anyway."

"How many American troops, in your judgement, would that require?"

"Gee, I don't know."

*

They never saw it till I finished it. Peter Brook was very good on that actually. When I finished it I showed it to the London Film Festival and the two films *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* and *Benefit of the Doubt* were invited to the London and New York Film Festivals. In London it was called "Two Films by Peter Whitehead" and in America it was called "The London Scene."

*

Peter Whitehead, would it be fair to describe "The London Scene" as semi-documentary?

"Semi" suggests "half," so I suppose in some ways I would hope not, because I rather consider my films to do something more than documentary, at least I hope so. In that case I suppose it's fair. I think I know what they mean when they say it's semi-documentary. An ordinary documentary film is supposed to record reality as it happens. You are supposed to be there and your job is to show what it's really all about and you are supposed to be telling the truth. I think there is a different kind of truth to be told on film and I hope in some respects my film does that. I think it is rather similar to the difference between impressionistic painting and expressionistic painting. One was an effort to record reality how it looked. The other was an effort to say something personal on behalf of the artist. You take reality as people normally see it, or think they see it, and you work with it.

In other words you take the position that the filmmaker, who is going to make a statement on something that interests him, has a certain privilege.

I think it is more than a privilege, I think it is a responsibility.

*

Yes, I think there is an obligation to say something about what you are filming and why you are filming and why you have chosen this particular subject, and the only way to do that is, in fact, in your editing and so on.

In other words this puts the filmmaker into the act himself, doesn't it?

Yes, I have in fact on several occasions, in the film, left images in it – like, on one occasion, a policeman is trying to get me out of the way, and so on – several things like this, which, I think, remind the audience there is a cameraman there. You see, I am my own cameraman. When I make a film I do all the filming myself. This is rather different from a director who tells a cameraman what to shoot and why. I am there at the moment and I feel I am absolutely saying something automatically by choosing whatever I choose to film.

Now that you are in the United States are you going to stay here and perhaps do some filmmaking in this country?

Funny you should say that, but I've always wanted to make a film in New York. In fact it was one of the first places I ever visited as a young man and really felt all the time I was here that somehow I was feeling everything that was happening. One was so aware of the people and the place. It's an extraordinary city. And as a consequence of the success of *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* I have been able to get financing over here. I am going back to England this week but returning in a week's time and expect to spend at least a month here during which time I hope very much to make a film on New York which I hope won't take me as long as it took me to make the London film.

Marvellous! Well, we know that you have the creative and the technical excellence, but how can an Englishman, even with the very background that you have, come to New York and presume to do for New York what he has done for London?

Once again, in a sense my film wasn't London, my film is people. I'm not going to make a film about the buildings of New York. If I choose a building in New York I will I hope be making some comment on the people who built it. I'm interested in the people. They are so like us but they are different. I shall find people that interest me. I imagine they will communicate something to me. I hope that this will get over on film. This film must essentially be my reaction not so much to New York but to America now.

*

I arrived in New York and showed my two films at the New York Film Festival. Then I was approached by these two young girls who suggested I make a film about America in New York, sort of *Tonite Let's All Make Love in New York*. They wanted me to do the same for New York as I did for London. I said, "It would be nice to stay in New York for a bit." So they came back the next day and said, "We're launching the whole thing with a party." Andy Warhol was there with his entourage. He said he had been to my film. About a week later I get a phone call from him. I thought, "Who's sending me up?" He said, "Why don't you come round, I've got a proposition for you." So I said, "Where are you?" And he said, "You don't know where I am? My factory?" I said, "No, but I'll get there."

So I arrived at the factory and I come in and sit down and he said, "Would you like to be in a film?" I said, "I'm not an actor." He said, "Don't worry about that kind of thing. You're exactly what I want for the film." I said, "What's the film about?" He said, "Well, I haven't got a title yet, but actually there are only two people in it." I said, "Really?" He said, "You and an actress, this young girl I have. Her name is Viva." I said, "Viva... I see." I said, "Well, what's the film about?" He said, "Well, I want to improvise it. Basically it's just two people who meet and talk about a number of things. You're English and she's American." And I said, "Oh, right." Anyway, in comes Viva, who I did think at the time was a singularly

unattractive young female, certainly not my type. There were others in his entourage who might have made this a feasible proposition. Anyway, to cut a long story short he finally told me that what he really wanted me to do was to fuck her. And I said, "How do you mean?" And he said, "Well, I want you to do a whole number and seduce her and, you know, fuck her." I don't know whether I said, "Are you sure I'm right for the part," but I did think that and said I'd let him know. A promising career as an actor, and an entrée into American society, was blown by the sheer unattractiveness of Viva.

*

We had raised the money on the strength of *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* so I took some of the premises and pretexts and templates of that film and went out into New York and started to film all kinds of documentary things left, right and centre, about the war, about art, about painters, Rauschenberg, people on the street, and goodness knows what else.

*

We believe that the activities and objectives of our forces in Vietnam are directly contrary to the best interests of the Vietnamese people and of the united democracies.

*

I had all this footage, after which I thought, "Hold on, now this is an important subject and this has always been my subject: America. Maybe it should not be just a bloody documentary, it should be something else." And I proposed to them that I went back to England and wrote a script which would fictionalise it. What I had decided to do was to take the whole documentary thing to another level altogether, to examine my own participation in events as a documentary filmmaker. Was I outside or was I inside? I wanted to make the film about this, still using all the documentary stuff which I had in the can, which I liked enormously. Somewhere along the line I had this idea that I would make a film in which the central idea would be a filmmaker filming at a huge protest rally and arranging somehow for someone to be shot. This relates back to my preoccupation with the ethics of filmmaking. I thought, "Right, this is the subject: an act of film as an act of assassination."

*

General disillusionment with the idea of making a documentary film about protest. This seems to be simply protest at one remove. It's less effective than protest itself. If

protest is now ineffective as long as it remains legal, and can only be effective if there is violence, then so must my film be violent. In order to do this it has to become fiction. It has to become, in fact, a thriller. In order to communicate the experience of violence, there seems to be no better way of doing it than that. The idea of making a film about protest is no longer possible simply because the nature of protest at this point in time has to change. It is quite obvious that it's getting nowhere and that the next step is inevitably violence. Therefore my film must become an invitation to violence. It must propose violence.

*

My script was finished, I'd raised the money. The day I got back to America to start making my film I arrived in Washington for the American premiere of my film *Tonite Let's Make Love in London* and there was a huge party afterwards. In the middle of which somebody came in, crying, and announced to everybody that Martin Luther King had been shot dead. Everybody else started to cry. That was the end of the party. I was suddenly thinking, "My God, I have arrived today to make a film about an assassination and now the ultimate, the worst thing has happened. It's not just John Kennedy, now it's Martin Luther King." The next day I was told that my cinema had closed down because the city was in flames.

*

Newark, New Jersey, has been rather lucky. Mayor Addonizio was so happy that his city has escaped violence while so many others were going up in flames.

*

So I flew to New York thinking, "My God, I have got to film all this documentary footage about another assassination here now happening on the street. Perfect!"

*

Suddenly I had a real assassination in my fictional story so I had to incorporate that, which was fine.

*

Senator Kennedy leads with 245,000 with forty-two percent, Governor Brannigan with 157,000 with thirty percent, and Senator Eugene McCarthy 150,000 with about twenty-eight percent.

*

I arranged to film with Bobby Kennedy for a day. He was coming to New York, campaigning. He was very friendly. "You're from England" and that kind of stuff. I was in my car, I followed the car, all the police cars, and right at the very end I was walking along, hand-held with the camera, interviewing him. We stopped and he turned to say goodbye. "Thanks very much, I hope you had a good day." I said, "I hope next time I'll come and film you in the White House." His eyes narrowed a bit and he smiled and said, "There's lots of things standing between me and the White House."

*

Then the next thing is I wake up one day and the students have occupied Columbia University.

*

All previous peaceful methods had been humiliated by bureaucratic hypocrisy, and so with a mixture of social and political romanticism, hundreds of frustrated students joined the SDS minority in their heroic stand against the administration. The university had become a microcosm of America and its problems.

*

I arrived at a university that in twenty-four hours had been totally barricaded up by the students, so there wasn't much to film on the outside obviously. I thought "Hell! This is *La Chinoise*, this is Godard. Godard has invented all this. Godard may have made a fiction film but now it's for real. I've got to be here and involved."

*

Columbia University, New York, April 1968. Radical students mobilise the campus into rebellion. Students of SDS – Students for a Democratic Society – occupy Low Library, the offices of President Kirk. The administration fails to control the situation and there is escalation. Hundreds of students occupy five other university buildings. Protest has become resistance.

*

So I tried to get in this window, I tried to get in that window. I wasn't going to give up because I felt that what was happening was my territory, I just had to convince

somebody. Anyway I saw another window being opened up and some people taking some food in, so I went up and said, "Hey listen, please let me talk. I'm an independent filmmaker from England. I make films about poetry readings and Allen Ginsberg and the war in Vietnam and all this kind of thing. I'm not television, I'm not the media, that's exactly what I'm not. Look, I just have a camera. I want to come in and film you and be with you." "No! Go away! The last thing we want is the bloody media here. This is us, this is our private scene, man! I said, "Listen, I made two films, one about the war in Vietnam." And they said, "No, no, no! Sorry." And then suddenly a little voice from behind said, "Hold on a minute, what was it?" And I said, "I had these two films shown at the New York Film Festival two or three months ago." He said, "I saw them." I said, "You didn't!" "Yeah, the one about the theatre thing." I said, "I made those films." He said, "Hold on a minute." He disappeared and thirty seconds later came back and said, "Come on in."

*

The film is divided into three parts. Part One I called "In the Beginning is the Image." It's basically the camera, it's arriving in the city, it's outside, it's the film, it's the continuous flow of what is outside. It's America, the city, saturated with violence, imminent potential violence, the aggression building up.

*

You're a Nazi. You talk like a Nazi. Look, he's a provocateur. You know something, in 1953 – and this is something you can read in the books – Eisenhower stated that we have a lot to gain by getting power over the natural resources in Vietnam. There were profits to get and they didn't mind how many men died so the profits could be obtained. When you cut out the profits, you'll cut out war.

*

The violence is out there. I am here, passive with the camera, filming. That's Part One, "The Image." Part Two I called "The Word," which is really the editing machine. It is really where the violence, or whatever you want to call it, that was outside is now inside. The second part is more about the artists who are trying to deal with this exterior situation. They have absorbed the violence, they are inflicting the violence onto their work.

You've got all kinds of people trying to sort of come to terms with this threat from outside, taking it inside themselves. It's the editing machine, in a sense, because the editing machine is like thinking. You start to cut things up. You take a long bit of sequence and you chop it up. It's like chopping things up into words, it's like

thinking. It's an act, actually, of aggression. It's severing the narrative flow of reality. It's making it more into your dream. You're taking it and distorting it in the editing process, inflicting the violence onto the film. And in my case, onto myself, because the film is about me. And the film then, on the machine and in the film, gradually disintegrates to the point where finally the interior, the exterior, all the violence is inflicted onto the film, and the film finally disintegrates. End of Part Two.

The last part, which is the occupation by the students and artists and revolutionaries and anarchists of the university, has a different context. I call it "Word + Image" because the violence that was outside and that has gone inside is now coming out again and being collectively projected, not just by an individual, against the structure of the university, which is an institution based on a number of things: money, politics, racism, you name it. Columbia University was the epitome of that other side of America that we don't even want to talk about. The students occupied the university for two reasons. They were racist, occupying Harlem, taking no notice whatsoever of the rights of the black people in Harlem. And they were bombing all the yellow people in Vietnam. So finally we are all together in a commune, a community in which that violence has been absorbed, processed, brought out and becomes a part of a collective act of revolution. Finally there wasn't a split between word and image. I was filming something outside of myself of which I was part.

*

This is the roof of the Mathematics Building. Inside this building at the moment there is a revolution.

*

There were a couple of bits of rolls I wanted to look at so I sent them to the local laboratory in New York. They came back wiped, blank, with a little note saying "We're very sorry, but the film was incorrectly exposed and hasn't come out." I had a word with someone and he said, "You know, they're after you." They knew that I had been filming. Somebody came up to me at a rally at one point and said, "Who are you? Ah yes, you're Peter Whitehead. Yes, we know about you" and walked away. So they knew I was there filming. Somebody warned me to get out so I rented another flat and took all the film and stuck it in the fridge. I thought, "I have got to get back to England." I arranged to ship all the film to England. I got on the aeroplane, got off at Heathrow, and the headline on the *Evening Standard* was that Bobby Kennedy had been shot dead. I had been filming with him three weeks before. I thought, "I go to America to make a film about a symbolic assassination as an act of protest. The day I get there my film is closed off. My debut in America is annulled by the murder of Martin Luther King. The day I leave Bobby Kennedy is

shot." I then collapsed. I really couldn't quite distinguish any more between what was real and what wasn't.

It was a harrowing three months editing this material. I think I put myself together by putting this film together.

*

I think I was convinced in the beginning when I started to make TV newsreels that I was filming the outside real world and I was presenting something that was basically documentary and true. Making *Wholly Communion* I just realised it was totally, absolutely, only me and my take on that particular event, and any other person would have made a totally different film. So I lost any kind of pretensions I had about film, any kind of film, even posing, or especially posing, that a documentary could be true in that sense.

Cinéma-vérité, direct cinema, the Maysles brothers, Pennebaker and the things going on in France, suggested this is finally the way to make a real film about the absolute truth as it is happening. I was swept up a little bit by that and saw what they were doing and said, "Well, I did that with *Wholly Communion* and *Charlie is My Darling*." But the more I thought about it I felt it was totally wrong. Liberate the camera from the tripod and the lights and the cameraman and the editing machine and the production. Go out there with a camera on your shoulder and guys carrying along the sound and actually it has become more and more personal, more and more interiorised as you are filming it. I began to think, "This whole thing about documentaries is a total lie. I don't have to hide myself. I don't have to employ somebody with a voice that sounds like Margaret Thatcher's chauffeur asking the questions. It's me asking the questions. I am interested in what these people have to say. This is a very personal film."

*

Hello. Watching the television as usual.

*

I did not believe in the objective documentary. I was attempting, in various different ways, to make personalised documentaries. A lot of people do it now, but in the Sixties there wasn't such a thing. A documentary was assumed to be objective. I was a scientist, I was trained as a physicist. The first film I ever made was actually all shot through the microscope to show how theories of matter depended on the equipment.

When I came to make the film *The Perception of Life* it was rather ironic as I had given up science altogether. I had gone to the Slade School of Art to paint, I had

taken up filming, and then somebody came up to me and said, "Didn't you study science at Cambridge? We're looking for somebody to do another scientific documentary on the subject of the history of biology." I thought, "My God, that's the last thing I want to do." But when he explained to me that he wanted it to be all shot through a microscope I thought it was an ingenious idea because it will show how the constructed world of knowledge – the constructed world – can only be known through the knowledge we think we have. This knowledge comes from perception, which can be improved upon by cameras and microscopes and telescopes. But it is still always wrong. It is always relative because it has changed in a week's time or a month's time. It is changed by the human imagination. We imagine a better camera, we imagine a better way of looking. So we go on applying our imagination. Imagination is the ruler of the pack. It's the most important card in the pack.

The very purpose of the film was to show that what the people saw through microscopes made them think what they thought. I simply transformed what they saw into film, so what we see in my film is what those scientists saw. We realise that the conclusions they came to – all of which were wrong – were inevitable because of the nature of the microscopes and the way they were looking. In the end I realised I could question everything and presume that everything was transitory and relative in an Einsteinian way or uncertain in the Heisenbergian way. I came out of it never being able to accept the truth of a given piece of film. It didn't matter who or what. There was a certain amount of truth in it that I can go along with but it wasn't an absolute in any possible sense of the word. That's why my films are a record not of the Sixties shot all in the same way as a historical objective, truthful record. They are a record of a funny guy who ran around London and various other places and ended up in the streets of New York, trying to make sense of the world, and trying to be true to his own experience.

*

My last year at Cambridge was, I think by any standards, pretty odd. I spent half the year, whenever I could possibly do it, going down to St Ives in Cornwall and painting there. I had a guy who used to sign me in to all the lectures, and I had a fake guy who I used to pay to do my other bits and pieces. I used to go off for a month at a time. I spent most of the time in St Ives, Cornwall, then near the end of it I met some funny American guys. To cut a long story short I ended up working for them. They were American salesmen working in Europe for a guy called Bernard Cornfeld, who became one of the great rogues of the Sixties. He became a film producer and everything. Anyway, they were selling something called Mutual Funds, and I got fascinated by them because it was such clever idea. It was to do with banking and shares and investments and all that kind of thing, about which I

knew nothing. And they just said, "You're the perfect person, you can make all this kind of money."

Within about a month I was earning something like $1000 every month and I decided I could do much better if I owned my own company and employed other people to do it. So I flew to America, introduced myself to the President of the Philadelphia Fund and to the President of the Chicago Group of Mutual Funds, stayed there three weeks and came back with contracts to represent them in Europe. I had a track record and I could prove what I'd done. I started to employ people and train them, it wasn't that difficult, these were Cambridge undergraduates. After six months I had made a lot of money. I was employing ten people, I had half a dozen cars. I decided that the thing I had to do – because I paid tax in England – was set up an office in Switzerland. You could have your money in a Swiss bank and the tax laws were perfect. I came within five minutes of persuading a bank in Düsseldorf to invest one million dollars in the Philadelphia Fund and I would have made seven per cent.

Then I went to Munich and stayed with an ex-girlfriend of mine from Cambridge and I had nearly clinched this deal. I went to bed, woke up the next day and couldn't move. I was within a day of persuading Deutsche Bank to put in a million dollars and I couldn't move. I was supposed to leave that day in my car – I had a very snazzy sports car – to go to Zurich to set up my office. I could not move. We sent for the doctor. I could not move my legs, my arms, I could hardly breathe. This went on for two or three days. I was getting worse and worse, I could barely eat, I could hardly sleep and I was in a terrible state obviously. I just could not get up out of bed. The following day I woke up, and it had lifted. I remember Helga coming in and saying "You're all right!" And I said, "Yes." And she said, "Well, why?" I looked down because I felt a bit stupid about the whole thing. She said, "Tell me." I said, "I'm going back."

I went back to Cambridge, folded the whole thing up, gave all the contacts to the guys I was employing. I gave them the cars. I rang up the Slade and said I had a scholarship which I had postponed for a year but could I take it up the following September? And they said, "Fine." So I went and rented a flat in Eaton Square with all the money I had made from being a very successful banker for a year and a quarter. I started to paint again and ever since then I have never seriously made a penny. And I don't miss it. It was a wonderful and fascinating experience because you realise how important money is. Money is a myth. It's very strange, something you ought to know about. I think in every single school people should be taught about the symbolic meaning of money, how it can corrupt people. I suddenly knew that money would never, ever get me what I wanted. So it was wonderful. I was purged.

When I arrived in the Slade and saw all these other people painting, I decided I wasn't a painter. It just wasn't for me. They were very classical, doing nudes and things like this. I had heard that there was a guy called Thorold Dickinson who had

made a film called *Gaslight*, a very well-known director. He had just been made Professor of Film in the Slade. So I went and knocked on his door and asked him who he was and what he was doing. He said, "I am the Professor of Film." I said, "Well, what are you going to do?" He said, "We are going to have a department in the Slade School of Painting devoted to film." I saw a Bolex on his shelf and said, "What's the camera for?" He said, "Oh, we thought we ought to have a camera." "Can I have it, please?" He said, "Yes, what do want it for?" And I said, "I want to make a film." And within two days I was making a film.

*

A funny thing happened in Sardinia. I was making love to the person that I loved, and it was at night, and the light was on. And as so often happens when you make love I had my eyes closed. And when I had finished making love – or maybe I hadn't finished, I don't know – I suddenly opened my eyes. And there wasn't anything there at all. Complete darkness.

*

Well, I can't possibly talk seriously about my women over the top of that footage, because that footage is jokey, trivial, fun. It's just me doing *Blow-Up*. That was just a crazy spontaneous thing that happened. There is no way I would relate any of the ideas about the seriousness with which I have always entered into the best relationships I have ever had in my life, which I consider to be totally important and inspirational, to that footage. When I talk about my relationships with women, it's the creative people, for God's sake. Where do we start?

Coral Atkins is the mother of my son, Harry. When I met her she was a very serious actress. She was lovely, extremely bright, and we had a great relationship. I persuaded her to go to college and within two or three years she became a practising psychotherapist and started a home for disturbed children which she ran for thirty years. I consider that to be one of the achievements of my life.

Then there was the relationship with the artist Penny Slinger who I met when she was at the Chelsea School of Art. She had just graduated. I saw her work before I ever met her and within a month we were living together. I lived and worked with Penny Slinger for two years. We did a couple of books together, we tried to do a film together. I sponsored her work for a year and a half, I might say. I gave her the space, quite consciously. We did a deal, I always say. She was very guilty about it. I said, "You just come here and I can sit and write and you do your sculptures and things." We went to live in the country in order quite specifically to be together and to write and work. We were a muse to each other. She was much more confident than I was. She was utterly confident and secure with what she was doing. I was making films which I was never too sure about. I wasn't confident with my writing,

but Penny certainly gave me the space to develop my writing a little bit more and to reconsider my filming.

After Penny Slinger was Niki de Saint Phalle with whom I made my film *Daddy*. That was a fascinating two years. Extraordinary. When I met Niki she was extremely successful as an internationally-known sculptress.

The guys at Immediate Records rang me up and said, "We have this new singer. We are producing her first record. Could you make a film with her?" So I said, "Yes. Who is she?" "A German actress who is in this film called *La Dolce Vita*." "Sounds interesting. *La Dolce Vita*? I don't remember a German actress." Anyway, she arrived. Apparently her name was Nico and she had been in this film and had played the part of a girl called Nico. In the film she was a sort of blonde fashion model and apparently she was a blonde fashion model. Anyway, she'd decided to become a singer now. Well, we had – what can I say – a fleeting affair. She's not alive any more, is she? But I doubt if she would remember. I don't think I can remember too many details, but she was lovely. There were some jokey things that happened in the Sixties, you know, even to a serious man like me.

And then of course there was Natalie Delon. My relationship with her was certainly one of the most dramatic relationships of my life, let alone the period. I spent a year or so with her and then at the very end when I had met somebody else and decided actually not to encourage the relationship, I got a phone call from France saying "Peter, please come to France. I'm having a big party and there's a private aeroplane leaving on Monday to go to America with me and my friends. I would love you to come with me. Then we'll go to America and have a great time, all paid for." I said, "Well, I am very sorry, Natalie, but you know I can't do it at the moment, I'm working." And she said, "Oh please, it's going to be such fun." I said, "No, sorry, I can't." So she rang back and said she was very bitter about it because if she couldn't go with me she had decided not to go herself. I said, "Fine." Anyway, the person with whom I would have gone to America with Natalie to enjoy myself in Los Angeles was Sharon Tate. And within a week Sharon Tate had been murdered.

Then suddenly something changed quite dramatically. It took me by surprise, and took everybody who knew me utterly by surprise, and that was when I was forty-one or forty-two. I met Dido Goldsmith in December 1979 and married her in January. Dido was an extremely creative and ambitious person when I met her. She was very complicated and absolutely the epitome, you could argue, of my type. But I would say that I had changed. I think I had reached a point where I perhaps was more certain of what it was that I wanted and what I was myself. I was trying to have a relationship with someone that wasn't going to be just tearing each other apart, absorbing everything you could, and moving on.

This is why I get upset. People say, "Oh, the Sixties and all these glamorous females, probably a bit of a playboy, just knocking about." I sometimes wish I could have been, actually. It was absolutely essential to me psychologically that I had a

creative female in my life at any given moment. I think there is a sort of Oedipal inheritance that forces me to want to communicate and write and make movies and God knows what else. It's something to do with accessing the anima, the female side, and I think it was a kind of surrogate thing in seducing these kind of women and exploiting their creativity.

What worries me is that I made a film called *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* and I was running around in the Sixties. Everyone thinks the Sixties! Mary Quant! Mini-skirts! As if I was the epitome of the kind of guy who was always running around. I think that's probably how a lot of people saw me in the Sixties. But I didn't at the time see myself in any way as part of the Sixties. I was slightly older than most of the people flinging themselves around. I was simply not an extrovert. I think that's why I was able to make the films I did in the Sixties. People assume that if you made films about dashing around with the Rolling Stones and Allen Ginsberg that you lived with them and that was your world and that you were out at nightclubs every week. I have only been to a nightclub five or six times in my life. If you really were to speak to any of my real friends in the Sixties, I spent most of my time in my little flat in Soho lying on the floor like a cat in front of the fire yearning to be a writer.

*

I had reached a point where I couldn't do anything without relating it to the possibility or necessity of filming it. I could not walk down the street without seeing somebody and wanting to pick them up and film them. I couldn't walk past a shop window without thinking that it could be filmed and incorporated into something. I couldn't read the newspapers in the morning without wanting to go off and film. I was going crazy. I would be walking down the street and I'd be zooming and panning and editing. I couldn't sleep at night. In the very last sequence of *The Fall* I am sucked totally into the film. The image of myself is on the screen, the tape is going through on the machine, and finally the tape ends and the image which is moving, freezes. That was my experience and my fear. I used to dream that at the point when the film came to an end, I was dead.

*

Some people are so much afraid of becoming an object because to become an object is to be dead. People who are lonely become obsessed with the idea of being dead. And if you fail to accept the fact that it is not the outside world that has alienated you, and that it is only you who have alienated yourself, then of course you often kill yourself.

*

I believed that is was actually the camera that was linking me to authentic, communal kind of experience. In the end I decided it was doing exactly the opposite. It was severing me. It was the technology that stood between me and authentic experience. If you meet someone and all you want to do is film them, or the most precious aspect of your relationship is to film them, you're in a dangerous situation. I had to accept that in the end, by trying to film everything and being sucked into it more and more, I was being sucked more and more into virtual experience. And I have never known such ecstasy as when I was able to say, "I don't want to make any more films."

*

It's just as difficult to look into a camera as it is to look into somebody's eye. The camera, on the other hand, of course reduces you to the state of being an object. You are thus petrified, you are thus afraid. It's as if you are being forced to communicate with nothing and I suppose it's the same as being alone walking across a desert. Some people are happy to do that. Some people would go out of their skulls if they were asked to do that. I think it's the Arabs who said that God was born in the desert. You ask an Arab who has crossed the desert if he was alone, he will say, "No, Allah was with me." So we can communicate with objects, we can communicate with other people, we can communicate with God. I am interested in the problem of either being alone or not being alone.

*

Every breakdown we have should be a breakthrough. It becomes a breakthrough if, by somebody's help, or your own strength, you manage to see what it is and what it should be and what it's for. It is the ability to slough off and eject a mask, a persona, which is totally and absolutely false. It has been acquired, and we have lived through it, perhaps usefully. Where did we get it from? Mummy? Daddy? Brothers? Sisters? School? In *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, near the end, James Joyce writes: "I will not longer give myself to anything to which I do not believe, whether it call itself my family, my church, or my fatherland." I will basically go away. I will choose only silence, exile and cunning.

And suddenly, because this real self is growing, emerging, developing, pushing out, trying to get you out of this cocoon, trying to make the cocoon crack, you come through it and break out, new. It needs tremendous courage. Most people aren't able just to choose to do it. It gangs up on you, it happens to you inadvertently whether you like it or not. You are going forward with all the little bits of things that are undoing you. But in the end, when you can see the process actually as being one of immanent liberation, you get rid of all this falseness, this

inauthenticity, and this fragile being emerges from the broken cocoon and has to suddenly emerge with new wings and a whole new shape and a whole new form. You have to be able to get through, re-invent yourself, re-find yourself, and reassert the things which you've known all along, but never had the courage, or never been allowed to have the courage, to express.

*

The Fall, after my having had a complete nervous breakdown in the middle of it, was finally put together on the editing machine. The good news was that it was going to open at the Edinburgh Film Festival. I was invited to go there, and they asked, "Are you going to come in?" I said, "I can't sit with one of my films." I just couldn't. I have never sat with one of my films. So I thought I'd go for a walk. Anyway, I found this little square, a hundred yards across, nice trees, nice plants, nice bushes, nice little path and a nice little seat. So I went and sat on it to contemplate my future. I was thinking, "I made this film, I haven't changed the world, I'm not going anywhere really. What am I going to do?" And suddenly I heard all these birds twittering. I thought, "God, it's the dawn chorus, I've been here all night. I've fallen asleep or something. Or it's Hitchcock." There was an incredible noise. I suddenly looked around and birds are flying over here, flying to the left, flying to the right, all over the place. What the hell's happening? And I heard this shuffling sound, a very strange, sort of gravelly sound. And then I looked over and saw this little old man, small, bent – he must have been ninety – shuffling along. I kept very still on my seat thinking, "What on earth is happening?" He stopped, he put his hand in his pocket, he brought something out, he said, "Charlie, where are you Charlie?" And then a bird started to fly down towards his hand. He took it away and said, "No, not you. You wait. Charlie!" And then this bird came down, stood on his hand, ate something, and flew away. Then he said, "Ethel!" And Ethel came down. "Bill!" And Bill came down. And he just stood there for half an hour, feeding all these birds by name. I thought, "Good God! How much time and energy and love and dedication has he put into this?"

And I decided that not being able to change the world, I would change myself. And I gave up film.

Part 2

Cambridge was paradise.

It seems to have been created by people of learning and knowledge and curiosity. It's all these beautiful little colleges, all of which are attached, and all of which were created for one thing only: passing on knowledge from the past to the inheritors of it who take it into the future.

It was shortly after seeing Bergman's film *The Seventh Seal* I suddenly felt one day, on the way home, compelled to go into the Fitzwilliam Museum.

It's a temple, a temple of knowledge, a temple of history, a temple of archaeology and art, a temple of mythology. I suddenly felt drawn into it.

Up I went, up the steps. It really was as if I had been called, as if I'd heard a voice, without hearing a voice, as if I knew that I was suddenly no longer in the real world, the rational world of perception and knowledge.

I was in a dream.

I think Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* opened me up to the certainty that the world of dream was so much more significant than the world of perception.

I knew I had to go down the stairs to the right. I went down into my own unconscious, as Jung would say, down into the basement, down the winding stairs of stone.

Down at the bottom of the stairs was a door over which it said "Egyptology Department." I knew that's where I must go. I went inside and turned left, and there was a big limestone sculpture of Pharaoh Akhenaten.

I walked around all these glass boxes wondering why, suddenly, I was in this museum studying artefacts from Ancient Egypt, four thousand years old, five thousand, nine thousand.

And suddenly, in front of me, was a small sculpture, the head of a girl.

I went up to it and read that it was from Tel el-Amarna from the Eighteenth Dynasty. A sculptured head of one of the daughters of Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti. It was probably Meritaten.

I just was transfixed.

I remember noticing the beautiful crystals that it's made of. It's a sort of crystalline limestone.

By the time this experience was over and assimilated a few days later, I'd given up physics. I'd given up the real world, I'd given up matter.

A museum is a temple of the muse. Meritaten was my muse. She said, "Give up on this world, follow me."

Like Oedipus I had confronted the Sphinx and from now on I would have to learn to unravel the riddle, my own myth.

I have been preoccupied with the meaning of that experience – that act of possession – ever since.

*

Rationality and reason is a total myth, manipulated by Christianity.

But there is a need for rationality, too, don't you think?

No, I disagree. There is a need for structure. But we have lived under two thousand years of linear structure, which is supposed to go from A to Z. In other words, you are born, and all you can think of is dying: A to Z. Actually the new paradigm is verticality, parallelism, pluralism. It is perfectly possible to have structure without having linearity. That is the unconscious. The unconscious has always been structured. It has got us through a hundred million years. We have only had two thousand years of rationality and look at the mess it has got us into. We killed two hundred million people in the twentieth century alone, legally. If you want to look at rationality just look at the two World Wars. There were rational arguments for war, in the male world of technology. We are entering a new paradigm, a totally new paradigm, and it is nothing to do with letting go. It is actually allowing the forces which are within us to come forward and manifest that structure which has always been there. As I say, it got us through two hundred million years of evolution. The unconscious has got to be structured. Were we supposed to suddenly – three thousand years ago – become conscious? We were conscious before that of our sacred place in the world of nature, of our continuity with all the forces that were going on for those hundreds of millions of years. Rationality was a regressive step. Monotheism, Christianity and the development of the ego are the worst things that have ever happened to the human race.

*

I want to privilege feeling, if you like. Intuition. Everything that got us through the first two hundred million years. OK, we've had two thousand years – which has been absolutely remarkable there's no doubt about it – but it seems to me to have severed us from something else.

We live in a society totally privileged by the word. The word is God. "In the beginning was the word" is the first line of St John. I resent the privileging of the word because I think that is part of our predicament in the West in a scientifically dominated, technological technosphere. It's all basically to do with the word, which is rationality, which is measurement, which is cutting up, which is science. Fine, it has lots of advantages. I'm using words now to describe my own experience and my ideas. But is it everything? Is it life? Is it really what life is about? I don't believe it is. I believe that life is much more the image. What we perceive, what we dream, and what we imagine.

*

A child initially experiences the world as image. It is all image. There are no words. And after a certain age, for a baby, the thing that it will always select is the image. It will always, in fact, choose the image. What it sees is more real than what it hears. Then slowly, as it develops its own knowledge of itself, it starts to think about itself. Communicating with the outside world is nothing to do with words. It comes more from seeing.

*

We live, here and now, always in the present. What is in the past? Well, I can tell you that the only thing in my past at this moment is images. Images that I can draw upon by thinking about them, imagining them, remembering them. It's an image databank. I can remember words spoken at the time, but it's largely to do with images. Now what about the future? How can I conceive of and imagine the future? Do I think of it as a series of words? No, I see it as a series of dreams, movies. I imagine scenes, settings, people.

*

In the beginning was the image, not the word.

Words are by definition alienating. Thinking is destruction. It's a deliberate breaking up of experience that beforehand was total. It's chopping it all up into words and giving it little bits of form so that it's communicable to other people. Maybe this is wrong. Maybe there is another kind of communication that is absolutely total, that comes from not trying to fragment things up and break them and destroy them into pieces.

*

I can't deny that I have a certain facility, if you like, of using reason. At least I assumed I did, to the degree that I was capable of going to Cambridge and studying physics and crystallography and everything. Everyone said, "OK, you're going to become a scientist." That would have been one path but emotionally and psychologically it was a total and absolute impossibility for me. I think it was Marcuse, one of the great political philosophers of the Sixties, who called the rationalist "One-Dimensional Man." I did not want to be a one-dimensional man. It was not even a question of wanting, I just wasn't. Therefore I had to come to terms with all these other things, so for me it was a question of becoming "the whole man." There was so much more that I felt I needed to deal with in myself and I gave up the pursuit of rationality in any obvious form like science, trying to bring a better balance between the two sides of my personality, which I think is one. I quite enjoy reasoning and thinking but I am much happier painting a picture or taking a photograph or making a film or throwing a pot.

*

You've had a long journey to be able to talk like you do like now. Could you please review your life as a seeker? What head-points you have been touching?

Well, I am glad you used the word "seeker." The word "truth-seeker" is a very interesting word. It's someone looking for the invisible. He is looking for structure beyond the visible material world. I started as a physicist, I became a painter, I became a moviemaker, running around with a camera, which is the all-seeing eye. I then gave it all up in 1970 to pursue my real interest, which was the mythology of Ancient Egypt, and that drew me to the falcon.

Could you please tell the audience about your dealings with falcons because it is a very specific tale.

It seems pretty crazy that I should spend six years making movies and then become obsessed with breeding falcons and trapping falcons but funnily enough it's a similar myth, the all-seeing eye. I was very interested in the mythology of Ancient Egypt, which is all based on a single idea, the copulation of the goddess Isis with Osiris and their giving birth to Horus, the falcon. Now, these are myths and stories as equally powerful and far deeper and more profoundly powerful than rationality or scientific materialism. There is in fact, in that story, the essence of cosmology and the ideas of the development of consciousness. It then led me to the real falcon because I asked myself, "Why did the ancient Egyptians choose the birth of the falcon as the most important concept in their whole mythology?"

I was possessed by a sculpture in the Louvre. When I was eighteen I was walking down the first-floor corridor and standing in front of me was this bronze sculpture of a falcon-headed man.

*

After making films for a few years, I then decided to give up my Egyptology – which was a preoccupation, after all, with the invisible, intangible, unlovable falcon – and decided to go in pursuit of the real falcons. My life has been, from that moment, really, coming to terms with the possession of this man, this companion of Horus. I have lived out, absolutely, the mysteries of Isis and Osiris.

*

We had to get chicks very young and bring them back into captivity. People would say, "You can't do that because they are almost extinct." So what do you do? Leave them there to be poisoned? So they all become extinct? So it had to be somebody like me who said, "This is an utterly stupid attitude. You are going to try to pass laws that will take ten years. You are going to say you can't do this and nobody knows how to do it anyway, by which time there are too few to save them in the

wild." Therefore one or two people had to be crazy enough to say, "Well we have to get them now." This has been proved totally with anything on the verge of extinction. You cannot wait until you are past a certain threshold. You have to act before. You have to say, "If the peregrine has been wiped out, the Saker is going to be wiped out in twenty years, even though they are alright at the moment. Breed them now so that if it ever does reach the point where you do need a captive breed, because that's the last resort, then you have already got birds that have been imprinted."

So I was prepared to break the law. I used to go to North Africa. I developed the technique, with portable incubators and things, of taking the eggs from the nest and keeping them alive in these portable incubators. I had an incubator that would work in the car. I used to go three thousand feet up in the mountains, drive all the way down, walk all through the river beds and go and bring them back to my hotel where I had another portable incubator. I used to put them in these and I used to keep them sometimes for twenty or thirty days. Then I had to bring them back to England, so I had to carry them on my body. I was the portable incubator. I used to take eggs from the nest and incubate them for thirty days, travelling, and bring them back to England, and they would hatch. I once came through British customs with twenty-four Lanner falcon eggs, of which I hatched and fledged twenty-one of them. I sold a lot of them to pay for my trip, to other falconers who were then able to breed their own. And now, in this country, there are five hundred Lanner falcons bred every year.

*

The falcon story – my myth, as I call it – is totally about my father.

It is about that moment in my childhood when my father came back from abroad. I had never seen him. I was about nine or ten. We went to live with him for three months, and then he got ill and died.

I loved him, feared him, hated him, because he had taken away my mother, with whom I had lived solitarily and alone for nine years, and suddenly died.

I was at that age when little boys get out on their bicycles and go off to the mountains. We lived on the edge of the Lake District and I would go off to the sea, the quicksands, the woods and the forests. I collected birds' eggs, stuffed birds. For me, it was a kind of total ecstasy, being alone without a father in this most beautiful place. There were beautiful rivers, there was the sea. It was just paradise.

And then my father came back, dragged us away from the Lake District, down to London, got ill, and died. From then on I was living in bloody London, in a slum, and then in a council flat, a ghastly, ghastly council flat, with my mother.

From then on I was severed from that moment in my life when I had ecstasy and paradise, and then my father, and it was all taken away from me.

The way I got back to it all was the falcon.

There's a poem by Hopkins called "The Wind Hover" which is actually about Christ. Christ is the falcon. The myth of Osiris in Ancient Egypt was the same as the myth of Christ, and that is the ultimate story of the absent father.

For me, the absent father thing was allied with the theft of nature. I lost the Lake District, I lost paradise, I lost the canal in Carnforth, I lost the river down to the sea. And I suppose then the only way of getting back to it was the falcon.

To trap falcons in the wild, to hunt with falcons in the wild, to go to the kind of places they live, to get the eggs and bring them back and hatch them, was to become a falcon, and was to live actually in these amazing territories.

I would go to Alaska and Iceland and Northern Afghanistan. It was a fantastic adventure.

But it was to be totally one with nature.

I was not lonely when I was in Alaska and Afghanistan or in the mountains. Never. I was alone, solitary. I was ecstatically whole because I was in touch with the Gods.

I was lonely in the city. I was lonely making films in the Sixties. I was lonely trying to be a member of society.

When I had arrived at Cambridge to study physics and had been to see *The Seventh Seal,* I was ripe for shamanistic possession.

I went to Paris and saw the sculpture, and I was possessed by that sculpture.

It is shamanism.

The potential shaman in tribal societies is the one who loses his father.

The desert is one of these places where, once you have been there, by God you feel the Gods. And you feel you are connected to them because you are part of the natural world and they are part of the natural world. This is the basis of all mystical experience. And you can read about it in books, and read poems, and read Yeats and Ted Hughes.

No damn good at all, unless you have done it. Unless you have felt it. Unless you need it.

I needed to understand what was happening to me. What was happening to me was a kind of possession which, when you study archetypal psychology and tribal mysticism and goodness knows what, you begin to realise is actually an experience that of many human beings throughout the history have experienced and written about and made art about.

I do believe that all the great artists are to a certain extent shamanistic in the sense that they access voices and experiences and levels of meaning, planes of reality and surreality, which are not available to people without that eye and that sensibility.

I could argue that that eye and that sensibility is a wound.

You have to be wounded.

The shaman is always wounded.

He beats his drums and his music and he goes up the tree of life and he flies off as a falcon.

He gets the truth, and he comes back, and collapses, and is completely

He is cut up into a million pieces.

*

Another image that always obsessed me was the hovering falcon. The falcon is the only bird, the only creature in the world that I knew of at that time, that hovers then kills. As a child I remember being fascinated by it because it was flying so fast but it was going nowhere. So for a moment it was outside of time because it was flying forwards, backwards, but going nowhere. And then suddenly, it enters reality, drops and murders.

*

So here I am. Suddenly, for ten years, pursuing the real falcon. This is me going over a cliff in Morocco after some eggs. To say that I risked my life on a number of occasions in pursuit of this obsession is an understatement. I fell down that cliff. I have fallen down more mountains than Sisyphus. Here we are again, somewhere up near the top. This is just to illustrate the extent to which my obsession possessed me. I can't tell you where this was because I would to jail immediately, but this is a newly trapped falcon in the Arctic, and here is the same falcon in my hotel room, the same night. The beautiful thing about falcons is that they will tame. This very falcon was eating on my fist the next day. I have trapped a falcon in Morocco on Monday and trained it then flown it again seven days later – fully tame and fully trained – back to its own territory. I flew it for ten days and lost it again. That's the great thing about falconry. In the olden days you could just get the falcons, fly with them till you lost them, and go and get another one. Now we have to breed them. I was then invited to Saudi Arabia by Prince Khalid Al Faisal, son of the King of Saudi Arabia. When I first met him this was a bare mountain. Three years later this was my falcon centre. It cost him two million dollars. This was my house, this was the tower where I released the falcons. We were twelve thousand feet above sea level. You can see the valley in front, five and a half thousand feet straight down from my front window.

*

This, then, is the Al Faisal Falcon Centre.

*

We have two methods of breeding falcons here at the Al Faisal Falcon Centre. One is entirely by natural breeding where we have a male and a female who are completely wild and have had no contact with human beings at all. They are simply put in an aviary and left, hopefully, to breed by themselves. The second method we use here, which is using artificial insemination, involves an entirely different approach. It involves imprinting falcons and working with them at a very personal level.

Here is my falcon, Oedipus. I call him Oedipus. Six weeks ago this falcon was an egg, and he hatched this big, so you can imagine how much he has been eating in the last six weeks. In six weeks the bird is fully grown. In seven weeks he can fly. In one week's time we are going to take this bird outside and he will be able to fly. During this whole period of six weeks he has not seen another falcon, he has only seen me. And this bird is now completely imprinted. As you see it would be impossible to have a bird who is a wild falcon, used to killing things, more tame than this. You see he is very playful, very friendly. All this is perfectly deliberate, the intention of which is to make sure that this bird will, later on, when he is fully grown, come into breeding condition in relationship to me.

This process has been known for quite some time with animals. Various different animals have been imprinted in the past for captive breeding. It has been done with certain apes and I think with some of the big cats. Now we have learned how to do the same thing with falcons.

This bird could easily live to be twenty-five years old, so in two years time, or even next year – maybe even when he is one, when he comes into full breeding condition – he will be an important part of our falcon centre. He will become the father, hopefully, of quite a number of various different falcons. It is possible that he in his time might produce two, three or four hundred falcons, just because he is imprinted. A bird that is imprinted on me can be used to fertilise maybe thirty, forty or fifty different falcons during one breeding season, whereas if this falcon was completely wild and was in with a female, they would only produce maybe four eggs, maybe three of which might be fertile. This way we have complete control over the process.

I think he is just about to make his first kill, which is going to be a bumble bee or a mosquito or a fly. I am not quite sure what it is.

This is very important because falcons preen each other in the breeding season. I don't have feathers, unfortunately. If I had feathers I would be able to fly, but I do have hair and he thinks, of course, it is a bit of a feather so he preens it a bit. Come on, aren't you hungry?

*

What you have just seen me doing, in fact, with this falcon, although it's not the breeding season now, is just one of the small things I do to imitate the courtship

behaviour of a female falcon. This particular falcon here, who is now ten years old and is my friend, I hatched as an egg. I fed him by hand for the first two months of his life until he was completely grown up and completely fully-fledged. This means that he never saw another bird during this period. What happens if we do this, either with a male bird or a female, is that eventually – when they come into breeding condition – they do so in relationship to a human being and not in relationship to another bird. This has certain advantages for us. It gives us more control. It enables us to enter into the natural process of breeding and to become selective. In other words the birds that come into breeding condition can be manipulated in a certain way. What we are doing is taking the semen from the males and fertilising the females. What you see now is just a little bit of courtship with a male. I will also do the same with female falcons, of course, having to behave in a slightly different way. This will bring the female falcon into a situation where she will lay eggs. By fertilising her with the semen from this falcon I have absolute control over the situation. I can alter the females, I can alter the males.

*

Here is one of my falcons, a unique falcon. It is a species of falcon that has never existed in the history of the universe until I created it. It is in fact a hybrid of three different species. It is a particular male who is trained to arrive on the back of my head, and he is actually at that moment ejaculating into the hat.

You probably recognise the guy with the bald head on the left, one of my visitors on one occasion. He had just witnessed the falcon ejaculating on my head. I then whipped him into my laboratory and showed him under the microscope all the sperm, swimming around. I came running out with it all in a syringe like this and went upstairs, back to my aviaries, and went "Cluck, cluck, cluck" to my female, and down she went. There she is, asking to be inseminated. He did say it was the most extraordinary thing he had ever seen in his life, but I bet he says that to all the girls.

*

Falcons are so remarkable that given another half and hour, I'd come in and up his little head will go. I'd chop up a freshly-killed quail, grab a little bit of heart, dip it into the liver, poke it in its little mouth. Lovely! Six weeks later it's a fully-fledged falcon, flying and pursuing eagles and ravens.

*

For me, in the end, I had to decide to have what I call "authentic experience" which was to give up filming, totally. After I made *The Fall* I gave it up. But then of course

I had to take one step even further and that was to give up on society. But probably I had already given up on society and because I had given up on society, or didn't consider myself to be a social or political animal, that is why I made films. But when I gave up films I had no link. Having discovered that was the very thing that was severing me, I went off into the wilderness and trapped falcons. When you are hanging on a cliff, two hundred and fifty feet over the Atlantic Ocean in North Morocco, on a rope, and you are not quite sure whether to go up and down or whether the clouds are coming in, or like I used to be sometimes, fifty miles north of the Arctic Circle on one of the rivers in Iceland trying to trap one falcon that had a territory of twenty square miles in temperatures of minus thirty degrees, you don't stop to take photographs.

*

There's a French expression, if you'll excuse me for being too pedantic: *Voir pour voir et pas pour regarder*. "To see in order to see, and not to look at." In the culture we live in images are used to alienate us, not to invite us to participate. The only participation is to go and buy it. So what you have to do is constantly make people alienated with this barrage of images, a lot of which are very sexy, a lot of them very clever. Some of the advertising is brilliantly clever. They are alienating us in every possible way from our own feelings. They are just persuading us, they are trapping us into a situation where we simply feel anxious if we do not respond to this barrage of seductive images and go out and spend. Spend, spend, spend and buy these things, all of which merely increases the alienation. You go and spend forty quid on a new blouse, you go out to a nightclub and three girls have got the same blouse. You feel like throwing yourself in the river, so my daughters tell me. I don't go out and buy Armani suits. But the whole principle of the modern society in which we are saturated by images is that the images are aggressive, violating. They are violating us and deliberately making us feel alienated from everything, including ourselves, our own feelings and our own natural selves. *The Fall* is the ultimate expression of this kind of engulfment in images. I went for twenty-five years into the desert, where for me there was no alienation.

*

Tonight, this building will be liberated by the police force of New York City.

*

In the end of *The Fall* I participated with a commune of other human beings in an act of violence against a world that was crushing me with images, and I had a certain satisfaction. But when I stepped out of it and came out of it and got back to England

and finished my film I thought "It's fake. So what? Do I want to go on banging my head against the wall, trying to change people?" I discovered I changed nobody by making *The Fall*. I was just adding to the plethora of images. I had to change myself. So I went to the desert to change myself and I changed myself absolutely. When I was in the desert I went back four thousand years.

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I flew out of Saudi Arabia in 1991 or 1992, just after the Gulf War, in a Boeing 747 jet, with one hundred and fifty falcons. Prince Khalid, when the Gulf War came, said, "I cannot function in the Falcon Centre any longer, it's all yours." So I flew out all the way to bloody Morocco, Casablanca, with all these birds, having bribed – or at least Prince Khalid had bribed – the customs in Casablanca for me to get in. There was a guy there with a lorry. We drove all the way to Spain. How on earth I wasn't shot I do not know. They were shooting the French in the middle of Marrakech. Here I was with half a million dollars worth of falcons, having gone through an extraordinarily perverse situation with customs, arriving in Spain where somebody had promised to build me a falcon centre where I could put all my falcons. When I got there it wasn't built. I had a hundred and fifty falcons I couldn't house or barely feed, so I was in one hell of a mess. I fought for it for four months during which time the Spanish Mafia moved in, deciding that there must have been a lot of money there. The falcons themselves were worth a fortune and the Mafia thought I must be connected to very wealthy Saudi princes. Nobody realised that I was now on my own. I was a penniless guy who wanted to make a breeding falcon centre. And one day I just woke up and realised that if I didn't concede to these guys, they would shoot me. And they would. It was very, very nasty indeed.

It suddenly occurred to me that I had been through a cycle. In the beginning the falcon, for me, was unreal. It was a statue in the Louvre. You could argue that it was to do with virtuality. For me the falcon was symbolic of certain aspects of myself. Then I spent twenty years when it was utterly real. I can remember the moment when it first dawned on me in 1969, when I had had my experience in Edinburgh, when I suddenly thought, "I have got to get a real falcon." I found one advertised in a newspaper, £7 in Dalston Lane. I went down and there were half a dozen falcons in a cellar on a perch. They were the most incredibly beautiful perfect things I had ever seen in my life.

I had already started writing in Saudi Arabia, and it suddenly dawned on me that it was all a sign that it was no longer possible for me to function with the falcons as something real. So I just drove to the airport in a rented car, got on an aeroplane, came back to England, and I left everything in Spain. It certainly took me a little while to get over it, but the wanderer – "*le pèlerin*," "*die Wandervolke*" – moves on.

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Looking back on everything, it does seem to be quite odd that I went the way of making films at all. I've often asked myself why? I gave it up. I went off and did lots of other things and now I'm writing books. I got very disillusioned with making films. So the real question I have often asked myself is why was I so compelled to do so? It was a very intense period of my life and I did work very hard at it.

Looking back on it all I would say there were two very significant things that made me become a filmmaker, quite different experiences. One was a film I saw when I was twelve or thirteen. My father had died, I was living with my mother in a council flat in Wandsworth, and went along to see a film at the local Granada, one evening, alone. It was a film called *Carrie*, based on a novel by Theodore Dreiser, starring Jennifer Jones and Laurence Olivier. It's about a young girl from the country who comes up to the city, wants to be an actress, meets this distinguished gentleman, and basically destroys him and becomes a successful actress. It totally and absolutely demolished me. I wept thinking about that film, for months and months. It did something very, very disturbing to me. It was a sort of premonition or just tapped into something. I saw lots of other films, I went once a week, but this one film was so powerful that it decimated me. It demolished me. It dismembered me. It took me a long time to figure it out.

A number of years later, I saw another film which could not be more different but which also demolished me in a very different kind of way. It was when I was at Cambridge, studying science. I used to go to the Cambridge Film Society. One evening it was documentary films. One of the documentary films was a half-hour film shot inside the Warsaw Ghetto by the Nazi soldiers. The Nazi regime had its own cameramen because they were documenting everything they did. They built up a wall around the Ghetto in Warsaw, put in several thousand Jews, and starved them to death. To celebrate the event they filmed it. And we sat there, in Cambridge, in the little Arts Theatre, a bunch of students, watching this film, shot by one or two Nazi soldiers, of the people dying, being murdered by the regime, inside the Warsaw Ghetto. There was one image in particular, of this young girl, in rags, just walking around. She had a little stick and was digging in the mud, looking for food.

Well, I came out of that film a changed man. And what I could not bring myself to understand was how anybody could film it. To do it was bad enough. To want to do it, to need to do it, to think that it was doable and that it was right and that it had to be done. But then to celebrate it, to film it, to make sure it was in focus, put it on a tripod, to say, "Oh, there's a good image." And then to finish it and put it in their archive and then years later it is shown and we are supposed to go along and just look at it and say, "That's an interesting film." What are we supposed to feel? Think about? So I could not understand how that cameraman could be there and actually film it, film somebody basically being murdered. It's a snuff movie.

I think that the Nazi film was so devastating for me psychologically that I was always doomed to make documentary films. Why was that guy in that Ghetto filming it? Why was he not capable of not filming it? He does not participate. He says, "I have a camera, I am a Nazi, I have no name, I am getting documentary truth of the murder of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto." It determined my problem with film forever, because I was always striving to use film to enable me to participate in what was going on. In *The Fall* I finally did it to a degree. I put myself finally into the film to say that I don't believe in objectivity. In other words what I am saying is: if you believe in objectivity of that kind you will end up in the Ghetto, murdering people.

I saw Hell in the Warsaw Ghetto, filmed. The act of filming was the ultimate evil and therefore it made me always conscious of my responsibility behind the camera. In the end I could not accept the responsibility and I gave it up.

*

I know enough about myself to know that most people would not suspect, I would have thought, certainly in the earlier days, because I kept it fairly hidden, or wasn't preoccupied with it.

My father was a plumber and I was born in Liverpool. We lived in a very working-class area. My father was a pacifist and refused to fight in the war but agreed to work in the war effort. In 1940 he was whisked off to Iran – the Iranian Oil Company – where he spent the entire war working with the oil to run the tanks and the aeroplanes. We had no money, we had no house, we had nothing. I was in the very dangerous part of Liverpool. Liverpool was bombed constantly because of the docks and everything. We ended up being homeless and my mother and I – I think in 1940 or '41 – started a very strange life, which we led through the whole of the war. We were pretty well homeless and we went from one situation to another where we rented a room somewhere. She was looking for work. We first of all went to Southport and then we went to Carnforth, which is near Morecambe Bay. All during this time, I suppose, I was starting to grow up and become a little schoolboy.

I was very clever right from the very beginning so I was very lucky, in that sense. Or not, I don't know. But my mother and I lived in a single room, basically wandering, rootless. My mother and I ended up living in a newsagent's shop. We had a room above the shop. I visited it recently, it's still there. My mother used to work in the shop. We had a room upstairs, a bedroom where we used to sleep. And all through this period I slept with my mother. I can remember one day being told the war was over, something like that, but nothing much more than that. And one day I came downstairs and there was a guy standing there. It turned out to be my father. I didn't know I even had a father. I assumed I didn't. When you are that young you don't think about these things if they are not there. The occasional photograph would come through of my father standing in front of a sphinx or

something in the desert. And suddenly I had a father again. And that would have been in 1945, so I would have been eight. And he came back. And I remember asking my mother "What happens to me?" And she said, "Oh, we found a bedroom for you in the attic."

Anyway he came and stayed a few months, and then left again because apparently he decided to go to London to set up a business there as a plumber. There was no work in Carnforth. And my mother and I were left there. Suddenly he disappeared. And I stayed on there at school until I was about nine. A year later I was taken to London by my mother, a scruffy little flat in Wandsworth, and my father, whom I had suddenly got to know – and presumably forgiven for coming back and stealing my mother – disappeared again. I was told that he had gone to hospital and had an operation, and he hadn't come out. Anyway, he died.

I did my 11-plus exam. At the time there was a good old guy called Clement Atlee who had just taken over the government in 1947. Unexpectedly he had just won the election from Winston Churchill and decided he was going to finance the working-class children of the country, the top one-percent. The ones who were the top of the 11-plus were going to be offered scholarships to go to a public school, all of which of course were full of upper-class English people and the privileged, the elite, who had the best education. Everybody else had nothing else but grammar schools. So it was Clement Atlee's idea that it was a bit unfair that if you were very, very clever and you didn't have any money that you should be allowed to go to one of the best schools in the country.

I was sent to Ashville College, Harrogate, which was a Methodist school for church ministers' sons. Can you imagine it? They were all being paid for by their mums and dads and were all very rich and very posh. And they all wore grey suits and pinstripe shirts and everything. And I arrived in the wrong shirts and the wrong suits and the blue suits and the wrong trousers and the wrong shoes. I was the guinea-pig boy. I was the one boy in 472, all of whom were paid for by their rich mummies and daddies who came in their cars at weekend and took them away to Yorkshire. I stuck in at the school, the little working-class guy from the slums of London. Clearly I was probably looked down upon a little bit when I got there. I was a curiosity. I was the social experiment. And I was top. I suppose this was difficult for them to handle but it was probably more difficult for me to handle, actually. But I was top from the day I got there till the day I left, in everything. I was number one. I became captain of the school rugby team. I became the school organist. I won the drama prize. It was very weird. I took over the whole fucking school.

As a working-class lad my father died on me, and that's a little bit too bad. It's an awkward age according to Freud's theories, but the government coughed up and sent me to a very privileged public school where I got the best education in the country. Where, thanks to a natural gift for memory, I was able to surpass everybody else and get a scholarship to Cambridge.

The problem is, you see, I was educated to be posh, never actually being able to come to terms with the fact that I can never feel at home anywhere.

*

Imagine that you have just been born and that there is no thinking. Imagine that every single experience in the world is beautiful, that everybody is beautiful, that everything is beautiful, that beauty is really in the eye of the beholder, but beauty is the way you look at everything. And you are in such a marvellous state that every single thing you look at is beautiful, even violent people, even people who we would otherwise have said are violent, aggressive. Say to yourself that every single person who is violent or acts violently in this world is doing so because of fear, because of fear of losing themselves, of falling inside themselves into nothing, whereas there is something there and they need not be afraid. And anyone who does not have that fear is free.

*

I'd been up all night and I hatched my first falcon at six in the morning. I tried to sleep and couldn't, and I had a very, very strange experience. I was living in Soho in a flat right up in the roof. I knew there was something for me. You know that strange uncanny feeling you have? I didn't normally go down to the bottom floor to get my mail until early afternoon but I knew there was something for me. I went down and there was a letter. I came up and opened it. In it was a poem, sent to me by Ted Hughes with a little letter saying "Wondering where you are" which he sent, typewritten, dedicated to me. And it was called "The Risen." It has a subtitle, in brackets: "A Ghostly Falcon."

He stands, filling the doorway
In the shell of earth.

He lifts wings, he leaves the remains of something,
A mess of offal, muddled as an afterbirth.

His each wingbeat – a convict's release.
What he carried will be plenty.

He slips behind the world's brow
As music escapes its skull, its clock and its skyline.

Under his sudden shadow, flames cry out among thickets.
When he soars, his shape

Is a cross, eaten by light,
On the Creator's face.

He shifts world weirdly as sunspots
Emerge as earthquakes.

A burning unconsumed,
A whirling tree –

Where he alights
A skin sloughs from a leafless apocalypse.

On his lens
Each atom engraves with a diamond.

In the wind-fondled crucible of his splendour
The dirt becomes God.

But when will he land
On a man's wrist.

*

Well, this rather scruffy place, I must admit, is my archive. This is where I keep my past. This is me. This room I suppose you could argue is The Image. Here are all my old films, as you can see in a bit of a mess, but I tend to know where everything is. It's useful having a place like this to keep it all. We're just sorting it all out at the moment to send to the National Film Archive so it probably won't be here for too long. This is The Image.

The other half of my empire here I suppose you could call The Word because this is where I keep all my pain. This is where I keep my anguish and my frustration. All my unfinished novels and all my early writings. These are my notebooks. Like all frustrated writers I keep notebooks which are really diaries, but you don't call them diaries. You call them notebooks because you think they are very useful. A lot of them actually are, although you never refer to them. I don't know why one does it, but you can't not do it. For example here, look at this. These go right back, the very first notebooks I ever wrote. This was the very first notebook I kept when I was in the army. You never stop. I have never stopped writing. I have written almost every single day of my life, even when I was trapping falcons. A lot of these notebooks refer to my years in the desert. Peterhouse, Cambridge. I don't know what this newspaper is. Ah! I don't believe it. "The Problem of Emptiness." *The*

Seventh Seal. It was seeing that film, in Cambridge, in my first term, that started to unravel me. I went from that into the Fitzwilliam Museum. In fact somewhere here, in all of this, there might be the account of going into the Fitzwilliam Museum, but I would hate to have to look for it.

Later on I always used these French notebooks. Look, they are absolutely full, every single one. This about Kawabata and *The Risen*. So you can imagine how many words there are in here. So this one – look, you always go through lots of titles – started off as "Professor K." It was about psychoanalysis. That was part of the zeitgeist of the Sixties, Ronald Laing and all these kinds of things. This is "Der Fallenheit," after Heidegger: "Because it is less fearful to be the one than to be a self, the modern world has wonderfully multiplied all the devices of self-evasion." Heidegger, "Der Fallenheit." It means "a state of being fallen" or "in the action of being fallen," always in the state of "fallen-ness," which is why I called my film, finally, *The Fall*. It was as much about Heidegger and his sense of despair and multiplicity of the self because *The Fall* is a study of the self as much as anything else, which is why I put myself in it, for God's sake.

What is worrying about this – and I haven't looked at this book for probably thirty years – is that I look at it and I find it is exactly the same things that I'm dealing with in my new novel *Nohzone*. That is really quite scary because I could guarantee every single one of these notebooks – and how many are there? Three hundred? – you will find in every single one I am dealing with exactly the same things.

This is a very good example. These are manuscripts. *Crosswords* is a novel I wrote in Saudi Arabia when I was there during the Gulf War. This is the most disturbing novel I ever wrote. I might finish it one day, but I don't know whether I will dare to finish it. Look at it. Two hundred and sixty pages.

Orpheus Inc. is a novel I started to write and I then wrote it as a screenplay in 1974. There might be a letter here. Anyway, Sam Spiegel was shown the script and agreed to finance it. I was going to have Mick Jagger and Marianne Faithful in it. But I went off to America instead and made *The Fall*. It was a version of the Orpheus legend. I had seen two films that I thought were superb. One was *Orphée* by Jean Cocteau, the other was *Black Orpheus*. Orpheus is now a big company called Orpheus Inc. and is stealing all the voices and souls of the people.

Earlier writing, 1963. Look, just a few notes, here and there, a few bits written. "Mary's Monologue." Look at this page. Look at all the corrections. You see why I never finished the novels? I only was able to finish novels when I discovered the computer and I could make my corrections. I write very quickly. It's out, bang, I do the whole novel. I wrote *Nora and...* in twenty-one days, a 280-page novel. But then I have to correct it and if I use a typewriter I can never do it. But a computer! It saved my life.

This one says *The Fall* dossier. Obviously *The Fall* is a film I made but I at one point or another decided I would make a novel out of it or a book or something, and I

went so far as to actually transpose all my notebooks. I got somebody to type them. Actually it was my ex-wife, Diane. So I now have the complete dossier. When I was making the film I recorded everything about being in New York, being with Bobby Kennedy. "35,000 feet above the Atlantic." So here it all is. I called it my dossier. I would like to edit it one day. This is the complete account. May 1st, so this would have been just after Columbia and a week before the occupation of the Sorbonne in Paris. "I am no longer a free man. The events of this last week have by now been told to the world, even if their importance is underestimated. I am no longer free because I have experienced, for the first time in my life, the life of a revolutionary. I have also lived through a revolution which was suppressed by force."

I would say that this conflict between image and word has been the entire story of my life and my work. When I went to Cambridge I was doing science – something slightly different – but then, after the breakthrough, I started painting. It was the image. After seeing *The Seventh Seal* and Meritaten in the museum I started to paint. The first year I spent painting and acting in the theatre, funnily enough. The second year I took up writing and I wrote for the student newspaper. I was carrying on painting and was doing crystallography and philosophy of science by now. And then the third year I did the painting very seriously. But during that time – I don't know why – I sent off some articles to *The Guardian*, which got published. And I got a letter – I still have it somewhere, very proud of it, really – from *The Guardian*, saying that we now realise that you are leaving Cambridge and would like to invite you to join the newspaper. There can't be many people who have been invited to join the newspaper. And I turned them down. I have always wondered why. It was because I didn't feel confident in using words, because of one thing I knew. I could never be a journalist because I am not interested in writing a sentence or two sentences or a paragraph and saying, "This is true. I am in Beirut, I have just seen this. I am in Iraq. I am in Columbia University and I have just seen this and this and that and the other. And it's true." If it is not true, they won't publish it. You are not a journalist. And I just knew there wasn't such a thing as truth.

One of the reasons why I got fascinated by Ancient Egypt – thanks to Meritaten in the Fitzwilliam Museum – was that she was the daughter of Pharaoh Akhenaten, and Pharaoh Akhenaten was the first person who attempted to impose rationality and monotheism on the state of ancient Egypt. He was finally overthrown because they were polytheists. They were not prepared to be monotheists. They felt themselves to be part of the natural world. The very first person ever to try and separate off from that kind of intimacy and participation with the natural world was Pharaoh Akhenaten of the Eighteenth Dynasty. What I have always been interested in since then – which is totally an essential part of the Ancient Egyptian world picture – is their use of language, which doesn't use words as we know it. They use hieroglyphics, which if you like are words that are totally translucent and transparent. They are, in fact, images. So the hieroglyphic has always fascinated me, because although it seems to be a concept, it is an eye, it is an open door.

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It is interesting that the image of God in hieroglyphics is the falcon on a golden perch. Horus, or Heru the falcon, is the symbol of God because he symbolises the opening of the third eye. He symbolises a kind of vision that we do not have since we developed Aristotelian, Judaic/Christian society and philosophy that has dominated our Western world for the last two thousand years.

*

People used to say, "Why did you give up filmmaking and go into falconry?" And I would say, "It's the same thing, it's a continuity. It's the same thing on a different level. It's about an obsessive way of seeing." Then people come along and say, "You have written eight novels so you have ended up with The Word." I don't believe that at all. I may put words on pages, but writing – and writing a novel in particular – is nothing to do with words. When I write it I'm in a trance. I don't see the words on the screen. I go through them. They are translucent. When a person reads a page of my fiction what do they see? Do they see a page with black words on it? No, they go right through it. They see images in their mind. My last three novels have ceased to be words on a page. My latest novels take over from the last image of *The Fall*. *The Fall* was a series of dots on a screen and my face suddenly stopping being alive, becoming totally virtual. I reached a point of this kind of total abstraction, these little digital dots. My new three novels are on the Internet now. They are not on a page or piece of paper. They are not black words at all, actually. You have to go and explore the whole structure of the novels as an image. My entire three novels, almost a thousand pages, are contained within one single image, which I call the Nohzone Tree. It is a tree, with branches and a head. It is an absolute continuity of *The Fall*. It is, I hope, bringing together this idea that words, finally, are totally transparent and translucent.

*

A lot of these are tests, like you always do. You put a few tests in and some of them have worked, some of them haven't. But the ones that I was aiming at doing, which I would call a finished pot, have come out extremely well, very luckily, because the glazes have worked very nicely. There are two glazes, one on top of the other.

This one, for example, I'd say is one of the best pots I have ever made. This is a sort of Chinese/Japanese glaze. There you can see the cracks on it. This is a beautiful Jun blue, as it is called. This is another Japanese trick. You can see the stone of the clay in-between. It is very nice, very subtle on the top. Very happy with that.

It's the first time I have ever put a band around it, like that, which was quite deliberate. This kind of dancing figure. It's black and white, this subtle kind of reflection behind of a second pattern. That is a perfect example of what I was just saying. There's your white pattern, which is like a little sort of reflection and here's your main design. Then you look at it and you see these little white shadows behind, these little reflections. That's lovely, that. Here we are, this is like a plant, isn't it, and these are the sort of things coming out and these are flowers. But that's your classic oriental pot.

This one has come out extremely well. I was happy with that. This one had colouring underneath the glaze, which the others didn't. Very happy with that because you have got two different colours, one behind the white and one behind the black. Nice little octagonal pot.

This one was an experiment. It's a very nice effect that hasn't completely worked but I can see the direction to go in. That was a test. That I wanted to be more white, and this more brown, but there's a lot of potential there. You see, the brown should have been that colour. It isn't quite.

This is amazing. I've forgotten what I did with this. Very happy with that colouring, look at it. It's like oil underneath, isn't it? But I mean the blue, shining through this grey. Very happy with that.

This one here was very much a test and I had no idea how it was going to come out. This is the second best one. That's really like a big fruit, isn't it? It's like a ripe kind of fruit, but it's also like volcanic stone, which is what it is, by the way. The glaze is volcanic stone and the clay is clay from a riverbed. You are taking natural materials from the earth – clay and sand, and stone, granite – grinding the granite up, melting it all down and reconstituting it. This is a mountain. I have taken the mountain and brought it down here. This is stone. It's called stoneware. That is pure stone. If you chipped it open and sliced it and looked through a microscope you would see it exactly the same as if you had sliced open a piece of granite or feldspar or magnetite.

I did make three pots like this a while ago and I have never been able to reproduce it, and this time I thought I'll have another go. And it's come out. Sometimes just five degrees – two degrees difference – and it doesn't work. This time it worked so I have got to look and see exactly what the temperature is.

Now this pot, this is very interesting. It is a complete failure, as you can see, because most of the glaze has dropped off. But the bits that haven't dropped off are perfect. It's the perfect colour. I have got to decide why it dropped off. It's probably because I used ash glaze underneath and I should have used something else. But this particular colour, which I like – it's called Kaki, from Japan – has worked.

It happened when I had my heart attack and I was in hospital and I had had a bypass operation, which basically failed. The doctors told me – told my son, actually – "Just tell him to stop talking and stop writing and he'll be alright." I had just written a novel called *Girl on the Train*. It was about Japan and I used quite a lot of

references to Japanese pottery. There was a potter called Hamada who I liked a lot. I remember lying in bed in the hospital and I only had one book with me and I thought "Why have I only brought one book with me?" It was a book of pottery by Hamada. No ideas, no words. I could just think about it and look at it, and I just thought, "I'm going to take up pottery." I always wanted to do sculpture, which I never quite got round to. Pottery has a number of extremely important things to me. We say 'In the beginning was the image.' Well, that's not true. In the beginning was the clay. You go to primitive societies and they tell you that God took the clay and made man. But he made woman, really. All these pots are female. They are totally feminine. In Africa they will not allow men to have anything to do with making of a pot. It's only the women who are allowed to make pottery. This strikes me as being rather significant. These pots are feminine, aren't they? They are all vessels. It's the women who go for the water, it's the women in Africa who get the clay to make the pots.

It's the beach and the sea and the mountains in the background. That's a beauty, too. I'm very happy with all that.

Well, when you spend all your time thinking all through the night, writing all these bloody novels with all these hypertext links and God knows what else it's so absolutely necessary for me to come during the day and be real. This is the image. In the beginning was the clay, in the beginning was the image. Afterwards is the words. So I spend all day dealing with the clay and the image and then I have a nap, and then I go to my fucking computer and I start typing words. Although I quite enjoy it. It's a different thing altogether, that's for sure. It's a perfect balance. In between I see my daughters and whoever I want to see, and then late into the night I burn the candle. At both ends, sometimes.

*

I have never been on holiday. I have never wasted a single day of my life. I would consider it a waste if I'm not pursuing my myth in some form or another. I did not go off to Wales and eat mushrooms or become a solicitor like everybody else at the end of the Sixties. I went off to the desert. For ten years I ran the largest private falcon-breeding centre in the world, at the top of the highest mountain in the Middle East. In the end it bore fruit, but it was always the same pursuit. I'm ill now with my heart problems but if I wasn't I would be living in the Hebrides. I don't know whether I would have the strength, at my age, to go back to the desert. It's quite a tough life, you know. It's tough.

*

I can tell you why I really go in to the desert, because it is the closest thing I could ever create to the life I had in Carnforth before it was stolen from me by my father. I

was alone. For me it was a desert. I didn't have any contact with anybody. I was a very, very strange child. I know... I know... "In No Strange Land."

But I'm not complaining. I don't want you to think for a second I am complaining. I have had the most ridiculous life, actually, and I'm still here, ten years after my heart attack. And enjoying every minute of it.

*

Didn't we drive in a car one night, up the M1 or something? We did, didn't we? That's the time when I told you all these fucking stories and you've remembered them ever since. Isn't that weird? And why should I remember that now, too? That's even more weird. We were going to Pytchley, I can't remember why. Definitely up the M1. And I remember thinking afterwards I've told you too much. I told you too much. But you reach a point, I suppose, where you think, "What the fuck. You might as well tell it. You can't take it with you." Why does it matter whether I tell it or not?

I am celebrating my life. I hope I am giving that impression.

I have loved what I have loved, and enjoyed every minute of it.