Once out of nature...

> Il n'y a pas un talent de vivre et un autre de créer.
> Le même suffit aux deux. Et l'on peut être sûr que
> le talent qui n'a pu produire qu'une oeuvre artificielle
> ne pouvait soutenir qu'une vie frivole.
>
> Albert Camus

1.

"Can I see the image please, when you've set it?"

"Yeah."

"Yeah, that's OK isn't it? If you pull back you get some of my pots, don't you?"

"Yeah."

"Can I see? Yeah. Yeah. It's good. My kind of space."

"I'm going to get some pick-ups of the rest of the room. Bits and pieces of the shelves."

"Why?"

"Why? It's interesting."

"I don't know if this little light is doing anything actually. It is?"

"Yeah."

"OK, good."

"There's definitely some shadow on your face because of it."

"OK, good. That's the one then. It is coming across."

"Definitely."

"I just thought if it isn't doing anything I could switch it off. But it if is…"

"Why? Do you want to turn it off?"

"No, I'd sooner be lit right. As I say, I've noticed how people photograph and film old people. It's an art."

"You think you're old?"

"Well, I'm hardly quite as young as I was. You do begin to notice it. What did I read yesterday? Oh yeah, 'Growing old is a full-time job. It takes twenty-four hours a day.' I think it was Bergman who said that. Or Antonioni. But I'm pretty sure it was Bergman. Sounds like Bergman."

"Yeah there was something about Bergman. He said, 'I wish someone had told me how difficult it was going to be to get old.'"

"Maybe that was the quote and I got it wrong."

"Something like that."

"Not easy at all. I can vouch for his words, though I'm grateful to have got to the point where I'm still alive. If I have to be old to accomplish it, so it has to be."

"Amos says the same thing. I talk to Amos Vogel, he brings it home how difficult it is to be old, how miserable it can be to be old."

"Well, I would not be miserable at the moment – at all – if it wasn't for the fact that I'm ill. I've been rather cruelly ill. What's happened lately is unfair in a way. You know? I was suffering from serious heart disease anyway and have been for eleven years now."

"When was your heart attack?"

"1996. Eleven years ago. On 3rd August. It is today 1st August. Now, with the actual cycle of the stars being such as it is, it might well be that the ideal day to die is either today or tomorrow or the 3rd again. Sometime over this small period is the helical rising of Isis, the star Sirius, on the Giza Plateau, which is the most important day of the year to the ancient Egyptians. It just struck me as very strange with both Bergman and Antonioni."

"I can move that if you want."

"No, I like it. Why?"

"It's making a noise."

"Can you hear it?"

"Yeah."

"What, have you got earphones on?"

"No, but it'll be picked up."

"Well, you can move it then."

"Shall I move it?"

"How do you know if you can hear it? You haven't got headphones on."

"Because I know these microphones. I've been shooting all year on these microphones."

"You haven't, this is one of mine."

"It's the same thing. It's got a bigger head though."

"What, mine has a bigger head? Yours are more swanky because they're small?"

"I think it just means they're newer, that's all. That's all it is. They get smaller, everything just gets smaller. But you were talking about… 3rd August."

"Yeah, so it'll be eleven years, in two days' time, since my heart attack. And in fact, considering the nature of the heart attack and the state of my heart of the time, and the fact that I had an immediate emergency quadruple bypass operation, and that the bypass half-collapsed five years ago, I've actually done very well. As I say, the boring thing is to have got ill again in a different way. It's hard enough being old. It's worse being ill, so I suppose if you're ill twice over it's…"

"What do you have now?"

"It's an autoimmune disease which people only get if they have a specific faulty gene, which I have. I got the disease first of all in 1968 and it knocked out my joints and my legs and my knees in particular, which have been damaged ever since. And I have been partially crippled since 1968, thanks to this disease. And it's come back, which it's not supposed to do, with a vengeance. You get a bug, and if you have this faulty gene the immune system goes into overdrive in order to get rid of it, but it keeps going, it doesn't stop. It goes on and on and on. That's why it's called an autoimmune disease. It's called reactive arthritis. It's an instant rheumatoid arthritis. It just attacks all the joints: the knees, the ankles, the backbone, the hips, the fingers. Does all kinds of strange things. Most of all it's the pain. You just can't get rid of it. I haven't been able to walk. Can't drive more than five miles. Can't sleep. When I sit down I can't get up. It's all happened just like that, bang! Overnight. The immune system kicks in and does all the damage, then fades away, kills the bug and then comes back and comes back and comes back. And it lasts for three to twelve months. Or forever."

"How long did it last back in '68?"

"Probably six months. But I was young then, you know? I suppose I fought it quite well. Now I am no longer young and I'm suffering serious heart disease, which means that all my systems are not particularly doing very well. I don't have good blood pressure, I don't have good blood, I don't have this and that and I'm on all these drugs. By the way, that's why I had my heart attack, I've discovered. Now that I'm studying this disease… "

"Which is called?"

"Reiter's Syndrome. German doctor called Reiter – R-E-I-T-E-R – was the first to recognise what it was and how it was functioning. But there are now sixty or seventy autoimmune diseases which are coming in more and more as the immune system of the human race, and the immune systems of the earth, fall apart. We will get more and more of these kinds of diseases. There's Crohn's disease. There's so many bloody diseases. But this one is particularly pernicious, that's for sure, and as I say it can go on forever. But I did read only a few days ago that one of the things it definitely causes, in the long term, is heart disease. I never understood why I had my heart disease. I was perfectly fit. I ate good food. I'm not overweight. I never smoked. I don't drink."

"You never did drugs, really."

"I experimented a few times. I would have considered it immoral to have not done so in the Sixties. How can you write about the Sixties or film about the Sixties… Anyway, you know, one goes through that phase. But then I got this heart attack which was, I thought, very unfair. But clearly it was caused by this autoimmune disease because it attacks the muscles and the bones and nerves. And the heart is a muscle. A huge muscle. And this autoimmune disease, now, attacked the bones and muscles."

"And you had bad bones already."

"That was caused by the original attack in 1968."

"Because you would always talk about how one of the reasons you had bad legs was because of all the mountaineering you did in the Seventies."

"Because of the what?"

"The mountaineering you did in the Seventies."

"No. I used to joke about that. I used to say I had fallen off more mountains than Sisyphus. That didn't help it of course. No, that was ridiculous. I mean in '68, OK, it took me a while but then I suppose I got over it, over the worst of it. What happens is, if the thing goes away, you're just left with the damage in the joints and then you have to learn to deal with that. And it flares up all the time. Yeah, to do all this mountaineering and crossing of the 'Red Desert' was hardly conducive to long-term healing of my joints. But they probably never would have healed anyway."

"Peter, tell me about how this thing affected you in the Sixties. Was this the story of when you were working on *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* and ending up in hospital, or is this a different story?"

"Yeah. You know, you just collapse. Everything just blows up. You just pass out. I was in the queue going into the cinema. I can't remember what film it was. I didn't see it, so that's probably why I can't remember it. I can remember the ambulance. Yeah, I was in this queue. I'd been feeling pretty groggy for a few days. It's instant, you just…" [*makes exploding noise*]

"And you were in hospital for about how long back then?"

"About a week."

"I mean, you were otherwise fit and healthy and then suddenly bad, right?"

"Yeah. If you have this gene – HP something or other, 262N – you have this faulty reaction. Your immune system is triggered in a certain kind of way that it then goes on and it attacks anything that resembles that particular gene. In some way there are two or three little genetic codes that go on being triggered and it just goes on and on and on. And I ended up in hospital, the Middlesex."

"Is there some kind of parallel going on here between the fact that you were in the midst of your filmmaking back in London in '66, '67, '68 when this thing hit you, and you've been trying to make your film in Vienna, and suddenly it hit you now?"

"It's got to be mere coincidence. I don't think there's any way… I mean, a hundred percent I'm sure that I got blood poisoning because I had gastroenteritis at the time which is just, you know, my whole system was poisoned by a superbug or some bug. I mean, in Vienna I was going out every night filming, filming till three in the morning, coming back, grabbing a kebab on the Ringstrasse. What a fool. I don't usually even eat meat. As I say, I had this gastroenteritis and I thought, 'Oh well, I've just eaten something,' you know? And then, bang! The pain. It took me a little while to figure it out, actually. I thought, 'What the hell is this now?' And then it suddenly dawned on me: it was exactly the same. I'd had it before. Which it was. And I came back to England. Fortunately I managed to get back, which wasn't that

easy. I was in such pain, actually, that I was tempted to go to hospital in Austria and I thought, 'No way. Got to get back to England. Just got to get back to England.' Dosed myself up with Dihydrocodeine and Tramadol, which hardly touched it. I couldn't put my feet on the ground. I was crawling across the floor. I couldn't lift the weight of my body up on my arms because of the weight of my body on my joints, on my legs. Now at night when I try to sleep, I just can't put… The worst thing is that I can't put my right leg anywhere. It's just a question of moving and trying to do it so there's no weight on it. But the weight of the leg itself is the pain. Yeah, it's a bore. Anyway, it's not fatal unless it affects my heart, so I'm going to learn to live with it."

"But no more traveling."

"Can't see me traveling. My wandering days are over."

"But this is what interests me, because they were over, this time last year, in a sense. And…"

"I often went."

"…I or we or someone managed to persuade you to go to Vienna."

"Yeah, I don't know why I went to Vienna. Obviously you, yeah. You'd been there before and said it was quite fun. Can't remember why I decided to go to Vienna. Oh, because you said they were doing a whole… It wasn't just showing at a festival. I was to be the tribute director. They were going to do a big splurge and a magazine article and I thought, 'Well, you know, just do it once. Why not?' Also I looked it up on the Internet and read about the previous year and what fun it was and everyone had a party and I thought it would be good for my daughters to go, have a holiday. So we all went, my five daughters and myself. That was the real reason to go actually, give them a holiday. Let them see their dad in his one moment – finally – of glory."

"But it was something very new to you, in a sense. You hadn't even been out of the country in ten years, right?"

"Well, not since my heart attack, no. In theory I wasn't allowed to fly. I went by train."

"On the phone we talked about… We talked about… Going to Vienna was really sort of digging in the past almost for you. Going back to the sort of life that you used to have, that you walked away from."

"Not really. I had no intention of doing anything like that. I had no intention of staying in Vienna and going back and ever doing anything more with films. I don't like films. I hate my film past and my film self. 'Hate' is not quite the word, but mistrust. I have lots of negative feelings about it. I wouldn't have given it up quite so successfully for so long if it wasn't that I had certain misgivings about anything to do with films. All thanks to you that the wretched retrospective came together, went out and started to be success, which I hadn't assumed for a second. I thought you were crazy. Who the hell wants to go out and watch *Wholly Communion* in Buenos Aires? Or Jerusalem? Or Athens? It was just a fluke, the

whole thing. I was amused by it. But… I'd had a couple of reactions, after all, from America for my film *The Fall*. And I thought, 'Right, I've always cherished that.' I think one of the real reasons I gave up filming was that I had made *The Fall,* put an awful lot into it, had a nervous breakdown and really thought that I was saying something useful and valuable as a filmmaker, and so on. And… zero. George Hoellering complained that he'd had chicken for lunch and that Ivo Yarocy had been sick. And I suddenly had these reviews from *The Fall* and I thought, 'Maybe I'll go to Vienna and see how they react to that.' I think you'd said that Hans loved *The Fall* and was really pleased to be showing it, but I had… I think it was to please you lot that I decided to go. You'd put all this effort into doing this retrospective that was going around the world by now, twenty-five different places were going to show it. I thought, 'Maybe I'm being a little bit too… Maybe I'm being a little bit too effete,' if that's the word. No, self-effacing, that's the one I was looking for. And I thought… But no, the real reason, surely, was the fact that I had written all these novels. I had three novels I was just putting up on the Internet. I'd written six novels that had been published and, you know, I know that you only sell things in this modern world if you promote yourself in some way. And I wasn't promoting myself, you were doing all the promoting. I thought I could cash in and sort of jump on the bandwagon, and thanks to the kind of interest that was developing, swing my novels into the public eye. I'd been in the public eye in 1968, New York, film festivals and all these things. Hadn't got me anywhere. I hated it."

"Really?"

"That's why I gave it all up."

"Well, yes. But going back to Vienna. You did go back to Vienna."

"I went back to Vienna because I fell under the spell of impending winter in Vienna. And I'd always had a thing about trams and trains, which goes back to my childhood."

"Why? Because of the overhead trains in Liverpool?"

"That's right. And also the film *Barrier* by Skolimowski. It's also… And Sweden and Bergman. I used to go to Sweden a lot, for the winter, when I was at Cambridge. So it was sort of an aesthetic there. But it was also *Alphaville*. I mean, Vienna at night is *Alphaville*. Totally *Alphaville*. You know, you can't go to Paris now and find *Alphaville* because it was one little hotel, the hotel Scribe, Place de l'Opéra. That was the whole of *Alphaville*, and a few tracking shots. Have you seen how many of Godard's films start with the train? Even *Alphaville* starts with the train. I wonder if anyone's figured out why. Anyway, it was just… A lot of things fell into place, but mostly the reaction of the audience to *The Fall* and young people seeing it as a sort of totality and a message and evidence in the past of this particular revolutionary moment in time. And I felt it was perfectly evident in some of the questions, when young people confronted me with *The Fall*… It was a reflection back, they were throwing it back at me saying, 'What to do now? What should we be doing now? Yes, we understand all that. Vietnam is now Iraq. It's about anarchy,

it's about the artist, it's about participation.' And all these things. I always sort of felt that I had a duty to do a sequel to *The Fall*, I suppose. That it was now, after thirty-one years… How many years?"

"Thirty-eight at the time."

"Thirty-eight years. Suddenly people liked it. People were saying it was a masterpiece, it did this, it did that. People could read the language of it. They could read the image, the edits, the meaning, the structure, everything. They saw it as a Godardian film, which I didn't really at the time. I'd gone off into writing novels, even though the three-part structure of something like *The Fall* is mirrored in all the three-part structures in most of my novels, I just went into novels instead. But I felt this time that it was almost… I was being a coward, actually, not have a go at doing a sequel to *The Fall*. And the perfect sequel to *The Fall* would be to try and make a film of my most recent novel, which is called *Terrorism Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, which I was about to publish and which was already published on the Internet. I thought, if there are all these festivals… Paris was lining up and there was Rotterdam, there was London and all these things. I thought, 'Blimey, I've got get this book out, there, ready. People are now talking about me as a filmmaker and a novelist. At least I got that far on the quest.' And I thought it was the perfect subject to make a film, the kind of film that would be a sequel to *The Fall.* In a way my novel *Terrorism Considered As One Of The Fine Arts* is a sequel to *The Fall*. It's a kind of scenario of an unmade film, an un-makeable film, by now. So… And I met two or three people, two girls in particular, who I thought would be the absolute… They were, they absolutely were, in every sense – looks, character and everything – they were the two girls in the novel. The novel is basically about three people: Michael Schlieman, my MI5 agent, and these two girls who are anarchists, part of a revolutionary cell called the Rainbow Warriors, about to commit an act of assassination. So there were so many tie-ups with *The Fall*, which is about an act of political assassination. This was going to be real. So I had it all. And the environment, the city, was *Alphaville*. It just seemed completely right. Everything was in place. Even though physically I was extremely apprehensive. I had not been good for a while. I mean, when I had my heart attack in 1996 they did an X-ray of my knees. I was supposed to have had an X-ray in the hospital and had been going in for an operation so they did one and they said that in my joints the cartilage was ninety-five percent destroyed. That was in 1996. So by last year I was hobbling around Vienna. The problem is, what you do is you take painkillers and say to yourself, 'It's not damaged, I'm not ill.' You take more and more painkillers and you work against it, but all the time you're doing more damage. But it was really when I got this wretched superbug."

"But the fact is you went back and made another film after how many years?"

"I didn't complete it."

"But you were actively making a film."

"I was actively making a film, yeah. Because I associate filming with that exterior interface between myself and the world, which I had abandoned for forty years, or almost. Yet… [*knock at door*] Hello?... Oh, it's the front door."

"Shall I go see who it is?"

"Yeah, I don't really talk to anyone… No, forget it. I don't talk to anybody."

"Hmm…"

"How dare they interrupt."

"The back door's open."

"Well if they come to the back door you can go and speak to them. It's only somebody selling something, for God's sake. Or wanting me to sign a petition so the village square doesn't get converted into a basketball space."

"Yeah, it's funny I have so many things that I wanted to talk about but none of them seem…"

"Relevant?"

"I think I know the answers. I mean, if I have any questions, I know the answers to them anyway. I just kind of thought it might be interesting to hear you talk about them. And it would be interesting, but I'm not sure how useful it is or how useful it is for you. Probably not useful at all."

"I'm not here trying to be useful."

"But I think a lot of people were inspired by the documentary and your story. I mean, I know that. People were coming up to me at the festivals, expressing their…"

"Well, I'm delighted. I'm delighted obviously for two reasons. One, for you. You went to all the trouble to make this film, on faith. You know, I thought you were a bit crazy, I must admit, wanting to do this and coming back and deciding to do more. It started off a half an hour and then it was an hour and then it was an hour and a half. It went on and on and on. Suddenly it was two films into… And I thought, 'Poor Paul,' you know? But it's what he wants to do, let him do it. After all, I never saw a single foot of film you ever shot."

"No, you didn't."

"I took no interest in it, in that sense. I was very generous. I gave myself as a gift, without any attempt to interfere."

"Yes, but I think you wanted the film made as well. Right?"

"I certainly wasn't prepared to say, 'Don't make the film.' But I hadn't been sitting around waiting for you or someone to come and make the film. I wouldn't have allowed anybody else to make the film. We were, by that time, good friends. I trusted you. After all, I'd had an experience before where I was completely betrayed. And I do see all film as a kind of betrayal. Which is why I've decided not to see your film."

"Does that include fiction film? I'm curious to know why… This is one of the many things I'm curious about. And we talked about this, years ago, about why you never made any fiction films."

"I couldn't. I tried. I would have loved to have made fiction films rather than the documentaries, but each time I tried to approach it and go on to decide what and how and why, I couldn't. I couldn't take a human being and sit them down and say, 'Say: 'Blast! You movin' out?' No, no, no, say: 'Blast! You! Movin' out!" and on and on and on, until it was right. I didn't have that image in my mind of the rightness of the finished act, and that's because of a deep sense of fear of betrayal. I am philosophical, if you like, in that sense, in the sense that all documentary film is a kind of philosophical search, a research, an attempt, actually, to capture something which, to a certain degree or another, can be claimed as being true. I always tried to be true to my subjects. Which is why in *The Fall* I had to finally put myself in it, just to admit the total truth. To say, 'Listen, I have a camera and I'm doing this and I have an editing machine and I'm doing this. And I'm thinking and I'm working and I'm experiencing.'"

"You mean not to do that would have been betraying everyone else who's in the film?"

"What, in *The Fall* or something?"

"Or in any of the films. By putting yourself in *The Fall* you're saying…"

"By putting myself in *The Fall* I was trying to say that, you know, by this time, having made a few documentary films – all of which, by the way, were a kind of confrontation with people performing or trying to communicate, being artists of one kind or another – that, you know, there was a sort of dialectic going on, that I was getting more and more unhappy about. Or I felt that maybe there was also a certain kind of excitement, actually, the fact that I was a lone filmmaker, with my own camera, with complete freedom to do from A to Z making this particular film, suffering all the changes, the alternate situations, starting to film this and everything. And in the end I put myself into the film because I felt that actually it was the best way of joining up all the material, because what it was that was joining up all the material was me. And I wanted to show how I was joining it up. I was joining it up by being a cameraman and doing this film and going over here and by being an editor and chopping it all up. But you know, an awful lot of films have been made recently exploring this question of the subject/object, the subjective and objective in movies. More and more fiction directors are now making documentaries. And I remember thinking, 'Well, Wim Wenders and Herzog and all these sort of people are now going off and making documentaries.' And, in a way, Godard's greatest *oeuvre* of the last fifteen years is his *Histoires Du Cinema*, a documentary. It's a documentary taking all these little fictional fragments to communicate an ideology, a philosophy, a film. I just think it's an aspect of my character that I can't actually make fictional films. This new film that I was going to make, which is based on a fiction, my novel, would have been taking real people, who shared my ideological ideas, who where participants in it. I wasn't just paying them to be actors. I wanted them to contribute. The two people I was working with had a lot of their own ideas. I wanted it to be a dialogue based on a fictional structure. Although one of them was

playing Yoko and the other was playing Maria, the relationship between Maria and the person doing it and Yoko and the person doing it had to be one that they felt to be authentic. And I would have gone on and made the film if it wasn't for the fact that I had been struck down by this wretched superbug."

"Actually one thing I'm curious about. Did you always feel very strongly the need to express yourself, whether it was through the writing or the film or through the birds as well, and through the pots, this kind of thing? I mean, it seems to me that maybe you could have gone back to film ten years ago but your heart attack precluded that. You weren't able to do that physically."

"No, I never wanted to go back to film. I was very happy writing. I wanted to be a writer. I always wanted to be a writer. I started to write when I was at school. I wrote a couple of novels when I was at school. I'd just read Thomas Hardy and I'd read *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* and D.H. Lawrence. And I'd seen a few films that disturbed me very profoundly. But I felt that I should write. But I was doing music at the time. You know, I was the school organist therefore I was playing music two to three hours every day so I had the satisfaction of expressing myself through the music. I felt that writing lagged very far behind. I was studying science. I wanted to study English literature and they wouldn't let me."

"You felt that writing lagged behind or film lagged behind?"

"Writing. Film wasn't even on the spectrum. A long way to go. But I always wanted to write. And, in fact, I made the film *Perception Of Life*, which was a result of my making two funny little films at the Slade, after which I decided I wasn't going to make films. I'd given up filmmaking. I was sitting in my flat…"

"After *Perception*?"

"Yeah. I was sitting in my flat and I think Anthony Sterne came around… No, it wouldn't have been Anthony. Somebody else came around and said, 'I saw your film! The science one.' I said, 'What? How on earth did you see my film? I haven't seen it for a year.' He said, 'Well, it's on around the corner.' And I discovered that my film, *Perception Of Life,* the history of biology and microscopes, was showing in the Academy Cinema with a film by Buñuel, one hundred yards from my flat, and I knew nothing about it. The film was owned by the Nuffield Foundation. George Hoellering had seen it at a festival and decided to show it with *L'ange exterminateur* by Buñuel in Academy Three Cinema, which was a hundred, a hundred and fifty yards from my flat. So I went round and there it was and I saw it and I remember thinking, 'Well, maybe I am a filmmaker' or something like that. And I suddenly thought, you know, 'Wow! How weird!' And I rang Hoellering up and said, 'This is Peter Whitehead here.' He said, 'Who?' I said, 'Peter Whitehead, you know? I made that film. You're showing it in the Academy, my film.' He said, 'Oh, is it a problem?' or something to that effect, and he told me what and why. And I said, 'No, I was absolutely delighted. Thank you very much' and went and stood outside the cinema and thought, 'Yeah, how strange.' And then, I think, the next day went off to Better Books to buy some more books for my writing project,

and my unfinished novels… I had by this time four or five unfinished novels. I wrote two or three novels at the Slade, all of which I have somewhere. And that was my real project."

"And at Better Books you bumped into…?"

"In Better Books I went to buy a couple of books or steal them, I can't remember what. And then, you know, discovered that Allen Ginsberg was going to be reading poetry there with a bunch of other poets in a week's time or something. Obviously my writing project had included getting things like *Evergreen Review* from America with people like Burroughs and Beckett and goodness knows what else. And the French, Alain Robbe-Grillet kind of people. So Ginsberg was very high on my list. I had a record of *Howl* and that's why I went. It was only then, when they were talking about this crazy idea of renting the Albert Hall, that I said, in fact, I would film it. But I was also, by the way, still doing the newsreel camera work, actually. That's what I made money at, because that was good money. I'd make a hundred pounds a day or something, you know?"

"Really? That's a lot back then."

"Well, maybe it was less than that. I can't remember, but I made quite good money."

"But the music and the writing – well, the writing – was always much more important to you."

"Yeah. Always has been, still is and always will be."

"But even those films that absolutely shook you, like *Carrie,* like the Warsaw Ghetto film, like *Seventh Seal*, in a sense, you sort of internalised them."

"They possessed me so totally and absolutely I couldn't deal with it."

"They were clearly films. They weren't novels. Were there any novels that shook you like that?"

"No."

"That's interesting, right?"

"Well, yes, slightly puzzling. I'm trying to think what novels I used to read back in those days. There are not many novels I like actually. I mean, if I went on a desert island with ten books – I've been through this before – they're not all novels, that's for sure."

"Can you tell me what some of those would be?"

"Two novels. One novel would be *Night Wood* by Djuna Barnes. The other would be *Nadja* by André Breton, which I don't particularly like, but I sort of respect it for odd kinds of reasons. I'd probably take *Steppenwolf* or *Narcissus and Goldmund.* Actually probably *Narcissus and Goldmund.* And what else? I don't like any English novels. There are no English novels that I like. No American novels. French novels, let me think… No, the other books wouldn't be novels, actually. Can't think of any other novels. I don't sit down and read novels. I write them all the time. I can't stop. Never stop writing. Whether they're novels or not I don't know."

"A name that I've just made a note of… His name came up quite a few times. I'm just curious to know if you have anything to say about R.D. Laing."

"Yeah. Well, my novel *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* is sort of a complete study in a certain kind of a way, in inverted commas, of that schizoid self. His greatest book, as far as I was concerned, was *The Divided Self.* That resonated, you know? There was an awful lot of talk at that time about the schizoid state. I mean, I think that no artist is not schizoid. You have to be schizoid because there's one side that is always trying to communicate with the other side and it spills over. That's what the artist is. He has to be schizoid. He has to have access to the pre-bicameral mind. He really does. Laing was the first person to come along and say, 'Listen, we're all living in a totally schizoid, totally schizophrenic world and society. Everything is wrong, and the only true, absolutely genuine, authentic response to the world around us is to be schizophrenic.' Now, all that touched me because I was always on the edge, psychologically. That's for sure. I was tottering on the edge of a nervous breakdown all the time and the writing was a kind of self-therapy, obviously. Laing was certainly an influence. I mean, his book *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise* would probably be one of my ten books. The other would be Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception.* They are two very similar little books. They would be definitely two of the books that I would take. Another one is *In Bluebeard's Castle* by George Steiner. Do you know it?"

"I know George Steiner."

"That's a great book."

"What is that book about?"

"The Jews I would say probably, most of all. The Holocaust. The fact that society, as the socially civilised humans that we are supposed to be, that just below the surface there is so much that can erupt, given the opportunity. It confronts the absolute extraordinary mystery as to why it happened. You know, Nietzsche forecast the nihilism of the twentieth century, and it happened. By God it happened. But why did it happen in that kind of form? Steiner was examining culture, so-called Middle European high culture. How could it create something like the two World Wars and the Holocaust? And to quote Ronald Laing, how is it that decent, normal, so-called sane, society-loving humans, how could they calmly allow situations to occur where in the twentieth century alone we have legally murdered two hundred million people?"

"I just want to ask you, specifically, about the breakdown that you had when you were editing *The Fall*. What happened to you back then? It clearly was not something that came out of nowhere, right?"

"No. Why did it happen then? Or what was it?"

"Both."

"Nervous breakdowns are nervous breakdowns. I mean, I had to have a nervous breakdown. A nervous breakdown is finally sloughing off your false self. For me, if you're schizoid and you're tottering on the edge, permanently splitting

into two, never quite… There's no reconciliation, no dialogue between the one side of the self and the other. They're talking a different language. They don't recognise each other. They mistrust each other. Each one betrays the other continuously. When you're schizoid you meet people who relate to one side of you or another. I always had to have two people at once because one would be with one side and he would call it the false self and the real self, etc. That's Laing, as well as Jung, as well as Freud. I read all these people. I mean, considering my background and my past and what I had been through, which was a series of institutionalised situations that stripped me of any hope of having a unified sense of myself, it was absolutely inevitable that I was schizoid. I was both a working-class scruffy little bloke from the slums of Liverpool and I had been educated to become worthy of acceptance by the elite. I was both of these two people, continuously. But I was also a male and female, because when my father died when I was eleven and I was an only child, I was feminised by the Oedipal situation. So I was both male and female. That's another schizoid thing. I think the burden of continuously living out this schizoid situation, permanently the sort of lie of being a single person with a single name, which is why I invented Michael Schlieman probably, or Patrick Walker, my alter egos in my novels, and why I created a novel… But to have a nervous breakdown is breakdown/breakthrough, and it really was necessary for me, finally. Necessary in terms of the psychology of the psyche and the unconscious and everything. I wish I could have avoided it. But… It happened. It was inevitable."

"What did happen?"

"You just lose it. You lose the ability to function, and keep… You're not actually directing the movie. Consciousness is a movie and you're writing it and directing it and acting it all the time. Suddenly it's got a life of its own. It's a real nightmare in the sense that just absolutely everything is militating against you. It has a certain logic but nothing is useful and you just start, emotionally, to fall apart. Your relationship between thinking and feeling goes, which is also the schizoid thing, the body/mind thing. But as I say, having reflected upon it, I think it was useful in the sense that you sort of finally give up one of the sides of the self that you are clinging to for the wrong reasons. You have to finally admit some truths about things. Not easy. You're undoing – how old was I then, in '69? Thirty-two years old – you're undoing twenty years of false education, in inverted commas. Education by culture, by people, by friends. You know, you have to go into that silence, exile and cunning of James Joyce, at some point, in order to reassess the mess and the fragmentation. And there was a lot of fragmentation then, for me. And when it comes you don't sit around saying, 'Oh gosh well here it is, I've been expecting it.' It just starts to creep up on you. And it happened in the middle of *The Fall*."

"Now, this schizoid split is something that I think we've talked a lot about in terms of the word and the image. Is there a connection to be made specifically for you? Is that what the split is inside, for all of us maybe, the word and the image? I mean, that's one way of looking at it, right?"

"The split is between the mind and the body, number one. The second split is between the self and the other, number two. The third split is between the right side of the brain and the left side of the brain, you know. Number four, word and image. Number five, male and female. Number six, yin and yang. Number seven… You know it goes on and on and on. We are several different cells, all of us, always, at all times. You are your father's son but you are your mother's son. Your father's son can be a very, very different person than your mother's son. If your mother and father get on well, maybe they'll accept you, being two different people. If they don't they're going to fight for you and tear you apart. That's Ronald Laing. Laing's great act of genius was to recognise… Did you know about his experiment with the twelve women? He suddenly discovered that psychiatrists never talked, ever, to their patients, never listened to them, so they never really had a dialogue. They just had their ideas about them, they were mad or schizophrenic or whatever. So he decided to do an experiment. He took twelve women who were in a mental hospital and talked to them and listened to their stories and allowed them to express themselves and to appear, absolutely, to be communicating with their real selves and their false selves, etc. Therapy just by merely talking. And within, I don't know, six months all twelve were well enough to leave the hospital as perfectly normal human beings. They were cured. He wrote up the paper about how modern psychology had missed the point and the point of everything was to be etc. And he was a great hero and he was very happy with his work and thought 'What's my next stage?' Within twelve months all of them were back in the hospital. And the reason he discovered was that they'd all gone back to the source of their madness. The cause of their madness, the source of their madness, the very situation and context that made them mad and developed them as mad people and sustained them, kept them permanently mad: family. The very idea of the bits and pieces of themselves that belonged to mummy and daddy and grandma and grandpa and the priest and goodness knows what else. All these transforming, repressing, oppressing forces which had not been resolved. So all you were doing was getting someone with a bacteria, you spent six months getting rid of the bacteria – fighting it with all these chemicals and goodness knows what else – then you send them straight back into the swamp where they can get the bacteria again, and they are immediately re-infected. And that's why he decided that the only way in his Kingsley Hall that he could ever be a psychiatrist and work helping people to escape from the terrors and pain of madness was actually to psychoanalyse their parents as well, that in fact no person who came in and said, 'I am mad. Cure me,' was free of the causes, and the causes were invariably family. It's the same as what Jung said, that when someone comes in and says 'I am mad. Cure me,' I must see immediately the ghosts that this person has brought in with them. And my role as a psychiatrist is to exorcise those ghosts, to free them from the power that the ghosts have over that person, preventing him from being sane and whole. Well, to go back to me, I suppose I had my ghosts and they finally

got the better of me. I had a pretty bad trip in the middle of it and finally put myself together."

"I'm going to put a new tape in but I want to go back to this thing."

"It's not a whole tape we've done is it?"

"We've done a whole tape."

"Are you doing it on DV Cam? Forty minutes?"

"I'm shooting HDV."

"Is that forty minutes or sixty?"

"Sixty. Sixty-five."

"We've been talking for an hour?"

"Yep."

2.

"One thing I want to do is move this light because it's sticking right out the back of your head. Hmm… Family. One interesting thing is that at the Tribeca Film Festival, I think it was, someone asked why there was nothing in the documentary about your family, beyond 'your women.' Someone asked me about your family. People were surprised when they learned that you had eight children and I'm not sure how many ex-wives, but…"

"I'm not sure either. Are you filming yet?"

"Yes."

"Oh right, I see."

"But family. Family. We've been talking about family, the ghosts, which… And I have to say this letter that you sent me the other day – "

" – says a lot. It's interesting the word family, isn't it? Let's go from the word family to the familiar. What is the familiar? Families are familiar. They are what is familiar to us. But what does the occultist tell you? That every person is haunted by familiars. The little guy in the jungle, the shaman, will laugh and tell you, 'Hah, it's a snake!' or 'Ah, yours is a wolf.' Or yours is a this or a that. The familiars. Family. Families and familiars. You know, we start off that big and we grow. But in that initial period, God they have so much power, don't they? Maybe you asked me about my family. Maybe I answered and you didn't use it. It wasn't the right film was it?"

"Well, we did a section about your early years."

"Is there?"

"About your mother, your father. There's nothing about the family that, in a sense, you have created."

"I never really felt I had created families until… With Dido and my four daughters it was the closest, certainly, that I ever got to creating a family. But I do not consider myself in any way to be a family man. I've tried my best to be a father, but there's a difference."

"Do you think you're a good father?"

"I don't think it's for me to answer. Sometimes, in some respects. Sometimes no. Sometimes I've failed miserably in certain circumstances."

"At the end of this letter…"

"By the way, it's not easy to be a father, by golly. Because being a father, and being a successful father, depends absolutely on the mother. Or, at least, she is an essential part of it. The success that you are with your child depends entirely on the mother and your relationship to the mother. Whether it lasts, whether it's successful, etc. You know, you're not just a father. You're a parent, a shared parent. I would say that some of the problems I've had with some of my children have been caused by the fact of the relationship failing with the mother."

"Your relationship with the mother?"

"Yeah. Our relationship. Although let's take my first wife Diane, with whom I had two daughters. I stayed very close to Diane for years. Diane worked for me in Soho in my flat during the Sixties when I was making my films, actually. She was the script girl on *Charley is My Darling*. And we remained very good friends. Still are. The same with Coral. Coral Atkins, the mother of my son Harry. But you know when I met Diane she was a fashion model and an actress. When I met Coral she was acting on the stage with Nichol Williamson in *Inadmissible Evidence*. These kind of women, with all due respect, I don't think they were, in any sense, family types either. Even though ironically Coral went on to be the actress in a programme called *A Family at War*. She felt so bereft of the notion of family that she started a children's home and brought up fourteen children, etc. It's a novel that you read and you're never quite sure what the next chapter's going to bring, and what horrors are coming around the next corner."

"Speaking of Coral and family, would you like to relate…"

"No."

"OK."

"Not yet."

"It's quite a new… Something very new to you?"

"Oh yeah, this has only occurred in the last two months. By the way, it's not affected me in any negative way, either. I'm utterly, utterly, astonished and amused by it. What I cannot understand is why my mother never told me and why Coral and Harry never told me when they knew. It's ridiculous, knowing who I am. It's fascinating. If they told me earlier I could have maybe found out the answer to the questions that must now be asked. It's too late. But you see when you say 'family,' I never experienced family. This is another reason why I don't believe I've successfully created a family, or a family situation, and never could because I never experienced it. I never had any brothers or sisters, I only had a mother, we had nowhere to live, the war came, my father went away. You know my mother was one of the original single-family mothers. What do they call them?"

"Single parent?"

"Single parent. My mother was a single parent. We lived in one room, from room to room, house to house, bedsit to bedsit, and goodness knows what through the war. I was living with my mother and I can't have enjoyed that very much. Or maybe I did. When you're a child you take what you're given. But it was hardly family life because we were in a different house every year. I was in a different school every year. As I say, I had no brothers and sisters and what have you, and finally my father came back and got ill. I never saw him for a year, and by the time I saw him he was seriously ill and then he died. Then I was sent away to a boarding school. There are no English kids around who've been sent to boarding schools who will ever successfully create a family situation. By definition, to send your child in England to a boarding school is an admission of failure. OK, it's justified by the notion that you get the best education. The best education to be what? It's not education. It's brainwashing."

"Would you rather I not tell anyone about this letter?"

"Hmm… It's not necessary yet. I mean, like who?"

"People are interested in you. People I've talked to. I actually have to say, I have several people… There's a woman in Jerusalem, who I've been emailing. I showed you those emails."

"I think you did."

"A friend of mine in New York who is fascinated by…"

"You can tell them. You can tell friends or people that you're close to. If you feel it's a sort of serious, intimate, intelligent preoccupation."

"Oh no, these are people who are deeply respectful of you and your work."

"Yeah that's OK. You can say, 'The most astonishing thing happened…' Yeah. Because it is. That it should only happen when I'm seventy is ridiculous. But I don't know that it's relevant in any way, actually."

"What's relevant?"

"Had I told you about it before you saw this letter?"

"No."

"Well, turn the camera off. Turn the camera off."

"I can't film this?"

"No, turn the camera off."

3.

"I'm not talking for the camera."

"But it makes sense, yeah."

"Oh, it makes perfect sense. Everything makes sense. Because there were lots of other little incidental things. But its probably now to late for me to find out..."

"Well, that's a shame. Maybe not."

"Maybe not, no. I just don't know."

"Is there anything in your mother's…"

"Nothing. She left nothing."

"She was smart that way."

"She was. I admire her. Determined little woman. Kept it to herself, her whole life."

"You had a close relationship with your mother?"

"With my mother? No, I stopped talking to her when I was twelve."

"Oh."

"Hated my mother."

"That was never clear to me."

"Yeah."

"Were you in touch with her…"

"I'd come home…"

"Because she died not long before your heart attack, is that right?"

"A few months."

"A few months before your heart attack? Wow."

"1st April. And I had my heart attack in August. In her flat."

"But when you were in Arabia and this and that, were you in touch with her?"

"Well, once I married Dido and had the children she got close to Dido and finally decided I was human after all and everything was going to be all right because I had all these little children and she was a Goldsmith and all that kind of stuff, you know? It was lovely for my mother. Actually it was a great gift for my mother. My mother died happy. She had the last twenty years of her life been very happy, thinking that I had finally become a family man. Probably. Because that's all my mother would possibly think. She couldn't possibly be interested in my being a writer or an artist."

"Peter, did you have… Sophie asked me, 'How well do you know Peter?' and I said, 'I think I know Peter about as well as a man can know Peter.'"

"That's nice."

"Did you have many friends back in… You talked about how Anthony was one of your closest kind of collaborators, colleagues back in the Sixties."

"No, Anthony was the only person I would claim as a friend. And he was much younger than I was, and he came and just said to me one day 'Can I help you to work? You know, carry your camera.' I'd met him at Cambridge."

"You met him at Cambridge?"

"Well, he used to come with Sid Barrett to my house and rehearse in the front room. When I was living there in my studio."

"Oh, he knew Sid?"

"I had an exhibition in a gallery in Cambridge of my paintings for three weeks and the following three weeks was a joint exhibition of Anthony Stern and Sid Barrett."

"Of course, you talk about that in the documentary. But you never had… At Cambridge, did you have a lot of friends?"

"Well, that's a bit unfair. Yes, I did have a couple of friends at Cambridge, now that I remember. One was a guy, at the time called Waris Habibulla, who became quite a successful film director, called Waris Hussein, and made a lot of interesting films. He was a theatre director at the beginning and worked with big companies. He was an Indian boy. There was another guy called Ian something-or-other, I can't remember his second name. There were two, there was a guy called William Dunlop and this other guy called Ian – I can't remember Ian's surname – both of whom were poets."

"And at the Slade, anyone? I'm just kind of curious because you talk…"

"Yeah, I had one friend at the Slade called Paul Huson."

"Huson?"

"Yeah, he writes books. Or wrote books."

"I met a guy in Los Angeles in the spring who knew you at the Slade. I forget his name. I shall find out who it is."

"It might be Paul Huson."

"It might be."

"He wrote a book on witchcraft. He was an occultist."

"No, this guy's an artist. This guy's an arty person."

"Well, Paul was very, very arty. He was at the Slade."

"Well maybe he's into witchcraft, I'll find out."

"How old is he?"

"He's your age."

"Yeah, it could be Paul then. It would be Paul Huson, because he was gay and went to live in America."

"Was this guy gay? I don't know. I met him at Mamet's house. I'll ask. I'll find out."

"Paul and I were close actually."

"Hmm… I'm just curious because you talk about being such a loner. You talk about how you were just curled up in front of the fire."

"Well, no, no, no. Yes, that was a lot of the time. I quite enjoyed that. I'm essentially an introvert, let's face it. But my relationships were always with women. I always had at least one passionate relationship on the go and still am totally. Totally."

"Now, one thing we didn't do for the documentary, which we talked about doing… Well first of all, I have this note. You mentioned it last time we met. I have no idea what it means: 'Sinking twenty-six ships in Sardinia.'"

"Oh yeah. Can't talk about that. "

"Why? What? 'Sinking twenty-six ships in Sardinia'?"

"That's my real story, my whole story. All of this is just superficial twaddle. This is just the real world. This is just all the reflections on the surface."

"'Sinking twenty-six ships in Sardinia.' Is that what *Once out of nature…* might be? That's the real story. You did tell me, Peter, that if I made – quote – a success of *In the Beginning was the Image* you'd give me the real story."

"But how would you define a success? Has it been a success because you've got a person in Jerusalem who likes it and a person in America who likes it? It's going to go around to a bunch of film festivals, maybe for the next twenty years, and be seen by maybe sixty or eighty people at a time. All the people who hate it walk out at the end and don't say anything to you, and the people who enjoy it come up and say, 'I really found that film very interesting, Paul.' And so you managed to pull out of the audience the ten percent who are interested – the weirdos – in the strange sort of things, anything that is slightly beyond the pale, and who thoroughly enjoyed it. OK, I'm being very facetious and very cruel. But what does one mean by a success? It has been a success I know because, I think I told you, some of the people whose judgments I really respect say it's good and like it. Therefore I am very grateful to you for treating me with respect and apparently making a film that the right people like."

"I myself am playing devil's advocate because I want to talk about what we were talking about a couple of weeks ago. It's the reason I'm back here, which is the *Once out of nature…* story, which is really about me and where I am right now and what I'm trying to do."

"Why? What makes you think that? You don't know anything about the *Once out of nature…* story."

"No. The conversation we had two weeks ago was, in a sense – and I think you picked up on this – my realisation as to why the film couldn't be made as I wanted to make it, as I thought it might be made. It's my sense as to what film is and what film might be and your story and where I am and what I should be doing, how I should be using film or not."

"Yeah."

"I'm not sure if I understand any of it."

"Yeah, you do. You understand it."

"Well, I understand that it's not to be filmed."

"Mm-hm… Which is why I just said no to that aspect of the story."

"Why is it not to be filmed?"

"Can we stop now, because I'll just go and… We are getting into dangerous territory. I need to have a glass of water."

4.

"Yeah… You see what I left behind. One way or another."

"But you've always left things behind."

"We always do, yeah. Don't quite know what I mean."

"There's a great story, you know this story obviously, about leaving the birds behind in Spain."

"Oh God, yeah. Well, you can't be a wanderer, the wanderer, you can't be the victim of the myth of the wanderer, *le pèlerin*, if you're not always permanently in search and you're the pilgrim, *le pèlerin*, the pilgrim, the falcon, the pilgrim hawk, if it isn't the fact that you must always go on and on looking and if you must always go on and on looking then you must always go on and on leaving. You must never allow anything to become clinging to the extent that it prevents you from moving on into the next level of the quest. The next stage of initiation."

"Doesn't it become a bitterly solitary life?"

"Yes and no. I think it was Wilfred Thesiger who was crossing the empty desert of the Empty Quarter and he met a man on a camel who had just come across the Empty Quarter. They sat down and had coffee and dates in their tent for the night and I think he asked him wasn't he ever lonely in this expanse of nothingness? And he said 'No. Allah is with me.'"

"You know, you tell that story in *Nothing To Do With Me*."

"Well, now I've told it again."

"Forty years later."

"Oh! In *Nothing To Do With Me*? No!"

"You do. You tell that same story."

"I thought you meant I'd told it in your film."

"No, you tell it in Anthony's film, from 1968."

"Well, you see …"

"It's these same ideas. One of the most extraordinary lines is the sequence we shot in Meadowcraft when you're looking through the notebooks and you say, 'The most extraordinary thing is that these – "

"It's all the same fucking thing over and over again."

"But as it should be, really."

"Well, it's easy enough to recognise an El Greco Painting, isn't it? All got long thin faces. And I can remember some art historian finally saying he knew why El Greco always painted the faces long and thin, they go down like this, so they're instantly recognisable: because he suffered from astigmatism. That's what I call a rationalist. That's the kind of world we live in."

"But your novels written at school are probably, who knows…"

"The same story, yeah. This is what James Riley keeps telling me. He's going back and back and back and back into all this early writing. I remember I gave him a whole box called 'Early Writing.' I don't know whether I should have done, right back to some of these very early things at the Slade and this and that. And he said, 'It's the same story. I've found *The Fall* in there and I found *Nora and…* and I've found…"

"Really?"

"Oh yeah."

"Your mic's come off."

"But that's good. That's what it should be."

"You can put it a little lower."

"That's what it should be. The same story."

"Sardinia, Callanaish, shamanism, Pakistan, this is all…"

"Shamanism, in a word. Shamanism."

"It's about shamanism."

"Hmm… *The Risen* is about shamanism. My novel *The Risen* is a shamanistic trip from the first word to the last. And it is my inner story. It is a coded version of my inner story and is what I consider to be the real story. The inward. The inner wanderings."

"Did you need to travel around the world in order to explore your inner self? Could you have done that from Pytchley?"

"No. I didn't find the truth – I say it in inverted commas – the ultimate truth, until I met Kamal Sahib in Pakistan, in 1979 or something like that. I was thirty something-or-other, nearly forty, if not forty, just before I met Dido. No, I must have met him '78."

"You were forty in 1977."

"Well, it was around about then that I met Kamal Sahib. And I met him by accident. I didn't go to Pakistan looking for a shaman. I went looking for falcons. And by chance, through one thing and another, I was introduced to this man, with whom I worked for a bit off and on doing certain things, and without a single shadow of a doubt it was the most important thing that ever happened to me and ever will happen to me on every possible level. And it put everything into place and I have attempted since to deal with it. But you don't, you can't actually always live at that pitch, at that level. If you are a shaman you don't go on a shamanistic trip every day. You don't just every night take the amanita mushroom and dance yourself silly in a woman's dress and fly out to the top of the tent and go around the universe and come back in the morning. You know, you don't do that every night. You never do that, but you know what I mean. The thing is that the whole concept of shamanism. Shamanism is the pre-bicameral religion. They were the original priests. They were the ones who had access to the higher meaning and significance and healing and nature. The gods. They spoke the language of the gods which is, of course, the language of birds. The language of birds was always the code word, the phrase, for the occult language. And it is as a bird that the shaman goes off to the other world and comes back. The myth of Isis and Osiris of ancient Egypt is a description, a perfect description of shamanism. The dismemberment of Osiris. The fragmentation and dismemberment of Osiris. And Isis taking the shape of a falcon copulating with her dead husband and giving birth to Horus the falcon. It's just another version of the shamanistic story that you will find, if you trace back through history, is there in the earliest possible writings of the *Rig Veda*, in particular. If you read Wasson's book on Soma, Soma is what the falcon brings back. If you read *Gilgamesh*… These are just various different aspects of the same shamanistic story, which is how to get your hands on the elixir of immortality. That is the subject of

my book *The Risen*, and is my real story. All this about films and Ronald Laing and Vienna… When I think about it I just can't understand sometimes why I waste so much time."

"What should you be doing? Should you be back there, in Pakistan?"

"I should have stayed in Pakistan. But I came back and married Dido instead."

"And then went to Arabia."

"And then went to Arabia. And lived out my falcon story at the maximum pitch I could have possibly done. For two million dollars built the largest private falcon-breeding centre in the world at the top of the highest mountain in the Middle East and bred all the falcons and did all the things I wanted to do. And wrote *The Risen*, my first novel. And it is only recognition of that novel and my other novels, which are peripheral, but mostly *The Risen*, that I want to somehow or other be sure of, that somehow or another that novel doesn't die."

"Hmm…"

"And the other book that I have written, which I have called *Once out of nature*..., which I have not published or even attempted to get published, is the real story, the story that pivots around my meeting Kamal Sahib in Pakistan."

"Is the reason you haven't t published that novel or put it out into the world in a sense the same reason why you can't tell me the story on film?"

"Partially, but to tell it on film would be ten times worse."

"And why is that, Peter?"

"I cannot possibly, even though I promised to consider it, I cannot now, on reflection, ever consider the making of a film called *Once out of nature*..., by you, in the way that you have talked to me about it, since grasping the idea of it."

"Well, since grasping from you the importance of it in your life. It was only because you've always said to me it was the real story."

"I know it's cruel of me really."

"You did say to me once, and I'm sure you have said it to many people, you giving the *Once out of nature*... monologue – this is melodrama I'm sure – was the greatest gift you could ever give anyone."

"Well, that's not a nice way of putting it. I wouldn't use, ideally, the word 'gift.' I haven't given it to many people. I haven't told the story to many people. I think only three or four. Four, I can remember now. I think only four people. The real question is: why? Why should I give it to anybody? Why should I actually tell you about it? Why should I tell anybody about it? Why should I try and tell the world about it? Well, there are reasons why maybe I should try to tell the world about it, especially now, now that you've created a kind of persona that will never go away."

"Well, just between the two of us."

"No, in your film that you have made now that's going to go around and may be seen more and eventually might get clearance and it's shown on television or

something and or shown in festivals. I have no idea what success means, as you said. It has been successful and it has gotten fantastic reviews from sensitive, intelligent people who obviously like pottery. They don't just like the Led Zeppelin. They seem to really respond to your film as a story, a documentary film about a person. There are lots of documentary films in this world about people and it can take many forms, and yours has taken the form that you've given it, and in that sense is a success, yeah. But I have to say is it a success to me or for me? That's a very selfish question. I'm delighted for you. It would have been terrible for me if it had been a total disaster obviously, and everybody hated it or was embarrassed about it and didn't dare look me in the eyes afterwards. Because I can be over the top – don't I know it – in talking. Especially about myself. Because I think I did say in your film, I really have celebrated and enjoyed my life. I am an ecstatic. I think there is such a word."

"You'll be glad to know that that sentiment is the last words of the film."

"Really?"

"'I'm celebrating my life,' you say. 'I hope you realise that. I've loved what I've loved and enjoyed every minute of it.'"

"Well, I have. There's no doubt about it, which is why when I talk about nervous breakdowns, in the end it was a great experience. I sloughed off part of my false self, etc. But there are certain things… I don't know… If I have now got a public persona, thanks to you, through this film and my film showing and if I ever get it through my novels… If anyone who's in the position to do so reads *The Risen* and says, 'Well come on, hey. This is a novel that is doing A, B, and C and has done it very well, and therefore…' And it suddenly gets out and is read by the kind of people who want to read such a book, and it gets the kind of correct feedback then, well… Fantastic. Then I think it would be quite, actually, appropriate that it should be followed by *Once out of nature*... In other words, the sequel to *The Risen* should be *Once out of nature*... as a book. The sequel to the film *The Fall* could be *Terrorism Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, as a film. Those are the only two projects left in my life, really, that I should consider seriously. One is the film, the other is *Once out of nature*… Now, I'm prepared to die tomorrow knowing that at least in that cupboard over there is the entire manuscript of this. And I've given a disc of the text, I think, to Harry. He's probably lost it though. But, you know, somehow or another I feel its there and won't die. Also you know about it now so you would come along if I died, I hope, and say, 'Dido! I swear Peter promised me the manuscript of *Once out of nature*… In fact he was going to sign a letter the day before he died giving me permission to lay my hands on it because I'm going to publish it."

"Two things. First of all, in *In the Beginning was the Image* you start the Godard story and you have in your hand your version of *Alphaville* and you're flicking through it and you sit there and you say something like, 'This is uncanny, this is uncanny.' You look at it. And then you turn to me and you say, 'Have I ever

told you …' – and you knew the answer to this question when you asked it, by God – you say, 'Have I ever told you the stories of Kamal Sahib and Pakistan?' And I obviously nod or shake my head off-camera. And you say, 'Well that's a whole other story. And you have to come here to relax me to tell you that one.' In the Q and A afterwards at Jerusalem someone asked me…"

"…had I ever told you…"

"Someone picked up on it and said did he ever tell you that story."

"Well, people who know what were talking about will know that it's perfectly feasible that there is another story."

"But what we were talking about earlier in terms of – and this is the crucial thing, this is the crucial thing – the park in Edinburgh 1969. This is why I'm so fixated on getting that little Edinburgh thing from you. The certificate."

"Well, I promise you that. I'll leave it to you in my will."

"No, we'll find it. It's in one of the boxes here. But…"

"Can I go back quickly, because, you see, you said something very interesting. You said that I looked at *Alphaville* and I said, 'Gosh, that's uncanny.' OK? Alright. There is a very famous essay by Sigmund Freud which is called *The Uncanny. Das Unheimliche.* Do you know it?"

"I do know it. First of all I saw a copy on your shelf in Vienna two days ago. I left it there. Thought it should be left there."

"Yeah, because one day I might go to the Freud Museum and film."

"I do know the essay."

"Well, the interesting thing is he analyses the word, you know, and the uncanny is to do with familiars. It is to do with family, to do with home. But the uncanny is the word I want to pick up on in this moment because we know all the other connotations. How can you make a film about the uncanny? You can't make a film about the uncanny. You can make a film about people suffering the uncanny. You know, that would be, let's say *Rebecca* or *Wuthering Heights."*

"You mean Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*?"

"Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*. Yes, that is a great work. That is a work about the uncanny. That's absolutely right. *Psycho* is a work about the uncanny."

"I was going to say… *Psycho*."

"And I have lived at the edge of the uncanny. I have suffered that kind of haunting all my whole life, and that is what my whole trip is to do with. The whole falcon trip and everything to do with it is to do with the death of the father. My father, or the person I thought was my father. Turns out he may not have been my father. That's another story. But this whole question of the uncanny. How can you film the uncanny? I don't think you can. You can't tangibly make the uncanny appear. And that's what you said. You said, 'We'll go to Pakistan and we'll film.' What do you do, film the building in which I sat talking to Kamal Sahib? So what! Or even film me talking now about going to Pakistan? How can I tell you about how I met Kamal Sahib, which was through a person with whom I was having an

affair at the time? Someone I was in love with. What do we have to do, get a photograph of the person to show her? Is that relevant to what I did? That is sacrilege. To use film, to realise, in images, my story of the occult and the uncanny, and shamanism, would be sacrilege. Because my story is absolutely sacred. Because it is about the sacred. And filming, taking photographs and filming – which is a kind of death in life, in every possible sense, at all times, every bit of film that has ever been filmed is immediately death – is sacrilegious. Sacrilegious being the theft of, the destruction of, the erasure of, the sacred. The sacred is what happens to Osiris. It is about dismemberment. It is about actual fragmentation. It is about surrender to something more than everything that could be seen. It cannot be filmed. It would be obscene. It would be obscene and sacrilegious. The only thing I could ever give you, which would be a compromise, and it's very difficult for me to assume the kind of arrogance, to assume that I could do it and ought to do it, would be simply, yeah: to sit in front of a camera and tell you the story. I do think anyone who's read my novels and *The Risen*, or just *The Risen*, or maybe not, who has just seen your film, who really, really, was possessed by your film – as people can be possessed by films – or really intrigued or fascinated or whatever, because it is obviously a bit of an introduction through a window into a person and his life, I think would find this final story amazing. Because it brings it all together. Absolutely, especially in connection to *The Risen*. I know that. I know that. I can't deny that. I know it would be. And I think in that sense that just to have me sitting and talking and saying it would be enough. But to have it as an illustrated lecture? No way. It has to be like reading a novel. When you read a novel you see Heathcliff and you see Catherine and you see the ghost at the window, in your own terms, in your own symbols, in your own inner secret mythology. We don't see it played by Nicole Kidman. That's where we reach the point of the rape of the sacred, the ultimate sacrilegious destruction, meaning our relationship to ourselves and to the natural world etc. For me, life is that kind of faith in film. Which I do not share. I might say, of course, it relates somewhat ironically to the Muslim faith. It was Mohammed who said, 'Nothing must be represented except the purely aesthetic.' That's why I make pots, you see. They're just sort of… They're nothing. They can't be sacrilegious because they're not claiming to be anything more, and yet they're aesthetic. Anyway, that's another story altogether. I suppose there is something deliberately… Well, obscene for me now, the very thought of telling you this story as a potential for becoming an illustrated lecture. It's got to be somehow taken in as a sort of completely inward experience. And the closest to that is a book, a novel, poetry. I mean, could you honestly and sincerely believe that you could take *The Four Quartets* by T.S. Eliot and make a perfect film to express the absolute truth of that poem? 'Go, go, go said the bird.' Right! Little birds! Little sparrows running across the lawn! 'Go, go, go said the bird.' I mean… Illustrated verse. I mean, could we? Someone did once I believe do a very good illustrated version of *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*, but that's a narrative. It's a story. You couldn't do the *Duino*

Elegies by Rainer Maria Rilke. It would be obscene, because every single choice of every image you choose is your… is an interpretation. It is not an access to the unknown, to the uncanny. A juxtaposition of three words in a poem by Rilke accesses the uncanny. One of my projects in Vienna was to go into the Freud Museum, into his study – and I had permission to film there – and was to film at night alone in a conversation with Freud and to tell Freud my experiences of the occult and the uncanny. Because I would believe that he would be there listening."

"I'm fully detached from any notion of making *Once out of nature…* as I had once hoped. We're making *Once out of nature…* right now, this is what we're doing. The other thing is, if you remember, when we talked about this a couple of weeks ago, one reference point for me – and I'm not making excuses at all – I'm just explaining it to you, and I think you understood this, we talked about, for example, Derek Jarman's *Blue*, something like that, which is in a sense a visual representation of something that is perhaps somewhat unknowable. But all it is, is a blue screen, isn't it?"

"It's that Francis Thomson poem, 'O world invisible we view thee…' That's my most favorite poem, which I learnt at school and have never forgotten."

"Read it to me. Recite it for me?"

"I'll probably get it wrong now, sort of so drugged at the moment on my painkillers.

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
Inapprehensively, we clutch thee!

Doth the fish soar to find the ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the air –
That we ask of the stars in motion
If they have rumour of thee there?

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars! –
The drift of pinions, would we harken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places; –
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, and your estrangèd faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

And lo, in the night my Soul, my daughter,
Cry, – clutching Heaven by the hems;

Do you know the last line?"

"No."

"And lo, Christ walking on the water
But not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

It's called 'In No Strange Land.' It was never published. It was found in his notebooks after his death. 'In No Strange Land.' Which is a beautifully ambiguous title. Which I rather hoped *Once out of nature…* would be. Now, *Once out of nature…* is the first phrase in a poem by Yeats, the last verse of 'Sailing To Byzantium.' That's Yeats writing a poem about what will happen when he dies. When he will cease to be a body, when he will cease to be part of the natural world, the world of nature. Seeing, imagining what he might be. Of course it's a bird."

"Will you let me film your death if it comes to it, if I am able to, as it were?"

"If we knew exactly and precisely when it might be, yeah. You're going be very disappointed. I can just see you afterward: 'Honestly! Honestly! We gave him mescaline, he wanted mescaline. OK, we set him up, we had all these beautiful girls around here from Arabia and goodness knows what else. We had the whole scene, this beautiful scene and we exactly timed it all. We had it absolutely perfectly worked out because the doctor had said this and he knew he was going to die within the next twenty-four hours so he agreed to take an injection so we knew it would occur in two hours time rather than wait and hang around. And so he was going to finally give me' – that's you – 'the final monologue. The ultimate truth. And you know what came out? All the same old bloody stories we've heard a hundred times and the same old novel, the same old story he's regurgitated in every one of his novels! Nothing new. There wasn't a single thing that was new! It was all the old stuff.'"

"The old stuff is still good stuff."

"You know, it's a very interesting question, 'Will you talk about death?' or 'Can I film you talking about death or your real death?' I mean, death, you know… Which death shall I talk about? The impending death or the enduring death? The death that one imagines one's going to finally stumble upon? Or the one that's going to preoccupy one forever? The impending or the enduring. They both have the word 'end' in the middle, please notice."

"Are you frightened of death at all?"

"Not at all. Not after Kamal Sahib. He's dead. Did I tell you the story about Bertrand Russell?"

"You knew Berty, did you?"

"Well I did actually, yes, I did funnily."

"Yeah, you worked at the Peace Foundation, right?"

"Yeah, well we've done all that too, you've already had all that."

"We don't need to go over it, but… When did he die? He died in the early Seventies, right?"

"Well, he was a Buddhist in his later days, as you know. He was a member of the Buddhist Society, and the leader of the Buddhist Society was a very famous scientist called Christmas Humphries, and he was giving a talk to the Buddhist Society one day in London. A big dinner, the annual Buddhist conference of the year. And in the middle of it someone came up and whispered something in his ear. It must have resembled the time when somebody came up and whispered something into the ear of George W. Bush when he was giving a little lecture to students at a university. 'Uh, Mr. President sorry to interrupt, but an airplane has just been flown into the etc.' Anyway, somebody came and whispered into the ear of Christmas Humphries, and he paused and he looked and said, 'Well, ladies and gentlemen, I have something very important to tell you. Sorry to interrupt my lecture, but Bertrand Russell has just died again.' It's useful being a Buddhist."

"Was religion ever important to you?"

"Of course."

"We never talked about religion, although in a sense, maybe we've been talking about religion all along."

"Yes. I was waiting for you to stop, of course. A shamanistic trip is to go and have a chat with God. Totally. It's *Le pèlerinage*. The pilgrim, the pilgrimage. What does the pilgrim look for? God. Goes out into the desert to find God, to find the sacred places where God has put his footprint in the sand."

"Can you tell me a little bit about what happens when he comes back and suffers this collapse? Then what?"

"The shaman?"

"Hmm."

"He comes back, falls apart, basically, or is already fallen apart. He comes back dead really. It's a sort of metaphorical, symbolic way of saying that he's died. You know? You come in and there he is, lying on the ground, as much as dead. He is dead. His experience has been so harrowing. He's left his body, gone away, and has died. As in all the great mystery religions. All the great mystery religions have rituals by which you practice being dead. That's what a mystery religion is. It's a preparation for death so that you know what to do when you die, like the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. It's a series of rituals that prepare you for the moment of death and the experience you go through. The shaman has come back, has become the victim, has sacrificed himself. He's been on this harrowing trip. He's taken the risk of dying, or has momentarily died. People believe that he will have momentarily died. He is the psychopomp. He is the person who can go into Heaven and come

back. And then he gradually returns to life. With the answers to the questions that have been asked."

"Is it then incumbent upon him to relay those answers to people?"

"Yes. He is the priest, he will preach. He is Christ crucified. And he came back! Christ came back! The whole Christian story is a shamanistic trip, it's just that the Christians don't want to admit it. He came back with the message. He was resurrected. The story of the shaman is about resurrection, just the same as Buddhism is about reincarnation. We're dealing with reincarnation. We're dealing with cyclic time. The shaman entered into cyclic time. He goes out of linear time into cyclic time. My novel *The Risen* is a whole 484-page novel which, by the end of it in a way I want you to realise could have been a single, vertical fraction of a second. Which of course is the falcon, hovering. Because it is both within time and outside of time. That's why I became a sha… interested in shamanism, with the hovering falcon."

"You were about to say… Did you almost say that's why you become a shaman?"

"I didn't say it."

"You almost said it. Is that what they call a Freudian slip, Peter?"

"I didn't slip into it. It proves not that I'm capable of a Freudian slip, because I didn't slip into it, but it does show that you have great insight into conversational hazards."

"Well, golly. Good for me. Did you see yourself as a shaman? Is that something…"

"I have lived out the shamanistic myth. But never, never deliberately. It has always been inadvertent. It's only looking back on things and seeing things that I realised that the story was there. I mean, it goes right back obviously to when I was at Cambridge and went to the Louvre and was walking down going to see the head of Meritaten, a little wooden sculpture from Amana, the head of a harp, that I'd been triggered into wanting to see by going into the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, and there was my falcon-headed sculpture. That is a shaman. That sculpture is of a shaman. The falcon-headed man. Teriesias is the shaman. That's why I saw the sculpture as Oedipus/Teriesias. He is Oedipus, I am Teriesias, or I am Oedipus and he is Teriesias. It was the interface, and the interface between Oedpius and Teriesias is the very nature of the shamanistic tradition. I was called. The shaman is called. I was called. Had I been living in a culture where shamanism existed and there was a shaman, and one day something happened to me, maybe the shaman would have come in and said, 'Well, I'm very sorry Mrs. Whitehead, I have bad news for you. You're going to have to dress him in a dress from now on. He's going to be a shaman.' Because the shaman often lives in his hut, all alone, dressed as a woman. In other words, he's feminised. He's Oedipus. He's both male and female, the schizoid self. Teriesias is the male priest shaman who spends seven years as a celebrated

harlot, as a priestess in a temple, as a prostitute. The shaman is a prostitute. He prostitutes himself for the sake of society. He is penetrated, though, by the spirit."

"For the sake of everyone?"

"Yes. And by that he draws the disease, or whatever it is, of the society, of the individual, into himself. Like Christ did. Chris is Horus. There's a famous poem by Hopkins called 'The Windhover' dedicated to Christ the Lord where he says he – Hopkins – is the prey. The prey of the falcon. The windhover, the kestrel falcon, who is Christ. That he wishes to be the submissive prey. He is dismembered. He becomes part of the shamanistic ritual, which is course the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the wine. Holy communion."

"We've reached the end of tape two. Maybe we should take a little break."

"I could do with a little nap, I think."

"OK."

5.

"Are you on manual focus?"

"No. Oh, manual? Sorry, yes. Always manual. I never use automatic. Do you use automatic?"

"Hmm..."

"Really?"

"I don't know how to put it on manual."

"No, I much… I can't really use automatic focus. I suppose I like the control. Life or death, eh?"

"That's a good one-liner."

"And cake… I think this is a real achievement."

"I haven't started to really do it properly yet. It's one of these things that the more you do, the more you do, the more you realise just what it's really about. I've probably made three hundred pots – maybe even more – in the last several years, because I keep doing it and stopping it, frantically, for three or four months then stop for three or four months. But out of that I'd say there are ten. Ten that I could call pots. And by the time I've done the ones I want to do now, that I see here and I know the way forward with the clays, those ten will become irrelevant too. It's alright. I'd sooner end my days with ten superb pots than a thousand junk, second-rate stuff."

"But those ten you like now that you say will be superceded by the next ten, is that… That's very self-critical. Very critical of yourself. Or is that what gets you up in the morning?"

"It doesn't matter to me, you see. I just enjoy it. It's therapeutic. It's just something I do. Yeah, if you want to call it 'getting up in the morning.' It's something physical to do."

"But it makes you happy?"

"Yeah, though happiness is of absolutely no use to someone like me."

"I wanted to ask you about happiness."

"No you didn't. I just gave you the idea now. What does it say?"

"What does that say?"

"'Are you happy?'"

"Kind of banal, but is happiness something you think about?"

"It's something I occasionally suffer. For the rest of the time I thoroughly enjoy my miseries and my strivings and my frustrations. I definitely throw pots because at the end of the day I can go to bed and sleep because I can see that pot I just made. Because you throw it once and then you finish it the next day. You get it right the way up and then you turn it, and I know it's going to be good. It didn't exist and now it exists. I've accomplished something. If I was a poet I would say, 'Fine, I've just written a draft of a new poem.' It might take a while to finish it, but I can sleep. I have done something. But it's not what I would sooner do. As soon as my new novel gets going, which is up there, started, the first few pages… I'm waiting, actually, to know that I've got three months ahead without any interruptions. Number one that I'm going to live, and number two that I've been sensible enough to avoid anything that can really suck me out and take me away. And can make no commitments to anything or anyone. In this dump of a house in this crazy, boring little village, I can achieve my silence, exile and cunning. Once I get into that novel, I'll be alright. There's a happiness there. A certain joy."

"You want to accomplish that. It's important for you to accomplish that novel?"

"The new one?"

"Well, any novel."

"Yeah. Well, I wouldn't do it if I didn't feel like that because it's a grueling business writing novels, you know."

"But the point is you don't feel that way about pots, and you didn't feel that way about films?"

"No."

"The pots and the films… This is kind of what I wanted to talk about. My first question on this new list is 'Do word and image have to conflict?' Are we talking about, in a sense, working with the image to facilitate, ultimately, the word? Working with the image means time away from – "

"I don't know what you mean by that. Honestly, I swear to God."

"Nor do I. I was hoping you'd be able to tell me."

"I think we're being sucked into a delusion here about the significance of this…"

"…so-called dichotomy…"

"…which Godard ploughed around with in the Sixties. Hmm… When I used it in the beginning of the film *The Fall*, actually 'In the beginning was the image,' it was really in the sense that I felt we were being dragged towards an environment in which the image would become the new tyranny. And I had, prior to that, always

considered the word, as a rational thing, to be the tyranny. Christian monotheism begins with 'In the beginning was the word.' And in that sense the development of rationality, which is connected, presumably, we think, very much with words, is a kind of tyranny. It is a kind of repression, oppression of emotion. And I used that expression 'In the beginning was the image' as a kind of irony, really. In fact the repression was no longer merely the word. It was now going to become the image, in the sense, in my film, of bang! Image! Dots! The digital revolution. The very first image in the film, you know, is the dots on the screen. The impending digital universe. *Alphaville*."

"With Lemy as shaman."

"Lemy's on a trip. He is a shaman. Exactly. He leaves the hotel Scribe and goes to Alphaville, the back of the north wind. To liberate the soul, to use a very, very boring word. But to liberate feeling. Choice, actually. Freedom of feeling."

"Choice…"

"Well, you can chose what to do in order to follow your feelings, whereas in Alphaville you cannot. Everything is determined by the computer, as now everything is becoming determined by the computer or the television or the newspaper. Very few people have the real strength and the courage and power now to go away from that world."

"Very interesting you say that, because one of my other notes here is about the Internet. Constantly being connected. It seems a little incongruous. You're very… You seem fascinated by the Internet, aren't you?"

"Well…"

"And it's been said many times before but – "

"I mean 'fascinated' is not the word. If it was 1941 and I was sitting on the cliffs of Dover, watching a falcon flying overhead, I might have been fascinated by the Nazis, assuming that they were amassing their troops just the other side of the water. And about to arrive and take us all over. I'm fascinated by the Internet because of its power and its ruthlessness. It's like me when I went to school. I arrived, a scruffy little working-class lad from the slums of Wandsworth, to be in an environment which was one of privilege and power, being – as far as I can see more and more from my own experience – exploited for all the wrong reasons and the wrong kind of way. So I had to assert my own identity and remain outside of it. To do everything I could not to be crushed. That's what I'm trying to do now, do everything I can not to be crushed by the Internet. Therefore I stand up to it. Try to confront it. I'm fascinated by it, yes, because it's so powerful and dangerous. We're always fascinated by the tyrant, by the barbarians at the door."

"What makes it so dangerous? I have plenty of ideas of my own, whether I've ripped them off from other people or not. I find my relationship to the Internet very destructive."

"It enables people to take the easy way out, to live without any real authentic responsibility for their lives, beings, feelings, ambitions, ideas, idealism. It's just the

takeover of a complete system of inauthentic communication. It's about inauthenticity when you use the word 'virtual' and all that. As far as I'm concerned it's stripping people from… Children in particular. Why I see it as a threat is not so much for people like you and me who, perhaps, have known another kind of consciousness and world where there wasn't the Internet. I see just how my own children are influenced by so many things that, as far as I'm concerned, and I hate to say it, makes me feel that they're very boring, that everything they talk about and think about and feel is second-hand. There's nothing coming from inside. It's crushing that inner thrust. That Pagan instinct. It's about the imagination. It's crushing the imagination. Is it imaginative for me to be able to talk about three different TV programmes this evening that I watched last night, and in which I can see a connection? That's the only kind of imagination that's left: shuffling the data. The data is becoming more and more and more and more second-hand, third-hand, fifth-hand, hundredth-hand."

"But is there any difference between that and being able to talk about the connections in three different novels you've read?"

"Yes, it's not so powerful. For me it's no different because I can choose. I can choose to read or make the connections or not, or whatever. In a way when you read something you are still in a position of a certain kind of choice. What is being eroded away without people realising it is choice, because in the programmes, in the whole thing that's coming at you, all the decisions have been made for you. Like big business, which is running both the politics and the Internet. In other words, we have choice but we have choice of only what they decide we can choose. Just a subtle form – is it subtle, I wonder? – it's just a brilliant form of hidden persuasion, to quote the title of a book that came out in the Sixties.

"Packard."

"Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders.* I mean, I will refer to what I consider to be one of the certain great assets, occasionally, of television and the media and the Internet and books, you know it's coming across – occasionally – something that is a masterpiece created by some individual who has expressed his individual views. Like for me the two greatest experiences that I've ever experienced on television are two films. One is *Edge of Darkness* and the other is *Century of the Self* by Adam Curtis, which is a work of total genius, because it shows how to have a democracy, to finance a democracy, the money has to come from somewhere and the only way to finance a democracy is to have enough money for the people who are making all the money to buy out all the politicians. The people who are making all the money have to be clever enough to manipulate the people so that they have less and less choice. All they do is vote, and they vote by buying things."

"You said something interesting when we talked on the phone, I think last night or the other night, and I'm going to use the phrase that you used. You talked about your apartment in Vienna and the wall upstairs, how there was a wall…"

"Yeah, there's a wall."

" …and you said it doesn't reflect reality back at you, you said, something like that. There was just this notion that – "

"Ah, yeah. My flat is at the top of a house, a very tall house, very typical of Vienna, right in the roof. It's a sort of loft, isn't it, actually? It's a modernised loft. And there's this sort of empty space downstairs with a tree in it, like you always have in these kinds of places. But there's no real view. Exactly opposite is this huge wall from one of the other buildings. I don't know why because normally there are other buildings and other windows, and it's just sort of a blank wall, you know, so I couldn't just sit there and look out and look at things. When I was in Abha in Saudi Arabia it was the most devastating thing because we were on the top of the highest mountain in the Middle East and you could just sit there and look out of the window and you could see eighty-seven miles to the sea. You could see eagles and vultures, and this is the supremacy of the image. You know, you would sit there and look. There was nothing else in the world that you wanted to do, actually. You would just become a shepherd and play your flute. And just sit on a rock and watch. Trap the odd falcon and go off hunting with it. And just watch this incredible beauty of this river of cloud and goodness knows what else coming up, and the valley below, five thousand feet. And when you have that, you don't need the Internet. You don't need television. You don't need a video camera."

"You scarcely need books."

"Well you do at night maybe because at night, you see, books come into their own. Writing maybe only happened, eventually, as we know it, by the fact that the sun goes out for eight hours. Bloody thing. You know more books are written per head of the population by the population of Iceland. I think there's only, I don't know how many, about two hundred and fifty thousand people, I think, in Iceland…"

"I think about three hundred and fifty, but yeah, around there."

"… and I think something like one in ten people writes novels. Because it's so dark most of the time."

"I think Norway has more newspapers per capita than any other country in the world. The same anecdote."

"The same. Hmm… So I was looking forward to getting a flat in Vienna, a beautiful place looking right over the Danube, you know, one of those nice old classical buildings that I could imagine. I couldn't afford to be in Paris overlooking the Seine but maybe I could be in Vienna overlooking the Danube with the Alps in the background. I was taken up to this flat and there was just this blank wall and I thought that's good! I will not be tempted, you know? And I may have used that phrase 'reflected back into myself.' The ideal place for me to work. It was going to be an introverted flat in an extroverted situation. It was a real little *Steppenwolf* flat. It wasn't the kind of flat where I could expect to be entertaining the world at large. Wheeling and dealing in the world of the media to raise money to make a new film,

blah blah and all that. I thought it was the ideal compromise. It was fine. Listen, we're making a meal out of a very small crumb here."

"What, with the apartment and the wall?"

"Yeah. What is interesting is that it was of interest to you."

"It's of great interest to me."

"That I should have said it?"

"You've explained it in an interesting way such that it has meaning way beyond a wall in a Viennese apartment."

"I did think that maybe – because there are other flats all the way around from the houses, all of whom presumably can see the wall, although they couldn't see into my flat – I thought I should get a really high-powered projector, you know, one of these new DVD projector things, and just watch. Get a painter in to paint the wall white, because it's a bit grey. Of course you'd have a build a scaffold, it would cost a bloody fortune. Mind you I could have climbed up over the roof, come down on a rope, and abseiled down and painted it one night. And then I'd have this screen and suddenly everyone would wake up or the nighttime would come and they'd go look out of the window and there would be *Alphaville* showing on the wall, or something. Godard's *Notre Musique.* Antonioni's *The Red Desert."*

"One thing I wanted to come back to which I thought was quite interesting was this dichotomy you just established, at least in my mind, between the virtual and the authentic."

"To go back to what we were talking about… maybe it's connected, maybe it'll come back to it, 'In the beginning was the image.' I would say, if I were making *The Fall* now, I would not have started with that. I would have said 'In the beginning was the imagination' rather than the word. And I think that's the key to the problem that we're nibbling at here, which I think is a fruitless nibbling – it's a *Nibelungen* – because in fact it's somehow not quite right. We are making a meal out of something that should just be nibbled at. The real difference is between the word and the imagination."

"OK, we nibbled to find what we really need to be munching at."

"Yeah, we're getting there. We're getting there."

"So the word and the imagination. Right."

"I mean there's this guy… I don't know if you've looked at my novel on my website. There's this guy called Rodolfo Llinas. This is one of my little satellite websites on my novel nohzone.com. Rodolfo Llinas is my man. And he's the one who worked for years and years and years with, of all things, the octopus. I can't remember why he had to work on the octopus, but he was studying the brain and neurology and wave patterns and so on and the brain and thinking and consciousness, this and that and the other. He's one of the world's experts on modern theories about consciousness. Studying it from the biological point of view as well as the theoretical point of view. You know, because there are two approaches to consciousness. One is the nuts and bolts of the operation and the other is how we

use words and think about words and think about images. And he is the one who has published all his work on the theory that the absolute beginning, in that sense, the source of consciousness and everything that we seem to be as individuals, conscious beings, is in fact the imagination. That perception isn't anywhere near as important as one thinks. The word isn't anywhere near as important as one thinks. Perception, you see, one could argue is largely the image. What he is saying, basically, is that the image is secondary. What is important is the imagination. We function entirely on the pivot of the present. The Japanese call it the pivot word, which is the word at the end of the sentence and the beginning of the next. I think I've talked about this. We live absolutely… Actually, we never live in the present at all, in a way. The present is always going by so fast. Either we're only ever living in the present or we're not living in the present. But by living, we're on this see-saw cusp. See-saw. I see, I saw. I see into the future, I saw into the past. It's about what we remember. Memory. But most of all it is about how we use memory, this vast databank of memory in order to imagine. I have to imagine what I'm going to do next. I have to imagine what I'm going to say next. What am I going to say next? What's the sentence I'm next going to say? I have to imagine it. I actually imagine it before I say it. There's this momentary gap, you know, between consciousness and action, and in that gap, that amount of time, we imagine what we're going say or do. You could say it's dreaming. In the beginning was the dream. It might be much better. I have to imagine, here and now, on 1 August 2007, am I going to be around this time next year? On the 3 August was the date of Isis rising. Am I going to die this year after all? Let's hope not. If not, what am I going to do with my time? I can do a number of things: write this novel. Not write any novels at all. Throw pots all the time. Leave this dump and go and find myself a rambling old cottage on the Hebrides or somewhere. Or whatever. Or go back to Vienna, finally, in a wheelchair and try and make this film. Heroically make this wretched, bloody film. Or maybe not write this novel but write – re-write – *Once out of nature…* If somebody could come in and say, 'You have three months to live.' Absolutely. With absolute precision [*phone rings*], as happened with Dennis Potter… I better answer it… Hello? [*Hello.*] Oh hi. [*Are you busy?*] Well, I am actually. I'm just talking about Rodolfo Llinas to Paul Cronin. [*Oh he's still with you? He's sleeping there?*] Well no, he's got a car this time so he'll probably be going later. I'll say 'hi' shall I? [*Yeah, say hi.*]"

"Hello."

"Yeah, so we're in the middle of a take. [*He's got a car, you said?*] Well, he's just rented one for the day to bring my stuff up. We'll talk a bit later, yeah? [*Oh no, if I'd known I would have given him the wardrobe.*] Oh right! [*You didn't think about it?*] No, I didn't. [*You forgot.*] Yeah, I did. Sorry. [*OK well, shall I call you later?*] Yeah, call me later. [*In an hour?*] Yeah, we'll be finished filming in an hour, an hour and a half or something. Well done about the hypnotherapist! [*Yeah, I'm in love with her! She hasn't called me today although she promised. So I'm in lovelorn*

torture.] Ah! You poor thing. But you've been like that ever since the day I met you. [*Yeah, even the midwife.*] Look at the name? Mid-wife. Your wife. [*Yeah!*] At last you've got yourself a wife. It's what you've always wanted. [*And an older one.*] And an older one. [*She's like a mature woman.*] To hell with all these men! [*Yeah, she is the mother of one son. We know the type!*] God help him! Fancy being an Oedipal son. OK, talk to you later. Bye… Can you do me a favour? Can you put this on that little silver thing at the end of the thing, you know the little cradle thing so it'll charge up? Brilliant. Aha! It didn't click on… Ah! Took its while. Anyway, to get back to the imagination, in Japanese poetry the most magical moment is the pivot word. And if you have a haiku which has five, seven, five lines and all that, you use a pivot word. And the pivot word usually comes at the end of the line, the phrase. You read through and it has its meaning, but it's also the first word of the next line. So it's the same word. But it has a totally different meaning because the word has two meanings. We have millions of words in English which have two, three, four, five different meanings. The subtlety is the connection of the word, the two meanings of it, relating to the two phrases which are usually symbolic images, and everything. In other words it's outside of time. It's outside of linear time. It's actually in a moment when time stops. It's the hovering falcon, is it not? It's what I was saying earlier about the see-saw point. So the pivot word… Now, that's where we live. We live constantly on the pivot instant, between past and present. T.S. Eliot, 'The Four Quartets.' 'Time present and time past,' etc. So there's the past… Now, everything about the past, if I at this moment want to draw on it, think about it, talk about it, or experience it in any way, I have to imagine it. So my imagination is, at this moment, functioning absolutely on anything I might say or want to do or think about, or anything in the past. You might say, relevant to this story, 'Can you remember the last moment when you saw your father?' So in a way I imagine it, because I'm not seeing it, am I? I'm not there. Totally virtual, isn't it? Totally a little film in my mind somewhere. A few little digital bits recorded in the neurons which I can access or not access. That accessing is actually using a faculty which is related absolutely to my sitting down now and saying, 'Right. What am I going to do this Christmas?' Because I hate Christmas so much, where will I go? Or what will I do next week? Or a new pot? You said you like my pots and I can just see one and I think, 'Yeah, I forgot to get the black slip from Bath Potters. Tomorrow I must phone them.' So I imagine now what I must do tomorrow. I make a list. That's called life, projecting yourself into the future, having something to do. Planning the things you want to do. So the imagination is, according to Llinas, not merely a device that we're using throughout life. And if we use it successfully we can survive. But it is also the very way we develop a child through time, how we develop the consciousness of ourselves and the world. In other words the world is actually created by dream, or by the imagination. We imagine the world into existence. We come, actually, prepared biologically with a template of questions in the brain that have to be answered. And therefore every single one of us creates, thanks to the way

we were brought up, thanks to every word that is spoken to us, every image that we see as a child. Where we live. Do we have a garden? Are we living in the city? Do we ever see the stars? Do we have brothers and sisters? Each and every one of us creates a totally different universe because we imagine it. The imagination is fundamental, is the power of consciousness. I don't know how we got onto that subject. We were talking about word and image. When somebody tells you that 'In the beginning was the word' and here is a book of words, what are they saying? These are the words that you must obey. It was the beginning of monotheism. This is the truth to which you must adhere. Every single word of this Bible is literally true. And there's at least twenty million people in America who claim they believe that every single word in the Bible is literally true. As, of course, the Muslims believe that every single word of the Koran is not only literally true but is absolutely written by Allah, and was channeled down through his prophet. There are an awful lot of people in the world, when you add up six billion, who believe not in rationality at all. They live by faith, and faith is the imagination. It is not reason."

"Hmm…"

"I will imagine God in the way I want to imagine him, thank you very much. I see him as a Jewish gentleman in a jewelry shop with a long, white beard, at a Macintosh computer. He's been very clever. He's bought one. He's cashed in on the craze, thought the only way I can get through to all these guys down there is to get on the Internet and get through to them all. Little buggers. I read in the newspaper today, which was rather fun I thought, about some priest who is the Dean at the second most important cathedral in Australia, who's just been de-frocked because some kids came and were skateboarding near the church and he came out and accused them of being God knows what. All this racist abuse came out and he told them this and that and the other. Apparently unbelievable hatred of these young kids, and it ended up almost in a fistfight, and goodness knows what else and everything. One of the kids filmed the whole thing on his mobile and put it up on YouTube. It was in that sense you could argue thank God for the Internet. But it only stayed up a short while. Whoever-it-was managed to get it taken off YouYube, but the damage had been done. He's been sacked. Anyway, we were talking about God, weren't we?"

"We were talking about imagination. The word. The imagination."

"This whole question of word and image for me is very related, I think, absolutely, to the Freudian ideas and Jungian ideas and the structure of consciousness. There is, clearly, reason. There is an image that we have of self, there's a point, some kind of focus within the whole gamut of consciousness that we have which we keep coming back to, which we call 'the self,' which by the way can be dissolved in three seconds by nitrous oxide. Ronald Laing will tell you that. Nitrous oxide, sniff a bit of it. It's called laughing gas, which is very amusing, really, when you think about it. That something so simple, nitrous oxide… and you have no self. The self just evaporates."

"What do you become?"

"You don't become a vegetable or anything. I suppose you become enlightened. You become pure imagination. You access the unconscious, which is the great project of the human race, actually. To become conscious of the unconscious."

"I want to ask you about something different. About Columbia. You said that, in a sense, being inside Columbia was the culmination of the previous six months of your time in the States. What actually did you experience that spring, inside those buildings for those five days?"

"Before Columbia? Sorry, in Columbia? What did I experience in Columbia?"

"Yes. What happened to you?"

"Recognition of my own paranoia as an Englishman. Imagining what America was capable of. Having great difficulty in accepting that my imaginary America, my Peter Whitehead-imagined America, was so dangerous and so worrying, to the point where I was beginning to think I was paranoid. For me Columbia was absolutely an affirmation and confirmation of everything that I thought and felt about America. That I wasn't a lone voice by any means. That I wasn't a funny little guy running around New York trying to make a film about American culture, and how it was expressing what I consider to be my fears about the potential of America, what America was really doing, what America really was. To be summed up, in a word: howl. Ginsberg's poem to me suddenly, somehow, you know became that much more real, that much more relevant. It was just an enormous confirmation to be with a bunch of other people, intelligent people, in the city, who had got together and were prepared to take enormous risks, physically and socially, to confront what the university embodied, which was a privately-owned institution, in charge of education of all these young guys, and in charge of all the research development that the university was funding for PhD students and professors, and this kind of thing, at which it was revealed that quite a lot of work had been done, apparently, by the physics department, and this, that and the other, was for the military. That the war being waged in Vietnam was not just being waged by government, by a crackpot president or a bunch of political fundamentalists. It was even being run and organised and perpetrated by an intellectual elite who were being financed by this government in this university. If you went along to the university and learned your physics and you were basically being indoctrinated. It's *The Manchurian Candidate*. And the other issue at Columbia, of course, was the occupation of the gymnasium in Harlem. It was just this ruthless racism. At least that's how it was interpreted, as racism. The takeover by the university… they wanted to expand their empire into the slums, and that was fine. Let's just move in and knock it all down. Push everybody out. It's exactly what they were doing in Vietnam. We want the rubber plantations. We want the natural resources of Vietnam. So all the things that I had been dealing with, for five years, not four

months, from the very beginning of working with Mark Lane and the assassination of Kennedy, the *Rush to Judgment* book, etc. I don't know why I grew up like that, in a way. I don't know why if I went and saw a film called *Suddenly* or a film called *The Manchurian Candidate*, or I saw a bunch of American films, that I would take it for granted, absolutely, that they were true, and that I'd watch television and listen to a bunch of politicians and know that it was not true. It was always totally evident to me. I just felt I had a hypersensitive Geiger counter, looking for bullshit. And nobody does bullshit better than the Americans, on every level. There are some good guys, I'm not denying."

"So you're inside and you talked about really communing with these people."

"For me it was an act of communion. I was suddenly at one with a bunch of other people in situation within a wall, a barricade, in which we were basically at war. It was war. I went upstairs, looked out the window, and there were these rows of soldiers, in their uniforms, with their guns on their hips, waiting to go in and bash up all these barbarians."

"And I just wanted to talk about what happened afterwards. From Columbia through to Edinburgh, eighteen months."

"Was it? That long?"

"Yeah. April '68 through to August '69."

"Well, I came back to England with the film, fairly shortly after Columbia ended, knowing they were after me and after my film. Got out, got off the plane, Bobby Kennedy was shot dead."

"I know the chronology. Sorry, I don't want to interrupt you, I just wanted to get…"

"I was going to say, then I spent the next X amount of months recovering from my nervous breakdown and editing the film. OK, the film was shown in Edinburgh but it was finished I think in February/March."

"Really? Of course, yes. So what we you doing throughout '69?"

"I'd met Penny Slinger."

"Thanks to Michael Kustow."

"Thanks to Michael Kustow. And started, I think, to live in Ashwell, in the country. I'd left London and gone to life in the country for the first time. I started to work on the project with Penny Slinger about Lilford Hall which became a book in the end, and did some filming with Penny there."

"Oh yeah, we looked at that footage."

"Yeah."

"The *Exorcism* book?"

"Yeah. Well, she did that later but all the photography and all the images we were doing… So I began to work with Penny Slinger, that's the truth of it. That sums it up."

"But can I remind you of something you told me, who knows when, I don't remember when."

"Sorry, I'm going to go back on that. I hadn't met Penny then, had I?"

"I think that might make sense because *The Fall* did play at the ICA when Michael was running – "

"That's right. What's the date on that poster?"

"I think it's '69. I can't remember. I'd have to check. I don't think it's '70. I think it's 60-something."

"Oh yeah."

"So that could work, that could be right."

"Yeah, that's about right."

"You told me that – and I did talk to other people in New York about this, who were very involved in New Left in '68 – you told me there was essentially this notion of 'After Columbia,' for you anyway, and I think for other people there was a question of 'We can either go forward with this, we can either continue with this, and we have to up the ante really, we have to seriously up the ante, or we can walk away from it.'"

"Well, I'd given seventy-five dollars to Angelo Mannsraven to get me a gun and I was prepared to become a warrior. Except I – "

"In the sense that the Weather Underground became?"

"Yeah, I was prepared to… Not in a sense, exactly like that. Had I known the Weather Underground was there…"

"They weren't there yet."

"No, but had I know I might have joined them. Although I don't think so. I was always the loner. I would have let them get on with it. I would have got my rifle and I would have done my *Manchurian Candidate*. I would have decided who it was I was going to shoot. I would have done my *Suddenly* trip and I would have shot who it was I had decided to shoot."

"You've never told me who that person is."

"Well, I would have thought it would have changed quite quickly after that, after the Columbia period. But I knew I had become, what's the word? Radicalised. You couldn't be more radicalised than that, and that if I was in fact to stay in America, that's the way I would have to go. I'd gone there to make a film about violence and the collapse of protest, and protest had collapsed so what was the next step? The only next step was action, direct action. And I think I wavered. I very nearly did it. The gun. It was Angelo who said, 'Listen, go back home man. Smoke some good pot. Go back home. I'll get you some for tomorrow. Have a good smoke. It's not worth it, man. Not worth it. Get some good coke.'"

"You know I tried to find Angelo."

"Did you?"

"I didn't try too hard. He might still be around."

"I doubt it. He was a lovely man. Anyway, and I did think yeah, I'm not prepared to be killed for America, for this whole institution that I hate. In other words I was back at Asheville. I was not prepared to die just because I needed to stand up against Asheville and everything it stood for, the British elite. It's much easier just to walk away and say, 'I got what I needed out of it. Good. Move on.' And I think the breakdown came from knowing, actually, when I came back, that I didn't really want to make the film either. The real pressure on me was to feel I'd spent all this money, you see. I had all this film and I had to make a film. I couldn't actually walk away from the film because of the money, so I had to finish the bloody film."

"Funny that. That's exactly how I feel about the Columbia film right now. Exactly."

"Yeah."

"I have to go back to New York next week and start editing."

"Well, be very careful, because when I started editing *The Fall*, that was it. I very quickly fell apart. And then it took me probably six months between the moment when I sat down and started to decide to edit it and the time I finished it, having a nervous breakdown in the middle of it. But I did bloody well finish it. I did keep at it and I did feel that this was my way forward. I suppose I thought, 'Well OK. I'm not going to go and shoot somebody. I have this film, I will make my film and see if it does anything.' I was, presumably, motivated by the idea of it. I could see, somehow, some way of putting it together."

"This is what I wanted to ask you. What did you think it could do? Because you talk about how in Edinburgh you thought: 'Not changed the world…'"

"Yeah, well you don't think quite like that. You don't actually think, 'I'm going to make this film and I'm going to show it here and there and everything and I'm going to overthrow the government.' You don't really. It's just, 'I have to finish this film! It has to be good enough to be a film.' But I think by this time, you know, I was fully aware that Godard's films had maybe changed me but hadn't really changed the French political system. He may have foreseen the occupation of the Sorbonne and made a film called *La Chinoise*, but did he really provoke it? I was unsure about the power of any film I might make or anybody else could make, to actually confront the institution, government, the state, big business, the industrial complex, or whatever they were calling it in the Sixties. Which of course is the whole story of *Century of the Self*, how big business, in alliance with politics, each would finance the other. The one would bring in the laws that the business people could exploit to make the most profit to give the money back, to get the politicians back, depended on some soporific manipulation of the people. And that was to be done by commodification… the commodification of the human being, and became the commodities that you wanted. You became a commodity yourself. And that's why I hate the present time. I see people becoming commodities. They can only talk as commodities about commodities. There is no real sense of… And everything that

was once culture which was supposed to be a significant part of developing consciousness about meaning and life and everything, is just shopping. Fashion. Hideous. A few wars going on in the rest of the world a long way away. You know? 'The Iraq war is not quite so well-filmed as Vietnam was filmed.' But you know in the Sixties it was new to film a war. We were very excited. We got some good images. Now, you know, we can't be bothered to film the Iraq war. We've seen it all before. Anyway, the news… We need all that time to advertise things. You could say I was pessimistic."

"One could say that."

"I suppose I am."

"I want to change tapes and I want to do a few more minutes."

"You mean you've got a tape that's only five minutes?"

"One doesn't need to play all the notes."

"My hands are falling to bits."

6.

"How many books? You keep talking about this number of books as if you're carrying a hundredweight."

"I think I bought about twenty books this morning. Just found this great bookshop. Who'd have thought it?"

"People are throwing books away now. You can't give them away. You take books to Oxfam, they don't want them. We're going to have to burn the books."

"Shall we burn the books?"

"Let's have a huge bonfire. Peter Whitehead burning his books. I've burnt my boats often enough."

"You mean your twenty-six ships?"

"Not quite. I'll tell you the story one day."

"Yeah, yeah. I'll believe it when I hear it. And even then…"

"No, you won't believe it because you'll hear the whole thing and you'll say, 'Coincidence.'"

"Did you ever… I don't really know how to ask this question."

"Well I certainly won't know how to answer it then."

"Did it ever upset you that you were never sort of part of the club?"

"Which club?"

"Any club."

"Well, I couldn't be part of the club. I never was, was I? Ever."

"Well this is what I mean. Did that upset you ever?"

"I never knew an alternative. I always felt privileged. I felt unique."

"Being such an outsider."

"Yeah. Because I was an outsider right from the very beginning, from very early on when I went to school, when I first went to school."

"Before Asheville?"

"Yeah. Oh, yeah. Asheville College, Harrogate."

"Before that?"

"Hmm..."

"How were you different even before that at school?"

"Well, my first memory of that kind of thing was certainly going to school in Leyland, so how old would I have been? Five or six? Because as I say, we left Liverpool because of the war. The houses were bombed, my father was away. My mother had to get work, actually. She ended up working in the Spitfire factory in Leyland and she rented a little room in a house there where we lived, she and I in this room. I went to school in clogs, wooden clogs. She went off to the Spitfire factory to make Spitfires and I would go off to school. And I can remember then feeling very strange. I still have my school report. I've never ever, ever, ever lost it. You know I was just absolutely top of everything. Everything. It was sort of thirty pupils, number one. Everything. Ten, ten, ten, ten, ten, ten, nine and eight. It was just silly. Nothing to do with class or anything like that. I wasn't in a school – then – where I was any different. I was just the bloke from Golden Hill Lane or whatever it was. But the fact that I lived in a room with my mother, with no father, I suppose even at that time it would have been slightly taboo, slightly different. But then, you see, I was always moving. We'd stay there a year, then we'd go somewhere else for a year and so on. We were always moving, so each time I would arrive in a whole new place. I never had any time then, even in the schools, to integrate into the schools, you see. And then, eventually, when my father came back and we went to London, I suppose by then we'd been in Carnforth for a couple of years. I liked Carnforth. I was very happy in Carnforth, on the edge of Cumbria. That was paradise for me in every possible way. I finally became myself. Totally. I loved Carnforth, right near the sea and the mountains and everything. But I was already a total loner. I had my bicycle, can't remember having friends. Go off, collecting birds' eggs and doing all the weird funny little things that boys did in those days. And my father came back, etc. Then I ended up in London. I went to a school in London where again I was the Lancashire boy who came out with all these little Cockneys, the Lancashire boy who suddenly appeared from Lancashire and lived with his mum and dad. We lived together for about three or four months before he went into hospital in Wandsworth. And I went to this school, and I was top there again. Being top of a school always, you can't avoid it. You go there and you're with three hundred boys. At Asheville it was five hundred boys, and I was top. I don't know how I dealt with it. I took it for granted after a while, but that's part of taking it for granted, that I was so emotionally inclined towards being different and alone and a loner anyway that that merely reinforced it."

"But later on you are constantly around people. Throughout the Sixties, when you were making films, you were constantly surrounded by people."

"Who? I wasn't surrounded by anybody. Who?"

"Well you were constantly with people filming."

"No. When I made *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* how many days filming were there?"

"Ten? I don't know."

"Ten. Over eighteen months. The only time I met the Stones was when I was… for the two days when I was in Ireland. Mick was always saying, 'Come on over Pete.' Brian Jones was ringing me up, 'Come on round.' I never ever went."

"Really?"

"Never. This is the hideous thing about this reputation I have about being the swinger in the Sixties… Surely I've told you this?"

"You have told me this."

"I've only been in to a nightclub ten times in my life, and one of those I met Dido."

"This is all in the film, yeah."

"Yeah."

"I just want to…"

"I don't like people. Don't feel comfortable with people. Quite like one-to-one relationships with women, in which I overindulge, give far too much to, but it does develop very interesting, passionate, crazy, wonderful relationships that I've had all my life. That's been my life. People have just been my girlfriends, women, wives, mistresses. *That* I could never resist. But people, being a member of the club, as you call it… I was expected to become a member of the club at Asheville. I arrived there when I was twelve, a little guy in his gray suit. I was expected to become a member of the club. I was different at every possible level to every single one of them. Financially, my accent, and as regards my intelligence. I excelled there in things that I set out to do. I was captain of the Under-15s, the Under-16s, the rugby football team, which in Yorkshire is quite something. It's a tough game in Yorkshire. And I was the school organist. So you could never get away from me at Asheville. You could not get away from me at Asheville. I was in the plays and the theatre and all this kind of stuff. So I wasn't a member of the club."

"Sounds like you were a member of every club."

"I was in love with Norma Whiteley, who was the woman in charge of the infants."

"How old was she?"

"Eighteen."

"Anyway, maybe I'm just pushing it. I'm just curious."

"And I spent hours and hours every day in the Memorial Hall, locking myself in playing the organ. I used to get up early. Everyone else got up at 7.30. I used to get up at 7 o'clock and sneak out even before the masters and go up into the Memorial Hall and play music."

"We should go back there."

"Still there."

"Is it really? We should go back there."

"Why?"

"Could be interesting."

"I loved that instrument, that orchestra. I had a whole orchestra. Just go on, switch it on. *Prrrrrrt*. Two beautiful big keyboards, all these voices. Voices. They call them voices. *Vox angelica.* Voice of the angels."

"Have you played an organ since?"

"I tried. There was just that one. It was an extension of me. I could just go in and switch it on and play for an hour and not notice anything I played. I'd just go out and go off. It was just improvising. I wasn't very good at playing, actually. I was very good at improvising. That's what you have to do anyway, when they come in and do this and you have to play and they go out, you have to play the hymns and things. For me it was an orchestra. I used to be composing. I was reading, I'm sure I've told you all this before, a book called *Beloved Friend*."

"No, I don't know this. What is this?"

"It was a book written by Nadezhda Filarentovna von Meck, a very rich Russian woman who was the patron of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky."

"Yeah, I remember."

"They had a very, very long and passionate amazing love affair which was all written down in these amazingly beautiful letters between them. This intelligent, sophisticated, very rich widow, and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, a homosexual. And they were absolutely one of the great love affairs of all time. For twenty years, I think it was, or more. And they never met. They met once apparently, on an underground train and were so embarrassed he fell out of the underground train and nearly killed himself. I was reading all this stuff about Tchaikovsky and playing Tchaikovsky on the organ. I could just pick up on themes and things. You know, all the kids would come into school and say, 'Oh God, what's Whitehead playing today. It sounds like Tchaikovsky's Fifth.' But it wouldn't be quite. It would be Tchaikovsky's Fifth mixed with 'I've Got a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts.' And I could sort of intercut all sorts of strange… I used to love it. Loved it. I was a very strange guy. I was a strange guy. Still am! Don't know about 'was.' Why join a club?"

"A lot of people need a club. A lot of people need to belong to something."

"I never belonged to anything and never felt I ought to belong, except to the world of nature."

"Funny that. I was about to ask you about *Once out of nature…* That poem. Yeats. Do you remember the poem?"

"Sort of."

"Please."

"No, you want me to recite it?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I'll get it wrong again. I always get it a weeny bit wrong."

"That's alright. Whoever's reading this will read it on the Internet and they can always google the real poem."

"I haven't given you permission to put all this on the bloody Internet. What's it going to be called? 'Further Conversations'?"

"It's going to be called *Once out of nature…* That's the whole point."

"But you're hijacking my title!"

"That's true. I'll tell you what. When you publish your book, I'll wipe all traces of this film off the Internet."

"OK."

"That I promise."

"I must type it out and get you to sign it."

"Fine. I've got a pen in my hand."

"Once I've gone, who knows what'll happen."

"Who does indeed know. *Once out of nature…* What does the poem mean to you?"

"Didn't I ever show you my notebook from 1962?"

"You did."

"I did?"

"You did. Remind me."

"It's just that in one of my notebooks I made reference to this poem in 1962."

"When you were in Greece, is that right?"

"That's right. Can't talk further on that subject."

"OK."

"What does the poem mean to me? Hmm… Well, I always liked poetry. Always read a lot of poetry. Especially at the Slade. Especially at Cambridge and the Slade. That was my poetry period, when I was supposed to be doing… Like now, with my pottery period, it's a way of getting away from all these wretched films. My poetry period was definitely at Cambridge when I was supposed to be doing science and God knows what else. OK, I was reading Eliot, Yeats and Rilke. They're rather obvious ones. Very obvious ones. They were the greats. Yeats in particular. No, no, I think Rilke was more important to me than Yeats. But I became obsessed by this one poem called 'Sailing to Byzantium,' one of his most famous, one of his most obvious poems, the last verse of which – it's all about death, what's going to happen to him beyond this life. It's about reincarnation really. What is he going to become? Or what would he like to imagine he would become when he dies, because after all the poet is always trying to peel away the outside layers of what we call the 'real' and access the 'surreal' or what I call the r-field, what they might call the symbolic or whatever, etc. which my novel *The Risen* is about. My novel *The Risen* is totally about the mummified falcon and reincarnation. The birth of the falcon. The relationship of the egg, the living falcon and the mummified falcon, the three states of being. This is all related to Yeats really. His famous poem 'The Second Coming'

mentions the falcon, and I'm sure I've mentioned this to you. 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; the falcon no longer hears the falconer…' He knew the meaning of the falcon. The falcon is both Christ and Horus. It is the Oedipal son. It is the son of God. In ancient Egypt the falcon *was* God. The hieroglyph of God was the falcon on a golden perch. I had all my falcons on golden perches in Arabia. All my little Gods. And all those little Gods I was producing in my falcon centre. Anyway, Yeats' poem, yeah. I just discovered one day that I had sort of memorised the last verse, for some unknown reason, which is so important to me. I think when you memorise something, you admit to memorising something and being obsessed by something. I was obsessed by this last verse of the poem, and people think. 'Well, explain why.' And you sort of think, hmm… Explain why. 'What does it mean to you,' like you've just asked. I'm afraid to say, you don't know, because if you knew you wouldn't be obsessed by it anymore. That uncanny link is broken once you understand it. Once you have rendered the unconscious conscious, freed yourself from the haunting of it, resolved the hidden complex, the hidden knots, then you don't need it anymore. Maybe you move on. It doesn't have that numinous power and connection with you anymore. And I think it took me a long time to figure out, actually. I would always go off and read books of criticism. *The Symbolism of Yeats' Poetry* by Professor James Stratford Clark Heathcoat or something. And you read it and you think, 'God, what pompous bullshit.' And somehow I never quite laid my finger on it, until I realised it was very simple. It was dealing with the idea of death and becoming a soul, in the Egyptian sense, because he refers to it, actually. Do you want to hear it?"

"Yes please."

"If I can remember it. Maybe I should go and get it to be exact."

"No."

7.

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

"That's the story of my life."

"I'm going to turn the camera off."