

# Fool that I am

*Tell me. What happened?*

What do you want to know?

*Tell me about the bird.*

Jenny was here. Jenny Spires. She's my girlfriend from the Sixties, who was the girlfriend of Syd Barrett at the time, I might say. And we became rather close. It was she even set me up with the Stones and why I filmed the recording studio and everything for...

*Pink Floyd, you mean?*

Pink Floyd. Did I say the Stones? You see, this is why I can't really be of much use. I get everything wrong. I couldn't spell Joanna's name the other day. However much I tried, I couldn't work it out in an email, how to spell her name. Two "n"s or... I have this kind of block everywhere... Anyway... OK, what was I talking about?

*The bird. Your bird.*

Yeah. And she saw it in a little box at the side. And it jumped out and it tried to struggle and go on and on, beneath the hedge and everything. Somebody had put a sort of tray, a little saucer of water or something. I mean, how inept can you get? Anyway, she grabbed it and popped it back in the box and brought it in and said, "I got a present for you." She thought it had been hit by a car. That was the first theory.

*This was just a box by the side of the road?*

Well, somebody had found the bird and decided to put it in a box, so somebody else could deal with it. And she brought it in, obviously knowing that I was a bit of a bird man. I didn't think it had a remote chance of anything. I put it in the corner, like this – two broken legs it appeared to be, and a broken arm. It's like me. I have two completely dislocated shoulders. Anyway... it's actually settled in nicely.

*What sort of bird is it?*

It's a collared dove. Now, they actually live... the adults have colonised the village. They're everywhere, together with the swifts and the other house martins and everything. But unfortunately they're addicts of Sky TV, and they've decided to nest on the dishes, the Sky dishes, everywhere – which is perfect for them. It's the right kind of shape and everything. Dove and pigeons only nest... very small nests. They make a nest, they don't make it very deep. It's almost a platform. And they sit on it and do it like this and everything. And in a tree... I mean, one nested in this tree here... actually right inside the tree – they get away with it. The other ones, they go and get on the Sky bloody thing. So it's fine. Well, they have the thing. They have two eggs, and if they don't drop off it's a miracle. We had horrendous storms this year. Then the chick hatches, then it reaches just the size when it's between a chick and starting to flap its... and then develop its wing feathers and everything, and it drops out. The wind just blows it out. It drops forty feet. It smashes its legs and its shoulder. God knows how many die. But it's been remarkable. It's completely grown all the feathers in its wing, although it's still a bit bent. And completely, now, because it screwed up its tail, completely ejecting all the old tail feathers. So it'll be perfectly alright. It'll never fly. I can never let it back to the wild. I'll have to build a big aviary in the garden, on the other end under that hill. Tree. Why did I say hill, you see? Tree. And it'll just live there. It's quite happy. Birds seem to accept this kind of engagement. It's been fascinating to see it surviving.

*How long have you had it?*

Only about six weeks. I had to buy this huge cage because it had to have enough space in it to be able to go from here to here to actually exercise its wings, and this, that and the other. No one else would have done it or could have succeeded with it, I promise you. I'm really quite proud of my work with that little bird, because it was, like me, in a sad and sorry state.

*Well, you look good.*

Yeah, I had an answer for that – I can't remember that. I was planning it because he's going to look at me and say, "But you look perfectly well."

*Well, you do.*

Yeah...

*And what is this on the table?*

These? Well... it was last November, yeah... a year ago, two years ago when I realised just how ill I was. I was told about it, when it was discovered that my inflammation factor was 118, and the maximum permitted in a human being is 5. 0 to 5. Mine was 118. Nobody knew why or what. The neurologist didn't know, the cardiologist didn't know. And, you know, if they'd have left it for very long... it could have been cancer, it could have been the two immune system problems I have and that kind of thing. Then I was dead, you know. There's no doubt about it. So you go on steroids – and I had to go on a maximum steroid thing, which is clever because it tends to knock out the inflammation, but it knocks out everything else as well, including your entire immune system. So now I'm in a worse state than I was, but I am at least alive, and I'm now near the crunch point of trying to come out of the steroids, because that's very dangerous too. Anyway, the point is that I realised that it was two years ago actually, and I was already getting so ill that it was affecting my mind and everything. The two immune systems that I have are precursors to Parkinson's and dementia, brain disease, and everything. So I mean... I shouldn't be here. Even my doctor looks at me and go, "Come on Peter, you're doing very well, you know." Anyway, in one sense it was a sort of... And my legs went completely, I couldn't move. I can't move now. I can't walk two inches. And it's agony most of the time. I thought, well, I always dreamt of being in a wood hut on a mountain top overlooking a lake. You know, in ancient China, in a little boat, a little guy going by with his fishing. And I would finally commit myself to writing the books that have been sort of hovering around, waiting to be written, completed. Most of them have been sort of vaguely started, one way or another. And I have, fortunately, still been able – almost losing it now – being able to type, and close to not being able to do it. But I have, every day, probably, pretty well every day, managed to write, and I've written how many: one, two, three, four, five – I think seven books. And printed and published seven books I think, in the last year. One of them isn't here. I asked the... yeah... the first one I finished actually was... yeah... I made this one film *Terrorism Considered As One of the Fine Arts* in Vienna. I can't move this, hold on... Which is part of what I call the Nohzone Trilogy. I've had three novels published, if you like, in inverted commas, on the internet, the last ten years, at nohzone.com, and I think it's been a huge success. I think it's been visited by about forty people in the last ten years. Probably you, trying to get a bit of secret info for the *Terrorism* review you were going to write for *Framework*, and it ended up in the hands of Sor-en-sen. Sorensen. Anyway, of the three novels there was *Terrorism is Considered One of the Fine Arts*. The second one, which I'm writing and completing at this very moment, is called *Nature's*

*Child*. The third one was called *Girl in the Train*, which is set in Japan, which is based on a Kawabata novel. They're all connected. They're all connected with the idea of assassinating someone who is responsible for the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior boat in New Zealand. And although I started the film with *Nature's Child* and Liza, my wife at the time, it ended up being actually much more about *Terrorism Considered As One of the Fine Arts*. In the meantime, I had decided to publish as a book – because I like published books, I'm a real fetishist about books – I decided to do *Girl on the Train* as the first one to do, because I thought that was the most complete of the three. And I have... did I ever send you one?

Yes.

You do have a copy of *Girl on the Train*?

*I think I may have given it to John Sorensen.*

I hope he's going to give it you back. I'll give you another one. I'm dying to get rid of them. I can't move.

*I'll take one with me today, if I may.*

Yes, I think I probably said, "Listen, this book is much more for John than for you." I know that's an insult, but, I mean – you're more of a film man, an image man. And it is totally the ideal novel for John. Totally set.

*I know if I were to leave here with some Whitehead gifts, a Whitehead gift bag for him, he would be... He's very dedicated to you.*

I know. Well, I'm glad you did the book because was treated unfairly by *Framework*, but it was the correct decision because I don't think the book would not have stood up... looking at *Framework*, never mind being in it. And I know you published it so he didn't feel totally rejected. I don't think you'll sell any. Anyway... where were we? *Girl on the Train* was the first one in this last phase of my life. After making the *Terrorism* film, I decided never to make films again. I never could. Physically, psychologically, mentally, financially, motivationally. On any level. Everything... you know all the inner stories about it. It's in that book... a lot of it. So then there's the question of writing, any everything. So then I decided the first thing was: I ought to do something about the *Terrorism* book, which had already been published, because the film was called the same title. *Girl on the Train* by this time I then completed. Sent it off. Jan Gordon did an introduction... almost as long

as the book. I didn't know what to do about it. Couldn't say no, could I? Anyway... did that. What did I do next? Ah well, then, of course, all during all this period, I might say the last twenty years, I have been writing a book, planning a project... If start coughing to death, you'll just have to wait for a moment because this happens regularly, especially after I've eaten. Also part of the problem of the steroids. *Fool that I am*, book one. This is another trilogy. *Fool that I am*, book two. That's a [X] Falcon. *Fool That I Am*, book three. That's a picture of Dido Goldsmith and Robin Whitehead, on the top of the highest mountain in the Middle East, called Al Soodah, or the Black One. *Al Soodah: The Summit of the Black Mountain*. What does it say on it? Forgotten it. *The Door to the Invisible*. That's the last book. This book is called *A Dream of the Final Flight*. This one is book one – *An Inadvertent Romance*. That is *Once Out of Nature*, written as a book.

*I'm going to need a set of those. Before I leave here. And one for John too, actually.*

I know. Unfortunately I think John is the one person in the world who really will read it.

*He will read it.*

A to Z. He will. Yeah.. Well, in between doing this and doing that... I might say it's only been possible thanks to Jenny, this girlfriend of mine in Cambridge. Absolutely wonderful girl. Beautiful. She's in *Tonite Let's All Love in London*. She's one of that bunch of girls near the end, the girl with the daffodil. And when I was sort of seeing her at the same time and sort of Syd Barret was incapable of seeing her but seeing her and one thing, and one thing and another, she was the one who saw a bit of my film footage I had shot. "You've got to use the Floyd music!" And she knew Anthony. So she was the one who introduced me to the Floyd. After that, went off and did all these... Haven't seen her for forty years, fifty years. Then she was working for Storm, just before he died. Storm Thorgerson is his name, the guy who did all the images for Pink Floyd, the covers – *Dark Side of the Moon* and all of that. She had been working as a sort of PR for the Floyd for forty years, on a very, low minor key for these various different people. She was the Cambridge link because she knew all the other people. That little Cambridge set was quite a bunch of little connected people, all of whom ended up doing funny things. And Storm wanted to film me because just before he died. He was in a wheel chair. He was given two months and he died within two months, and he rushed around to film a few people before he died, and he appointed someone to make a film, which is just about finished now. And he did a long interview with me in 78 Northampton Road, which I think he visited maybe – another of the houses I lived in. Rented houses. Anyway,

so... I sort of met Jenny again and talked about this and discovered that by some fluke she had done a government course at some point just when things were beginning to hot up, to learn about computers, and this that and the other, which included typesetting and this and that, which is quite an art I can tell you. Typesetting Considered As One of the Fine Arts. And it's a woman's job. It really is woman's work – it's weaving and its doing this, and is it going to be PDF and is it going to be... I couldn't do anything like that. I could do it in the old days, because I would print it out from my computer, give it to them, they would photograph it and make a sheet of metal and then produce the book. Now it's all done on the computer. And she's very good at it, and patient and broke, so she needed a bit of money. So we've had a fantastic relationship for the last year. She has transformed whatever it is I had. Now, for example, this book – I am very, very proud of. I'll give you one of these too. I can even give you two. It's called *Crosswords*. Is it called *Crosswords*? It's actually called *Cross Swords*. It's also *Crosswords* and *Cross Swords*. All Out War Considered As One of the Fine Arts.

*This is a wholly separate novel to the trilogy?*

This I wrote in the middle of the Gulf War.

*Oh yeah... I remember seeing the manuscript of this.*

Yeah. It's been around since the Gulf War. I don't remember when the Gulf War was.

*Nearly twenty, twenty-five years ago.*

I was stuck in a hotel in Riyadh while they were being bombed, watching a computer screen and a TV screen and goodness knows what else, and I wrote the whole thing. Yea, it was a long novel at that time. Harry read it, I remember. Probably wafted it under your nose and you think, "Another bloody Whitehead novel. Who does he think I am. I'm a filmmaker." Something like that. Anyway, for some unknown reason I got someone to OCR it about five years ago, thinking... because I had someone who did OCR, a friend of Francis. I have to have cheapo technicians, because at £120 an hour or something – these people, I mean they charge... fifteen is about it. And he was good at OCRing. Another guy from a nearby village, the son of the local vicar. Anyway, he wanted some money, and I thought well, I've got all that... because I typed it on a real typewriter, you see. I printed it...

*I think I saw an early, early nineties print-out.*

You would have. That's all that existed. That's what I was going to say. That's all that existed. So I had to give that to Matthew Foot – he lives locally, and he had to plough through it, which wasn't easy, OCRing it, especially since it's all kind of fragmented. It's all about crosswords and the war and goodness knows what else. And he did quite a good job except everything was in the wrong place and the wrong font. It was a massively difficult job to do. But he did it. And I stuck it up on the shelf and did nothing more about it. And when we had finished *Fool that I am*, Jenny said, "Well, what next?" Because she used to come every other Sunday and we would have an afternoon chat and everything and do more on the book. And I said, "There is one book that I'm quite fond of." I noticed it amongst all my files. And I told her a bit what it was about and she said, "That sounds really interesting." And I told her a little bit about it and everything. And she sort of dipped into it, this manuscript, and she said, "It's ready to go isn't it?" Yeah, it's ready to go. It wasn't quite ready but... "OK, let's do that next!" And here it is. *Crosswords* by Peter Whitehead. All Out War Considered As One of the Fine Arts. And on the back, a list of Peter Whitehead novels. But what is it about? Well, it says in here – it's got a picture of some guy called Peter Whitehead with some lackey, Arab lackey. It says: "On the run from war in the Nafud Desert." Actually, interestingly enough, it's not at all what the book is about. But... what happened was... I was in Riyadh, in a hotel. Can't remember why. I think I'd taken some falcons over to Prince Khaled or something and the war started, so I was stuck in the hotel and no one was going anywhere. There were no planes were going back... and all this and I was looking into all this. So, by some extraordinary reason... I don't know how this happened... I recorded all of it. I recorded everything on the television. From CNN and Saudi television.

*On VHS tapes?*

Yeah. No – Betamax tapes. I had a little Beta camera and a little Beta player, which is still stuck in Niki de Saint Phalle's chateau in France. Never get that back, I can tell you. Anyway... I was just fascinated because you go from one... this is, one tape you would go from and then somebody else in Riyadh, then there would be somebody else and somebody else. Fascinating. Fascinating. Anyway... It's...

*You were just monitoring the newsreel, the television news coverage?*

Yeah. From the moment the war started. Because the war wasn't going to happen. The war wasn't going to start. Everyone was saying, "No, there's not going to be a

war.” No, of course not, they wouldn’t do a thing like that. Americans wouldn’t go in and bomb Baghdad. I mean, that guy was fighting the Iranians for ten, twelve years, at our expensive, it only cost us twenty six billion dollars. He’s our friend. We can’t bomb the bloody guy and kill him. Saddam Hussein? He’s a gentleman. Anyway... and all this unbelievable hypocrisy and lies and this that and the other. And the next minute a scud in the middle of Riyadh, and the war is on because the day before... the war had started. And in went the American and Saudi Arabian planes and bombed... But, of course, Saddam Hussein had got angry with the Kuwaitis. This is about the war, but it’s about war as seen through the media. I recon it’s the first novel that just totally and absolutely says there’s a war going on and this is how the world sees it, or is allowed to see it. From this point of view, that point of view, and everything. But in the meantime, this guy – I’m giving away the novel, but I might as well – why he is in Riyadh... he is a crosswords freak. He knows all about codes and he does crosswords for fun. But he runs a company called Video Games Inc., which is, in fact, designing video games and various different things. But it’s actually a front for military operational new technology. We’re talking about quite a long time ago. And the secret of the whole story of the film is that he had developed some software which he sold to the Americans, but he had also sold it to Saddam Hussein, banking on the fact that there would be no war. And he is suddenly trapped in Riyadh, waiting for the war, and waiting to be bombed, and everything, communicating by fax to his partner in America, in England, and his wife... and his mistress. So there are two wars going on. One between him, because in fact his wife has discovered a secret note written by the mistress, and they both crack up. The women crack up, and everything. And the whole thing is the total, total, total network and webs of deceit, lies, cover-ups, identical in their family romance, as Freud would call it – the family romance. He’s been playing after these two women, the wife and a couple of kids and a nice little house, and his Italian mistress. He’s clearly into sadomasochism and God knows what else and he went too far. So he’s a bit worried about that being exposed too by the wife. It is about how the whole thing is closing in, closing in. The network of his war. It’s all about betrayal. It’s just how every word in this and every aspect of it shows that it is all betrayal. And there’s nothing we can do about it. We accept it now. And it’s quite funny. It’s quite harsh and quite difficult to get all the way through it. Anyway look, beautiful book. No? I’d reckon this book could go a long way. All the way to Kettering. Mark it.

*OK, so we got the trilogy, and we got Crosswords. Now we have...*

Terrorism Considered.



*Now this is.. This is not...*

Not a novel...

*This is not a book of the film. This is the illustrated screenplay. Is that right?*

This is the screenplay. Screenplay/dossier.

*And how different... how much does that screenplay differ from the actual film?*

Not at all because this was in fact a Lorrimer Book, in inverted commas. The premise started off with the idea... Because of the film, because of my film *Terrorism* being made in the way it was, in the end it had three narrative layers going through the whole novel. A voiceover occasionally by Michael Schliemann, was it? No – I can't remember. And then there was the words in the middle of it. There are three things that you have to be dealing with at any one moment. Most people refuse to accept it, and I accepted that most people would always do that. So I decided at some point, after making it, that there wasn't a problem. I liked the film the way it was. I had some very interesting responses from people who knew what I was doing, and I thought, well, what is, you know... Once I had, you know, two thousand books in my library, now I have one thousand five hundred and five hundred DVDs. I'm exaggerating but that's the way it's all going. Now, I decided this film is not going to be a film you'd see in the cinema, or even in film festivals anymore. It was too complex to take in one take. It had to be taken in more than one take. Did you read T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* and take the whole thing in one take? Did you? Oh, you are a clever guy. Didn't you read it several times? What about *Duino Elegies* by Rainer Marie Rilke? How many times did you plough through it? What about *Wuthering Heights*? Anyway, there's a certain level of complexity in cultural objects in various different ways. For example, you might like a sculpture, as a sort of... you know, in a Roman museum and you might go in and you're reading it, aren't you, as a sculpture, and you see the marble and Michaelangelo and carving this that and the other and then you remember that he was gay, so this beautiful picture of David... And then you sort of move away from the object of the sculpture. And then you get another context. Normally it's either the mythological story of what it is, or the sacred story of what it is. It is in a church, not in a cinema. It's in a church. And you read the several different... and when you're in the Sistine Chapel you read the ceiling. Then you read the windows. Then you read the sculptures. And we accept the various different... The problem is cinemas is from the beginning you trap people to go in – you go in, sit there, you're there for ninety minutes, you go out and you can't see it again. Especially when I

started to go and see movies at the Academy Cinema – if it was on twice, I would see it twice. If it was on for a week, I'd see it for a week. Then I wouldn't be able to see it unless it went to Paris. Then it would be in French. Which is why I started Lorrimer Publishing. So I decided that in fact I had made a film that was much more like a Jacques Derrida book or a Michel Boutor book or an Alain Robbe-Grillet book, *Last Year at Marienbad*. These were my heroes. And they were making... It's impossible to go and see any of those classical French films of that time, the *nouvelle vague*, without actually knowing all of these mythological contexts and the religion of the cinema, created by Bazin. You know... And you had to know all those other things, and I was more interested in the French novels. I thought, well, OK – I've got a film that nobody is ever going to watch unless it's on DVD. I had been learning... teaching myself the guitar for two or three years now, and watch... I had done a complete university course and I would have thought compared, could've been, for nothing. Just watching everything I wanted to know and discover and there on YouTube. YouTube is the answer. It solved all the problems. All the problems! My film, the *Terrorism* film, is on YouTube, which is where it should be. YouTube is the ultimate democracy. Better than that Vimto one. Can't stand the Vimto one. Nobody bothers to look at the Vimto one.

*Vimeo.*

Oh... Vimeo.

*Vimto sounds like a soft drink.*

It is. Yeah. Yeah... well... anyway, so I thought: right, and what you do is, you publish a book, which you can read, which is in itself interesting. To say: OK, it's a weird film... let me compare... what it is by watching a film and imagining it to be a film and yet reading it, look, with every single word of the actual screenplay, published exactly how it is in the film.

*So this is why you say is very much a Lorrimer book because actually those Lorrimer books are a word for word...*

Yes.

*...transcription of action.*

There is a complete transcription of the action done by James, and corrected by me. And it's very good. It's immaculate. He's got all the references. This is a unique

book. If Steve Chibnall has got any sense, and he has, he'll realise that this book, together with the film, in a DVD, means you can then take this film and look at it on your computer, stop it and start it and do whatever you want, read this, then you can go in to the second half of the book, which are essays written by various people about the film. John Berra. So here is a complete illumination of the film. So it's just not like *Alphaville*, which is a couple of bits and a couple at the end. This is an *aide-mémoire*.

*But presumably the description of the action of the film is... very readable. Just as the Lorrimer books are.*

Can I tell you this. I was slightly against the book in the beginning. Having thought of it, starting to have problems, James was doing it... When I started to read it, and I read it, I was astonished, because, you see, I had made the film, and there is a little bit here there doing this, it reads immac... it's a poem – he said modestly. You know, it is a poem. It is written in a sense similar to an Apollinaire poem. It's an Apollinaire poem. It goes to from this thing then it goes to this and then it goes... Well, have a look at it, you can just flip through if you'd like. Oh no, I'm not allowed... Well, you can... hold on... let's see if this is one you can keep. Because I've got some... yeah... OK.

*Thank you.*

Just flip. And you'll see that, in fact, the layering, you see... Makes perfect sense because you go from the this, and then you do... And, in fact, you're skipping all the time. So it's actually totally about dissonance. It's actually about the emancipation of the dissonance, which is exactly what the film is about. It's Schoenberg. It's twentieth-century Europe. It's Vienna. It's *The Third Man*. It's Alain Robbe-Grillet. It's a completely different field to, you know... everything else that's going on at the moment, which is the a dumbing down into commercialised trash and shit and rubbish and goodness knows what else. This would be the perfect thing to have in a sophisticated university, like Leicester, run by Chibnall, who's got twenty students a year studying films. Here is a film they can study. They can have a DVD to watch on their computer. They can go back to one image and think, "Oh this is... I see what he means. This is connected to this. This is why this was connected to that." Blah, blah, blah, blah. Then we begin to see how James, who has also done a very good job at the notes and notations... So... you get a little package. You buy the two in one. It is no longer a book, and the film is no longer a film. It's a marriage. It's a fusion. And it's going to be perfect for people who are studying film. Well, I'm sure you know, that out of every five thousand people, who applies to go

to university, in England, 4,999 apply there to go study film and media. What materials do they have? Norman Wisdom? You know, what do they have? What they need wasn't there and it's been lacking behind too long. People are desperately trying to catch up – like you doing book on various, different famous filmmakers. Backing it up, with a kind of... You've been doing something similar to this, which is adding the dossier thing, if you like, to certain films like you know, you did the two or three things – the Polanski, and all of this and the other thing. But they were much more... they weren't focused on one film, were they? Except the... what's it about the one... *Here's Looking At You, Jack.*

*Medium Cool.*

*Medium Cool... Here's Looking At You Jack.* Didn't I get it right?

*No. It's actually... Yours is better.* *Here's Looking At You Jack is better* Look out Haskell, it's Real!

Yes, actually. Yeah. You can't use the word real anymore. In any context.

*Let me... Oh, I can't give this back to you... It looks fascinating. Tell me who these fellows are. Stephan Kurtz.*

Stephan Kurtz went to see the film in the Viennale. He knew nothing about me. He just discovered what it was about, and he went to see it. He went afterwards, took all the trouble to go to the office, to find out who I was, where I was and how he could get in touch. And he got in touch. You probably know part of the rest of the story. He is in fact an academic at... He was doing a Ph.D, he was an expert on the guy who did *Eyes Wide Shut* or whatever. Who's the writer?

*Schnitzler.*

Pardon?

*Schnitzler.*

Schnitzler. Yeah. Yeah. And he's written the books on and done other things on, in fact, epistolary... read the thing on the back about him. And John Berra is another guy, who now lives and works in China, who also wrote a review of the *Terrorism* film for an online programme. Now, they're both very interesting because, him, Stephen Kurtz... Fascinating, because he decided the entire film was an

hallucination. Well, the day that I arrived and read the essay which he had written... by the way – he wrote an essay for *Framework* that was rejected... I read it actually and it was all... he had gone back to another Austrian writer at the same time who had written about hallucinations at the moment when the cinema was evolving. And I had written my entire film, made my entire film, when I was suffering, actually, from sort of imminent Parkinson's. I had three of the five pathways of Parkinson's: the hallucinations, the tremors and the psychological dissonance, and my goodness... Very, very difficult two years, though fascinating. I still get it off and on. But he got in touch and said it was one of the most interesting experiences he had ever had in the cinema. And he came and visited me all the way in Kettering. And this is a young, sort of young, bit like you, don't be, you know... Academic and now probably teaching in the university. John Berra was in fact... had written a couple of books actually, about American avant garde. He was another reject. But they both, you see, were both able to see the *Terrorism* film, you see. Even if the people at *Framework* couldn't.

*Did you say that the whole film is now up on YouTube?*

Yeah.

*And why is that... tell me about... when we spoke on the phone a few weeks ago, you were gushing about YouTube. You sent me some links. What is it about YouTube that so interests you?*

Free. It's free. And you can stop it and start it. It is totally free. If you knew the problems I had as an independent, trying to get my films seen – I mean right until you did my... whatever it was... retro and all that, my films were never seen. If YouTube had been around since the late sixties, I would have become a famous filmmaker in the early seventies. I am now a notorious filmmaker fifty-five years later because I made a few films that were sort of subversive to a degree, etcetera. No, I mean... I think YouTube is... People are lambasting all these effects of the media, which we all know about. *The Fall* starts with the dots and ends with the dots. That was a premonition and a precursor. What are you doing? Recharging it?

*I'm getting another battery.*

Oh... Whitehead does it again. Uses up all the batteries.

*Keep talking.*

I've got nothing more to say.

*YouTube.*

I don't see why you should be advertising YouTube. I use it now... I think its... well, I don't particularly want to talk about it. For me it's self-evident that if you're seeking to do something, and you find something that enables you to do it, you say this is fantastic. YouTube has enabled me to study, for absolute nothing, millions of films, millions of writers, millions of... I mean you just... you know.... All my writing is reinforced whenever I need it. And especially the guitar. I've actually enjoyed learning how to play the guitar.

*You played the guitar before didn't you?*

Well... not seriously. No, not really. No, I never played it... until I was in Arabia. Well, I'll tell you the history of the guitar if you want to know.

*Because you were very... when we spoke a few weeks ago you were very excited. And you said... Didn't so much shoot some footage of you playing the guitar which is on YouTube.*

Yeah. Leila. That's the weirdest story ever. But I mean... You see, part of it was a joke. The whole thing was a joke. I, in fact originally, built a music recording studio in Saudi Arabia when I was there for ten years, breeding falcons on the top of this mountain. I spent an awful lot of time playing. My computer set up... so I could get all the instruments from Japan, free of tax, and this and that and the other. You know, when I wasn't breeding falcons I spent most of my free time writing. And my books like *Crosswords* in between, and playing music. And it dawned on me after a while that I didn't like keyboards much because you couldn't bend the strings. I'd played the organ, as you know, at school for twelve years or eight years, so I was adept to doing that, but you couldn't [*makes bending strings noise*]... you just could not alter the pitch. It's a drum, you know. A piano – it's just a drum machine [*makes drum noises*]. And OK, you do various clever things if you've got computers, and the piano is quite nice if it's a nice piano, but then I suddenly thought, well, I've got to learn the violin again. I did play the violin once. The cello is my dream. But then I thought, no – I can never do that, not really. I haven't got the time or energy to go and learn the cello. [*phone rings*] Couldn't really see me carrying my cello around, you know. Pete's got a cello. Excuse me. [*answers phone*] Colin? [*Good afternoon Peter. How are you?*] Well, I'm very surprised to hear you. It's very nice of you to ring. I'm alright, are you alright? [*I'm fine.*] I'm... [*They just sent me the cover.*] Oh,

they're crackers aren't they, because I've been talk... Have they sent a cover or a proof? [*Just a cover for you to look at.*] Ah... alright. [*Have you got an email there?*] Yes. [*What's your email Peter?*] nohzone. N-O-H. nohzone. [*Hold on. N-O-H.*] Yes. [*Yep.*] Z-O-N-E. [*nohzone.*] What is it? Nohzone... nohzone@gmail.com. [*gmail... .com. I'll send it onto you so you can look at it.*] Well... they're crazy because I did actually, ten days ago, send them an email, establishing it. I followed it up with some phone calls. I've been talking to the girl off and on and on and on and off and off all about these things. She has my email address, so why on earth she sent it to you I don't know. She sent it as a file has she? [*Yes, as a PDF. So you can see it. She probably sent you one as well.*] Alright, well... I haven't seen it but it's great that you've got it and great that you can send it to me. nohzone@gmail.com – because I know it's going to be alright and if it's OK they will start printing it tomorrow so that's a great help that you've rung. I really appreciate it. Hello? [*I'm typing it out.*] N-O-H. [*N-O-H @gmail.com.*] N-O-H-Z-O-N-E. [*@gmail.*] Yeah. OK? [*OK.*] Perfect. If it doesn't come through... I'm doing an interview at the moment. If it doesn't come through, I'll ring you up. [*Okey dokey!*] Thanks a lot, Colin! [*It's on its way. See you later.*] Genius! Bye. [*Bye-bye.*] You know, the world is falling apart.

*You got another book cover?*

It's actually one of the... which one is it? Can't remember. It's the... ah yeah. The *Terrorism* one – I've improved it. The one you've got is a first edition that had a few corrections. And that's not got the final cover. And I had to do some proofreading.

*Forgive me for asking such an uncouth question, but are you selling these books at all?*

No.

*So if someone wanted one...*

Well... the uncouth answer is that I just lied for a moment because I've just remembered. There is actually a process ongoing, with my daughter Joanna, to set up a new website called Hathor Publishing. I have given her all my books, physically, and rights and everything and everything and everything and everything. She is going to be in charge after I die, which could be any minute or five years – we all know that. More likely to be sooner than later. And we're working on it now. She is going to be in charge of everything associated... you've met Joanna. She's a very organised girl and she's brilliant at this kind of thing. She just loves selling things to anyone, having a website... She's just amazing – I don't know where she

gets it from. Anyway, the thing is that she suggested it, actually. “Dad, why don’t I do something with your books there just sitting in...” So – yes. I can give you a flyer, actually. I’ve got some flyers that say: “Peter Whitehead Books.” And there’s a new website coming. So yes: they are going to be available. I never made any attempt in to sell my books in the past. There have been a few accidental things that happened like the guy who did *Baby Doll*... can’t remember his name. What was his... Williamson. Yeah. Nice guy. “Yeah, OK – go on.” You were talking about... well, I was talking about guitars and music. The reason why I wanted to learn the guitar was I had been to Hyde Park in the middle of the summer to listen to a guitarist whose work I admired. His name I now forget. Who put on, in fact, an absolutely brilliant, brilliant... he was German... did I say what nationality he was? German. He was with... you know all the German... kraut rock and all those kind of people. And he was using a guitar in some kind of a way, with some kind of processor. One of the first times I had seen it or heard of it. Do you remember Klaus Schultz? Do you remember I made a film with Klaus Schultz or was supposed to have done? He was a sort of compatriot with him. It’s a pity I can’t remember. *New Age of Earth* was the guy’s name... the name he put on his record, this other guy who was together with Klaus Schultz – and it became a worldwide bestseller. And the name “New Age” as far as I know was associated with... was created by him, this young guy, and he just got up in front of the whole thing and played. And I also, in fact, had been very impressed with Jimmy Page in the Led Zeppelin film I made in the Albert Hall. And I filmed him doing the solo. You see that’s what I did in my school on my organ in my memorial hall. I was improvising on classical things in this and “I’ve got a lovely bunch of coconuts.” I’ve probably told you this story before... and everything. So the music thing was all getting a bit muddled. But it occurred to me that the guitar, the electric guitar, now that it could be plugged into a processor, into a computer, and recorded... I could use it instead of having to do a violin and all that kind of business... I could record it direct into the music, which I, at this time, was quite happy with. In fact, all the music that’s in my films, *Terrorism* – can’t even remember the name of the bloody film now – was recorded in Arabia. And it was there that I got... after my first guitar. Because I realised that the sound I was after was, in fact, like the human voice. It wasn’t just a pipe organ which had different layers, which is already interesting. It was the flute pipe organ, and a piano as a drum. The guitar could be made to sound like a string instrument. And there’s one guy in the world that does it: Terje Rypdal, who’s this guitarist from Scandinavia, who is a genius. I went too, actually, I saw... heard a concert of his. Beautiful stuff. Beautiful stuff. So I realised the electric guitar had this extraordinary potential, had all these strings that you can manipulate and pull and... Yeah, fine. And gradually – I was starting a bit late, wasn’t I, really? Took me a while to sort of get... and I’m still plodding along. But I am being very ambitious.



I'm on the verge of doing what I want to do, and if it succeeds I will send it to you. I have set up in my bedroom, where I'm allowed to live – I'm not allowed to live here. In my bedroom I have got a music recording studio, and on there is the guitar, and on here, is the piano. And I am going to improvise. I am an improviser. I can't learn anything. Has to be improvised. I can nowadays just sit on the piano and just improvise till the cows come home. And my period is now is basically Schoenberg and Berg, all these kind of people. That's the people I'm interested in. Alban Berg. Anyway... dissonance. I'm interested in dissonance. Now, people play the guitar like they don't really ever... I've not never met anyone who attempts to create dissonance because they always have to have the backing track. especially with guitars... all popular... So, in fact, this is why I had a cello in my film. I had Nina playing the cello, and then I put something over it. You see it's similar to... When I talk about Schoenberg... Schoenberg was into the emancipation of the dissonance, which is to bring those hidden layers up and make them the front. So you didn't have the melody, you had this dissonance. That is what is very difficult to do on guitar and get away with it, because guitars are supposed to be doing either Brian May or there supposed to be doing... There's a few good guys like Terje Rypdal. There's only half a dozen who actually try to make it melodic, semi-classical or very classical. This fusion. They call it fusion. Well, fusion is plagiarism. Or, if you like, fusion is dissonance. Fusion is dissonance. It's getting two different things and mixing it as one. Plagiarism. It's like my novel *Girl on the Train* – it's actually about plagiarism. And those... you mentioned the little films I put up on YouTube. They are all about plagiarism. They are acts of deliberate plagiarism.

*Terrorism is about plagiarism.*

Well, the film is deliberately about dissonance. And my preoccupation with dissonance is, in fact, because of my interest in Schoenberg and his whole movement, because the whole movement that he created for music became a social revolution, which is in fact how to defy classical music and tonality, because it represented the powers that be. If you're going to be a revolutionary at that time in the year and the wars and this that and the other, the first thing that had to go was tonality. And his first great work was *Pierrot lunaire*, which even I can't listen to, to be honest – but I like some of his other stuff. I think he's a genius. He was rooting down into the heart of music, and saying, "Well, hold on – there's something else going on there." Why, you know... why should we be dominated by 1, 4, 5... Like jazz is 1, 4, 5, and everything in classical music was blah, blah, blah. You had to end up with the tonality, you had to have cadence and everything – and he went against that. Now, most of the things I've done on YouTube have been deliberately dissonant because my preoccupation with dissonance in music comes from my preoccupation with dissonance in literature. And

that started with my obsession with Thomas De Quincey. Because he was fascinated with by what? Not just his opium. But he was in fact fascinated by the palimpsest. What is a palimpsest? A piece of paper or card or leather, which you have a script on it... OK. And then, when it's been read and used and everything, you wash it off and put another one on. I'm sure you know all about that. So that in fact, the particular object contains the three layers. Let's talk about the three layers. Let's talk about the trilogy. Let's talk about the whole notion of the classical religious domination of the holy three, the holy trilogy. It's all to do, actually, with going deep, digging deep down into religious music and religious theological ideas about art. The church forbade anyone to ever use a tritone in any music that was ever played inside a church. They banished dissonance. I'm bringing it back. Anyway... What I'm going to be doing quite soon, is... you can see – it's the ultimate step for me, is I'm going to improvise both on the piano and the guitar at the same time. I've been practicing. It's very interesting. I can't learn for the guitar. I've tried to learn things... can't learn. I can only improvise. And I thought: what am I going to improvise on? I did one piece that I loved but I never finished it. I thought, I'm going to improvise on Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D minor*. [sings] You must know it, you must of heard it. Everybody who knows anything about classical music knows *Tocatta and Fugue in D minor* – even Jimmy Page. OK? So I decided that I was going to do an improvisation on it. I was going to play it upside down. Instead of [sings it] it was going to be completely upside down. So while you're listening to my improvisation of it upside down, you may be thinking of it in its original form. You will always have the palimpsest, the unconscious connection to what is going on rationally. It's about the layers of the mind. Some of mine are going fast but we won't talk about that. Now, on YouTube, I've got two or three little films which I've stolen. Nothing to do with me. And I put a totally new soundtrack on them. There's two ballets – which I can't name. I really rather liked them. And there is another piece which I really do like. If you want to listen and know what I'm up to you've got to go to my music website and look up "Between the Wars." That was.... Because again, when I improvise anything, musically, I don't know anything at all about it. For example that – I just discovered. The whole long twenty-minute piece on the piano which I've cut to the Mozart ballet, I discovered on a little cassette I'd recorded on an old piano in Niki de Saint Phalle's chateau. And there's not a single note out of place. The musical language and logic of it as a piece of music, that particular one, the piano one, I can't understand. The second one, which is "Between the Wars" – that was deliberate. The other one, the long one, the guys dancing, did you see that one? The ballet? The second ballet by Béjar... I've mention his name now... Béjart. That was another piece of music I recorded for Niki de Saint Phalle's second film. OK? Anyway... *Plagiarism* is connected to Schoenberg's idea of emancipation of the dissonance. And all modern music now, especially, actually an awful a lot of classical jazz and good classical rock 'n roll and fusion music, is all deliberately

confronting and challenging the domination – the hegemony, I think is the word – the fascism of traditional harmony that existed for five hundred years. Richard Strauss was the last person who tried and sort of do it and get away with it and then defend it when it got attacked by everybody else and fell into a terrible trap and ended up being a bourgeois shit. But he did some good stuff in the meantime. So I am extremely interested in the... Right, what I'm going to be doing is... I've got... I've practiced... I've got to the point where, listen to this, this was never done before. I can improvise if I just started on a bit of a thing, I can improvise for two hours on it. Now... something I never did learn how to do which is odd because I never learned things... I never learned to play by ear, which of course most jazz people do, and everything... You always have to be listening, you see, to the backing track. Well now, that's plagiarism. That's dissonance. That sort of defying the notion of the control of emotion et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. What was I going to say.... I lost my track there. Dammit. Very impor... most important thing I wanted to say. What I was going to talk about. Oh shit. Oh... what was I saying? Come on. You don't have Parkinson's. Alright, I'm going to tell you exactly, I remembered what it is now. I can improvise from any... I can just take two notes or I can even nick a little piece from somewhere else. But I've never ever been able to learn anything, and I've never ever been able to even sight read it or anything like that. But I can improvise – on anything. But I've never learned to play by ear. Well, now... most of the music I'm interested in now, a lot of it is connected to that idea, actually. Improvisation is playing by ear. Now, I have discovered – I don't know how or why – I have discovered that if in fact I play something on the guitar, which I'm completely improvising because I don't plan anything like that, and I go like this [*makes noise*], I can get it dead right on the piano. Now it's never... It's never dead right unless I want it too. Let's say I get [*sings*] on my guitar, OK, and I go to the piano [*sings*]... I don't do that. No. Got to be much more subtle. It's got to be backwards or upside down. Or it's got to be longer. You see, it's got to be a little variation on it. It's actually got to have a relationship of a different instrument, capable of creating different harmonics and all that kind of thing. And I've discovered... for example I've discovered that if in fact I start at the complete... I don't need to look at the piano. If I start and go to a piano, and it's in the wrong place and even in the wrong key, which it often is, I can immediately bring it back into the narrative. Very exciting. I've only done it a few times and I'm now having to set up the whole thing because I'm going to have to record it and film it. I'm going to film it. I'm setting it up so I can just sit there, with the guitar... and I've got that far with the guitar which I can really... I can sort of do something, but it's not that interesting. And I will be improvising with a piano connected to a second piano by midi. I also have a guitar which will connect, by midi, to a computer. I'm going to be able, I'm hoping, to sort of break it all down into multi-layered, single, secondary, tertiary idea into voices. Voices. You see, music for a thousand years was, you know, a quartet. It was The Rolling

Stones, you know. Violin, viola, cello, drum. I mean, it was all exactly based on... These guys did that the others did this and this that and somebody else, and then there was a chorus for the song. I've discovered, actually in doing what I am doing now, I've discovered, you know, medieval music. They did it all. They did it all. Anyway, I'm immersed in this idea of what I call plagiarism, which others might say is not actually plagiarism – but I say it is. And it's all connected with the idea of bringing things together in a new kind of way. Whether anyone else will find it interesting as music, I don't honestly know. You asked me about guitar, OK? One day I was fooling about in my other house, practicing a bit and doing a few things upstairs. Leila came in and said, "Dad, is that you playing the guitar?" I said, "Yes" – because it was staying... "I didn't know you could play the guitar!" "Well, I don't... I'm just practicing. I'm just fooling around." She said, "Hold on a minute. Don't go." I said, "I'm not going anywhere." She runs back with this little thing, she shows me, little thing this big. I ask, "What is that?" "It's a new camera I just got. It's full HD." I said, "It can't be – it's smaller than a credit card." "No," she said "it's a... I want to test it. Can I test... I'd like to film you doing something." And I said, "Come on Leila, I'm not..." "No, I'm just testing it." "OK." So she gets in. "Alright, alright. I'm ready now." So I go [*makes noises*] – you know, for Leila. I can't remember, nine minutes or ten minutes. She got bored I think, anyway. She said, "OK dad. Well, it's fantastic. Brilliant, OK, terrific." Anyway, she comes back down, wants to test it on my computer you see, plays it on the computer, and I watch it and I think... that's weird. Anyway. So I say, "Can you save it on here?" She says, "Yeah, OK." I had a friend who used to come and mow the lawn, and he played the guitar a bit, and I said, "What do you think of this, Frank? Because I've been looking at it, and it's very strange." And he looked at it and said... he said. "Yeah, it's you. I can see that it's you" – because he had been trying to teach me. And I said, "Well, where did it come from?" He said, "There's not a bum note in the whole thing." And he went away and I thought about it and looked at it and I thought... crazy. Well, then the plot thickens, OK. There's a guy next door heard me playing guitar, came in and said he liked the piano, so I played him my piano bits, and I also... "Did I wake you up with the guitar?" and he said, "No I liked it, I think it's..." Anyway, he said, "I'd like to see." I got a bit on my film actually, because he was sophisticated about music, you see. Wait till you hear this. So I move to this thing which is now going up, gone up on YouTube, because Leila put it on YouTube, OK? And I said, "Can you tell me about this piece of music?" And he watches it and he says, "Yeah, it's Brian May." I say, "What do you mean – it's Bran May?" "It's a piece by Brian May, isn't it?" And I said, "No... Is it?" And he said, "Yeah. I don't know exactly what it's from. I can't remember exactly. But it's Brian May. It's got the thingamebob sound, it's got the aeroplane sound and everything and everything. Yeah, it's Brian May." I said, "Well, it's not Brian May at all. It's me!" "You were playing...?" "I've never heard... I...I never heard anything of Brian May ever played.

Never listened to Queen. Nothing ever, ever, ever, ever, ever.” So he said, “Well, why don’t you put yourself on YouTube and put it up next to Brian May and see if anyone gets angry about it, OK?” So I put it up on bloody... I planned to put it up on YouTube, so I go and look for a couple of Brian May improvisations, and do you know... I doubt if there is anyone in the world who would not know... I hadn’t said it’s played by Brian May. I said it’s an improvisation on a... I don’t know if I used the word “riff” or something... Anyway, I’ve said it’s a variation, an improvisation, on Brian May. Now, nobody has objected. Nobody. Somebody made an amazing comment about it. And I then went and watched Brian May, two or three of his pieces. A hundred percent – it’s just uncanny. I’ve looked at it time and time again to find... figure... I couldn’t do it again. I don’t know what key it’s in, I don’t know why I was doing this, I don’t know why I was doing the drum, I don’t know why I using the thingamabob thing. I get into a trance, some kind of a trance, some kind of opium trance without the opium. At the moment I’m on an opium trance with the bloody drugs I’m on. Anyway, no one... you don’t have to believe that. But, I mean, these were two sophisticated guys musically, far more than I was, who were able to say, “Well, that’s this and that’s that and everything you know.” And I thought it was worth trying. Anyway, now I’m very close. I’ve been trying to work out the connections. Not that easy to get the levels right, you know – on the piano and the guitar. And that’s the only problem at the moment, to get it all balanced out. What I’m doing... this hands broken cause I fell on it. Smashed all the bones up. So this is a bit difficult. Is my bird flying around? Oh, you’ve seen him anyway. So, yeah... I’ll be able to do it in about a week, two weeks. It’s all... it’s almost there. It just about getting the sound levels right. I shall send you a little piece of film which will have an early Whitehead improvisation on Whitehead. Good one?

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