

aeroplane with no parachute.' Sally Hawkins, who made her film debut in *All or Nothing*, is about to start filming 'Untitled '06' as I write. She is by turns excited and terrified. She talks of being lucky enough to have had dinner with *Naked* and *Career Girls* star Katrin Cartlidge before her untimely and sudden death in September 2002. 'She kept re-emphasising the fact that it was all about the experience. You just have to go with it. Or it will drive you mad.' Going with it means making yourself totally open, vulnerable, available. 'Improvising for "Untitled '06" was . . . life affirming one moment and hell the next. It's incredibly stimulating but draining. I can't imagine what it's like for Mike being at the centre of that. You can't really hide; he won't let you. He doesn't let himself hide either. He can see right through bullshit, and that's quite scary. He's a phenomenal director.'

Hawkins, it seems, is far from alone in her appraisal. When I ask Alison Steadman if she feels spoilt by working with Leigh, she shrugs at the apparent rhetorical nature of the question. 'Yeah, absolutely. There's nobody like Mike.'

Amy Raphael
Brighton, April 2007

Introduction

'Though this be madness, yet there is method in it.'
Hamlet

AMY RAPHAEL: *Do you remember the first time you felt compelled to capture life on film?*

MIKE LEIGH: My grandpa's funeral when I was twelve. There was thick snow, the place was crammed with Jews, some guys were struggling downstairs with the coffin. One of them had a particularly long nose with a drip at the end of it. I remember standing there, thinking, 'This would make a great film.' At the age of twelve I didn't have the vocabulary to think, 'This is cinema!' But that was what I was experiencing.

Grandpa dying was a big deal for everybody. For reasons to do with who got what and that kind of rubbish, it caused endless family rifts. It never personally involved me, but it was traumatic if only because I was acutely aware of what was going on. People always said I was old for my age. I was clocking grown-up relationships from a very early age, and I think that's massively important. I very clearly remember being in my parents' flat in an old Victorian house in Manchester. We were only there till I was three: I was born in February 1943 and we moved in 1946. I certainly remember a lot of stuff from when my dad was in southern Africa during the war – I specifically remember him coming back, because he was quite late. At the end of the war all medical officers were shipped to Bombay, to process all the troops on their way back to the UK from the Far East. That was late 1945, early 1946.

Were you worried your father wouldn't come back?

No. But there was a kid in another flat whose dad wasn't coming

back. I didn't know what the war was. Nobody knew what anybody was doing in southern Africa. It so happened that it was safe.

My sister wasn't born until the end of 1945, so I spent a lot of time playing on my own. While I'm a perfectly gregarious person, I'm also a loner. My partner is away filming just now and I'm thoroughly enjoying being by myself. I am totally comfortable in that situation, and to some extent I thrive on it. In fact, it gets difficult if I don't have time alone.

As a child, in the 1940s, I used to get sent to stay with my maternal grandparents in Hertfordshire. They had moved there in 1940 after closing their butcher's shop in Finsbury Park. Grandpa used to breed chickens in the garden, which was, in a sense, going back to his rural Lithuanian roots. He used to take me around farms and to the cattle market at Hitchin. And when I went back to infant school at the end of the holidays, I was sometimes happy to be alone at play time: I was doing improvisations with animals and farms and cattle auctions . . .

Were you a keen reader in your childhood?

Absolutely. I read everything and anything, from *Just William* and *Molesworth* to Dickens. As a teenager my favourite H. G. Wells novel was *The Bulpington of Blup*; I found it fascinating because it's about this guy, Theodore Bulpington, who has a fantasy character called the Bulpington of Blup. He is one of the biggest wankers in literature (*laughs*). It's great. But also this whole thing of having a private, alternative, interior world is central to everything that I've made or done.

Some general truths about writers and film directors are unavoidable. Film directing is both gregarious and lonely. You do have to be bossy and you have to enjoy telling people what to do, to want to push people around and manipulate them. You have to be a control freak. You inevitably have to be both involved and detached. All of these things apply to me.

Paradoxically, the most solitary part of being a conventional writer is something I can't, ultimately, deal with. Being alone, ruminating, procrastinating and so on is essential to writing. But for me, when it comes to the crunch, being productive and creative

only flourishes in gregarious situations – but, if I'm honest, gregarious only if I'm in control (*laughs*).

Returning to your childhood for a moment, how did you respond to the formality of your education?

My journey through education went through quite different phases. North Grecian Street Primary School was really very encouraging of creative activity. I edited a newspaper and wrote and directed my first play, *Muddled Magic*. I then didn't manage to get into Manchester Grammar School, where my father and uncles had been, because I failed their exam (I didn't know the difference between stalactites and stalagmites). Instead, I attended Salford Grammar – Albert Finney had just left as I arrived – and there I became more of an anarchist. What was growing in me, quite unconsciously, was some instinctive sense of an illusive, organic, plastic thing about work and doing things that didn't square with anything one was being told to do.

I went through some really bad times, some to do with my father. Finally, I kind of screwed up all academic activities and decided – partly because you could do it without a full number of O-levels – to try for drama school. I was very young, only seventeen. By an amazing fluke I not only got into RADA, but they gave me a scholarship. It was very shocking, and not what my father or anyone else was expecting. In fact, my old man was outraged by the whole thing.

RADA was a continuation, in some ways, of the school experience. It was very prescriptive, very old-fashioned, set in its ways and mostly uncreative. But it was terrifically good news for me that I had that experience. On one level it kicked me off into the world of professional practice, but on another it left me questioning procedure on a daily basis. It wasn't till I took a foundation-year course at Camberwell Art School a little later that it dawned on me what the creative process is all about.

How did your father figure in the bad times you describe?

I have to say, with some mixed feelings, that my father was, for all kinds of understandable reasons, culpable of creating some of my problems, which, curiously, have mutated from problems into my

raison d'être. As a primary-school kid I was an avid reader, but as I went into my teens, pressure from my old man – to do homework all the time and not really have a social life at all, to only do academic work, to not ‘waste time’ drawing, to be sure that I’d go to university and be academic – made me become less and less able to do any of that.

Although I’m not at all dyslexic, the pressure seemed to create a short attention span when it came to reading. I still occasionally have lapses now. When I’m doing a project, I can’t read novels, and when researchers give me material to read, I get someone to summarise it where I can.

Did you fall out with your father?

All the time. I have to say that, without wanting to rake out skeletons, I had the most fraught teenage years. It was desperate – extremely violent and extremely bad news. I was even sent to a psychiatrist, which turned out to be a pleasant experience. He merely concluded that there was nothing wrong with me at all . . .

At the same time, my old man was a great guy. I was devastated when he died prematurely in 1985. He was a fundamentalist NHS doctor. There were celebrations in my house when he got rid of his last inherited private patient. He was also a factory doctor. And he was a terrific doctor; I know because I’ve come across people he treated along the way. He was very direct and honest. He had great integrity.

You were a creative child, always drawing, painting, making things. Did your father fundamentally dislike your love of art?

The truth of it is that being an artist was anathema to my old man. His own father had been to art school in Russia and was a commercial artist who made his living colouring in photographs. He was a very good miniaturist. But during the Depression no one wanted photographs and Grandpa couldn’t feed the family. Later, during the war, when everybody wanted framed pictures of sons killed on active service, he did very well.

I remember I used to be taken in the early 1950s to his little factory. These bohemian guys and women were all chain-smoking, talking ribald language and sitting at easels. They were known as

‘The Artists’. I would be allowed to sit at an easel and bugger about. But for my father, being an artist was still associated with a lack of income, and he couldn’t bear it. It frightened him to death. It has taken me a long time to realise all this, but it seems obvious now.

With or without your father’s blessing, what did you like to draw as a child?

At a very early age I remember doing endless elaborate cartoons. I was influenced by Heath Robinson [best known for his drawings of eccentric contraptions], so there were lots of little men with bald heads and white coats, lots of machines and wheels and odd things happening. But if ever I was drawing – which was all the time – my old man would always walk into the room and say, ‘You don’t have to press on so hard.’ Or, ‘Haven’t you got anything better to do?’ One of the things that has completely informed my parenting is my own experience, as a result of which both my kids went to art school and are both creative. I learned from my experience, but it was painful.

There’s a drawing that I’ve still got called *The Blowing of the Shofar*, a shofar being an instrument made from a ram’s horn that they blow in the synagogue. This was a massive cartoon like something by H. M. Bateman [famous for cartoons depicting reactions to mishaps], with the rabbi blowing the horn and everybody going mad and putting things in their ears. There’s a little door with a Star of David on it, and a mouse with a hat on coming out . . . I drew it because I wanted to enter a children’s art competition run by the *Jewish Chronicle*. My old man was outraged. ‘It’s blasphemous! I forbid you to send it in!’ But I did anyway. They wrote about it and gave it a commendation. He was shocked.

My folks never went to art exhibitions but they did regularly get their act together and go to the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford. And my old man was very well read. Much later, long after he was dead, I found out that after his matriculation from Manchester Grammar, he wanted to read English at university. But it wasn’t on – his family insisted he do medicine instead. In some ways he was a man embarrassed by art. And being ‘arty’ was always used in a pejorative way. This is a very provincial, subur-

ban, bourgeois world we're talking about. Of course, when I say my parents went to Stratford, to the theatre in Manchester or to the Hallé Orchestra, those were all middlebrow cultural events. They would go to a comic opera but not grand opera. They liked Mendelssohn, but not Bartók or Stravinsky. And we would have family trips to the cinema.

Would you say your parents – Abe and Phyllis – were snobby in any respect?

They were philistines in some respects. They were preoccupied with bourgeois values and aspirations. You certainly couldn't describe my old man as a snob, but on the other hand you couldn't give a detailed description of my mother without the word 'snob' coming into it at all!

Were you angry as a teenager?

I was angry with the establishment and with my folks. But teenagers in the 1950s were! Socially I was extremely active and gregarious. I was known early on as being a good laugh. I was a committed member of Habonim, the secular Jewish socialist-Zionist youth movement. I was very happy in that context. By about 1956 or 1957 – when I was thirteen or fourteen – I was leader of a team of younger kids. On a number of occasions I got kids together and put on plays with them. I got them doing things. A great Habonim tradition was the so-called 'zig', a kind of comedy sketch. It's no coincidence that other alumni include Sacha Baron Cohen, David Baddiel, Jonathan Freedland and Dan Patterson, who invented *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*, not to mention Arnold Wesker. We did a comedy about Nasser. Nothing was written down but it was all very structured. Having that leadership experience was great and has absolutely informed not only how I am but also how I've worked; everybody was open and democratic and working together towards a goal, the spirit of which goes right the way through my productions and the way I work.

Of course, this was all about the collective ideology of the kibbutz. Habonim's real objective was to get us young men and women to emigrate to Israel and be kibbutzniks. At sixteen you'd be taken there on a subsidised trip. I had this wonderful experience

in the summer of 1960. We sailed the Med in a rusty old ship, the *Artzah*, which like the *Exodus* had been used for smuggling Holocaust survivors a little over a decade earlier. We slept on the deck under the stars, sang and played guitars and made love. We picked figs and olives on a couple of kibbutzim founded by members of Habonim. In one we watched Wajda's *Kanal* projected onto a wall, with English and Hebrew subtitles. We visited Jerusalem – which was still divided then, so we didn't see the Wailing Wall – and we climbed Masada and swam in the Dead Sea.

Immediately after this I quit the movement, left home, went to RADA and walked away from Jewish life for ever. As Buñuel said, 'Thank God I'm an atheist!' I do maintain to this day very close friends – men and women – who date back to those days. And, of course, I deal with all this in *Two Thousand Years* (2005).

How long have you been an atheist?

For as long as I can remember. From a very early age religion just seemed to me like a game people play.

But do you feel Jewish in a cultural or even political way?

In *Two Thousand Years*, when Tammy is asked that particular question, she says, 'Well, I feel Jewish and I don't feel Jewish. I've never known what it is not to be Jewish.' Another question is, 'When do you feel Jewish?' Sometimes, by default, one feels very Jewish. Yet when I'm in a very Jewish situation, I feel decidedly un-Jewish. It depends.

It's very easy and comfortable at this stage of my life and of history to be Jewish and to be upfront about it. That's a far cry from being part of 'the Jewish scene'. As a result of *Two Thousand Years*, lots of Jewish organisations have wanted to involve me. That Jewish scene is an alien world to me, though. I've no desire to be any part of it.

But it would certainly be wrong to the point of being disingenuous to suggest that my life is devoid of anything manifestly Jewish. It isn't. Apart from anything else, a number of my very closest friends are not only Jewish but come from the Zionist youth movement I was in. And, of course, at some level I'm always preoccupied with Jewish cultural things. For example, I've read and

cherished Isaac Bashevis Singer enormously over the last thirty years or so.

How Jewish do you feel on a specifically political level?

I'm a signatory to Jews for Justice for Palestinians, but on the other hand I've mostly kept a low profile. I've been in the closet about it. Although you get a hint of these matters in *Hard Labour*, it hardly surfaces in my work. Deciding to do *Two Thousand Years* constituted a massive decision to come out and, in a certain sense, to stop hiding, if I'm honest; to gather together a group of kindred spirits and say, 'This is what we are.' Having agreed to make up a play at the National Theatre, I felt that there was simply no point in showing up and doing another version of *Abigail's Party*. I was just formulating the ideas that developed into *Two Thousand Years* when I went to see Kwame Kwei-Armah's play *Elmina's Kitchen*, which was set in Tottenham with a black cast. I remember thinking, 'I know what I've got to do. It's clear. I've been thinking about it for long enough.'

My sister came to see *Two Thousand Years* in a state of some apprehension. She hadn't picked up exactly what it was about, but she knew it was a play of a Jewish nature. So she came to London – and she doesn't come very much – specifically to see it. Afterwards, she thought it was great; she had been worrying that it was going to be all about our family in the 1950s. Of course, it was, but not literally. It is no more or less personal than any of my work. The ghetto mentality hang-up of hiding the fact that you're Jewish is my problem, no one else's. It's only us Jews who have the fear of a yellow star on our gabardines and want to have our noses fixed and change our names and be seen to be eating pork or bacon sandwiches. To pretend we're not Jewish.

How do your sons feel about you being Jewish?

Their mother, Alison Steadman, is not Jewish, so obviously they're not Jewish. But they've got a Jewish background. They know their relations in Manchester, their cousins and so on. When Toby was a young teenager, he used to go to Bobby Charlton's summer school at Manchester United and stay with his grandma. Then he went to Manchester Met University to do illustration, so he knows

the scene. They were at my mother's funeral. They're very relaxed about the Jewish thing – it's part of what they're about, but without really being involved with it in any way. They're not hung up about it like I am. Thinking about it, I've made a series of films that don't, as it were, have a Woody Allen factor – the little Jewish nerd syndrome.

Do you like Woody Allen?

It varies between blind adulation and deep loathing, depending on which film you're talking about. *Radio Days* would be on my desert island with me; if you wanted to subject me to excruciating torture, you'd send me there with a copy of *Match Point*. I wouldn't survive twenty-four hours. *Manhattan* infuriated me because I thought we could all make films like that if someone would just give us a chance. I love *Crimes and Misdemeanors* and *Bullets over Broadway*. I like *Annie Hall* but prefer *Hannah and her Sisters*. I loved *Zelig* but can't stand *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. But to me *Radio Days* stands head and shoulders above all the others. It's terrific. And he's a New Yorker, so it makes sense for him to make Jewish films.

How did your parents feel about you marrying a gentile?

They were finally OK about it, when it came to it. But throughout my twenties there was a massive stand-off. The phrase 'If she's not Jewish, I don't want to meet her' cropped up on more than one occasion. On two occasions very nice, respectable women said it made them feel like a whore. But when Alison came along, there was a sudden and swift turnaround. My parents weren't fundamentalist, Orthodox Jews. They decided that it was time for a rethink, to their credit.

Let's return to your influences: you may not have been particularly academic but it appears you were turned on by television and film during your formative years.

Very much so. People of my age will remember what a big deal it was at school when anyone came in and announced they had a telly. Gradually everyone got one, but it took some time. Then this

massive thing happened when the Coronation came along in 1953. It didn't mean everyone got a telly but, still, it was a big issue.

What was known as 'viewing' became a major part of our lives. I don't want to lapse into nostalgia, but back then there was only one channel. You couldn't watch the telly on a bright day without drawing the curtains, and if you had it on for any length of time, it started to smell of burning valves. There were interludes between programmes, like *London to Brighton in Four Minutes*. More importantly, television was a window on the whole concept of people making live visual media. One became very aware of the difference between what was and wasn't on film. There used to be film shows at kids' parties. I had an uncle who shot a lot of stuff on 8mm, which I've recently acquired.

Another major part of one's culture was news theatres. They were fantastic. The programme would last an hour, but you could stay and watch it as many times as you liked. You'd get newsreels, Laurel and Hardy, the Three Stooges. Quirky little items about weird goings-on. Documentary items. Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. A lot of film still kicking around in the late 1940s and early '50s was pre-war.

Did you also go to the cinema as often as you could?

It's very important that within walking distance of where I lived in Salford there were loads of cinemas. Some were flea pits and some were more respectable. In the holidays, if I had enough pocket money, I'd go all the time. There's a moment in *The Long Day Closes* (1992) where you see the kids outside the cinema asking grown-ups to take them into an A-rated film. We used to do exactly that: 'Will you take me in, mister?' Now an adult would be locked up for taking strange children into a cinema; then it was no big deal.

The independent flea pits would show whatever was kicking around, so you didn't only see the latest release but also old prints – all kinds of stuff, but always in English. There was a very active Manchester Film Society; I've no idea why I didn't join. If I had, I may have seen an Eisenstein. Instead, I only started reading about Eisenstein and De Sica towards the end of my time at school, after picking up a copy of *Film and the People* by Roger Manvell.

Even before wanting to capture your grandpa's funeral on film, did you always watch films and want to get behind the camera?

I don't know what chemistry happens to you when you watch a film, what makes it into a particular fascination for you. For all of us, at one level, it's the same thing: the film telling us a story and our involvement in that. For me – and I have to say the same is true with all art – it's bound up with a sense of wanting to *do* it, particularly with film and theatre, though more so with film.

I regard film as my natural habitat. It's about the joy of what you can do with a camera, with the medium . . . but even before that, it's about an exhilaration with people and places, with wanting to grab hold of life and do something with it – to somehow make it, even though it already exists. Despite my enjoyment of pen and brush, it's never been quite the same turn-on as making films. That's the ultimate turn-on.

A picture is being created of a young man who had quite a tough time at home, who was often a loner at school, who spent his free time creating other worlds by drawing or escaping from reality by sitting in the darkness of cinemas. But did you also like girls from an early age?

Yes, of course. But I didn't really have a proper girlfriend till I was seventeen.

What happened before then?

I had crushes. If there are all kinds of clumsy or unfulfilled relationships in my films, it certainly doesn't come from nowhere. But it's hard to talk about it without going into specifics . . . I think the same is true about sex in my films. Like everybody else, I've had some very good experiences and I've had some very unrewarding and disappointing experiences. If you take the kiss in *Bleak Moments*: I've said in the past that it's like a lot of kisses, which is to say awkward. There is no question that, ultimately, any two people are either sexually compatible or they're not. I think that underpins a lot of things that go on in my films – and in real life (*laughs*).

At seventeen you had your first proper relationship; you also left home.

And leaving home meant I had to grow up. Despite in one sense being a little old man, in other ways I was a pretty immature seventeen-year-old arriving in London in 1960. A proportion of the people on the course at RADA were considerably older because they had done national service. I missed it, fortunately, by about eighteen months.

Even though I was young, it was imperative for me to move down to London. I've since realised that there were some quite interesting things going on in Manchester in the 1950s, but I didn't know about them in my suburban existence. I would often go down to London with mates at weekends. You could get an overnight train for a fiver and sleep in the luggage racks.

Did you regret not having had a formal academic education at any point?

No. I don't regret anything. Although it would have been good to get to know about things that I either don't know about or have only come to understand in a roundabout way. What happened to me was in fact terribly good news, because I was catapulted into the world of RADA. And RADA got me questioning.

What sort of work were you interested in at the time? What got you excited?

As I've said, before I arrived in London in 1960 I'd virtually never seen a film that wasn't in English. Suddenly, here was world cinema – Eisenstein, Fellini, Bergman, Satyajit Ray, Buñuel, Ozu and Kurosawa. The French cinema entered my life. Renoir became a major influence, René Clair, Vigo . . . The Nouvelle Vague was just happening. *A Bout de Souffle* blew me away; *Les Quatre Cents Coups* inspired the autobiographical film I was never to make; and the first time I saw *Jules et Jim* I was in love with somebody who was in love with somebody else – and we all fell in love with Jeanne Moreau! Truffaut became a hero. I loved the fluidity of *Jules et Jim*, which is interesting when you consider the virtual absence of tracking shots in *Bleak Moments*.

Godard and Truffaut were definite influences, Truffaut for his humanity, Godard for his opening my eyes to the notion of film as film, the 'filmness' of film. Whereas the British New Wave – Karel Reisz, Tony Richardson, Lindsay Anderson – were more of an inspiration than an influence, really. Of course, I loved stuff like Richardson's wonderfully evocative bus ride round my native Manchester and Salford, or his hunt in *Tom Jones*, both beautifully photographed by Walter Lassally. It was great to see a real world one could relate to depicted on the big screen. I'd spent my childhood and teens loving British and Hollywood films but dreaming of a kind of movie where you'd see characters who were like you and me, warts and all.

Actually, just ahead of the New Wave proper came Jack Clayton's *Room at the Top*, which I saw at the Rialto in Great Cheetham Street, Salford 7. To walk out of the pictures into the real world you'd just been watching was a genuine breakthrough and very exciting. Though look at that film now, and it's pretty old-fashioned and stagey, certainly in the acting. Laurence Harvey's northern working-class lad is an embarrassment! (Incidentally, I really admire Clayton's work. *The Innocents*, which was cut by my recent editor Jim Clark, contains the most spine-chilling scene in all cinema.)

But the thing about the British New Wave was that every film was an adaptation of a book or a play, and, *Bleak Moments* and *Nuts in May* notwithstanding, I realised early on that somehow for me it was going to be all about making things up from scratch. In fact, one of the first films I saw in London was *Shadows* by John Cassavetes, another director I'd cite as more of an inspiration than an influence. We learned that his actors were improvising, that it had all been developed in a workshop situation. For me, this was particularly intriguing, as our RADA course was virtually devoid of improvisation work.

Over the years I've had mixed feelings about Cassavetes. Sometimes he was brilliant – I love *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, for example. But films like *Husbands* or, in particular, *Gloria* suffer from actors behaving like actors – improvising as themselves, so what pours out of them is actor behaviour, actor thoughts. Which doesn't work for me.

The other film that set me a-thinking in 1960 was *8½*. Nobody

on the shoot knew what the whole film was about or what Fellini was up to. He kept it to himself, which struck a deep chord with me!

All in all, going to movies of all kinds became my main activity. I now learned to understand Hollywood properly and more critically. I mean, as a kid I'd watched, say, John Ford westerns without knowing they were John Ford. I'd seen and loved *Some Like It Hot* in 1959 (my father was uncomfortable with cross-dressing . . .), but now, through *Sunset Boulevard* at the National Film Theatre, I discovered Billy Wilder. I even saw *Citizen Kane* and *The Third Man* for the first time. I'd only heard of them as I was growing up.

As important an educational discovery as any was the silent cinema, most of which was made up as they went along, of course! I was at all those first screenings of the newly discovered Buster Keaton masterpieces, when Raymond Rohauer would describe in detail how he'd tracked down long-lost, decomposed nitrate prints to the likes of James Mason's garage.

I've got a particularly fond memory of an all-night session at the NFT, when they showed all ten episodes of Feuillade's *Les Vampires* (1915-6). He extemporised like nobody else. He famously sacked his leading man halfway through the shoot for persistent lateness – but not before he'd first invented a scene where the unsuspecting thesp was shot dead! Those all-night screenings were great. I don't know why they don't do them now. Health and safety, I suppose. Five Marilyn Monroes, six Cagney gangster movies, *Batman* – the whole series . . .

When I was an actor briefly at Stoke-on-Trent in the mid-1960s, I spent the daytimes at a complete *Carry On* retrospective. Great fun, though obviously not a major inspiration. To be fair, given what I've been saying, they were actually original screenplays. Pure cinema. As were the Ealing comedies, which were most certainly an influence. And the Boulting Brothers . . . I love *Carlton-Browne of the F.O.*, though I would question the political morality of *I'm All Right, Jack*.

What films didn't you like?

Last Year in Marienbad bored me to death. And, although I liked early Antonioni, like *Il Grido*, *Il Deserto Rosso* irritated the shit

out of me and, later, I thought *Blow-Up* was total, unmitigated shite.

What about the theatre?

Well, my arrival in London coincided with the birth of Peter Hall's Royal Shakespeare Company. I'd already seen Shakespeare in Stratford at the old Memorial Theatre, and now they were in London as well, at the Aldwych and the Arts Theatre.

They became a major part of my life. I saw as much as I could. *The Wars of the Roses*, Gorki's *Lower Depths*, Rudkin's *Afore Night Come*, Michel St-Denis' production of *The Cherry Orchard* with Gielgud. And Beckett's *Endgame*, which I saw fourteen times, courtesy of my friend, the artist Paul Rowley, who was an usher. He used to let us in at the last minute, and we'd sit on the stairs.

Obviously the master at the RSC was Peter Brook, a major influence on me. Again, one knew about his experimental rehearsals, and I saw the results – *Lear*, with Scofield; the Theatre of Cruelty experiments, which introduced us to Grotowski and Artaud; and, later, the *Marat/Sade*. I was keen to be in the RSC and wrote to Peter Hall in 1964. By 1967 I was assisting him and others at Stratford, and I did my first major stage play, *Babies Grow Old*, at the Other Place in 1974, under Trevor Nunn's aegis.

But in all the time I was involved with the RSC I never met Brook, which was a disappointment. I've got to know him a little bit more recently. He's been very positive about my work, especially *Secrets & Lies* and *Vera Drake*, and he was most apologetic for coming to a preview of *Two Thousand Years* at the National (he had no choice: he happened to be over in London; he lives in Paris). I didn't mind, of course – though I'd rather he'd have come later! But he liked it, and the cast was chuffed.

I saw a lot of theatre, good and bad. Joan Littlewood at Stratford East was always interesting, and although I felt an obvious affinity with her spirit, her rough-and-ready folksy style wasn't exactly my thing. Then there was the Royal Court, with its Sunday night club performances, designed to get round the Lord Chamberlain's bans; and a lot of commercial stuff, courtesy of free tickets for RADA students.

When I arrived in London, Albert Finney was in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* in the cinema and in *Billy Liar* on stage in the West End. Ian McShane and I were in the same class at RADA, and we went round to introduce ourselves to Albert after the show. He was very friendly. I can't remember whether I told him I'd just left Salford Grammar. I suppose I must have. A decade later he was to back my first film.

The Caretaker was also running when I hit town. I saw it several times, and it was the first play I ever directed (at RADA in 1962). Pinter and Beckett are particular influences. The fusion of the word, the silence, the visual, the spatial, the comic, the tragic, the specific, the abstract, the transcendent, the ridiculous.

Apart from film and theatre, what else inspired you?

You name it. Of course, I've forgotten quite a lot of what I experienced. The great Picasso show at the Tate is one of my first London memories. Don't forget, I hadn't had that much experience of galleries before. And now here were the V&A, the British Museum, the National Gallery . . .

I started to discover the surrealists in 1959, pottering around Paris – but look, here's a random list of people who inspired me in the early 1960s: Paul Klee, Beckett's novels, Bartók, Brecht, Kurt Weill, Flann O'Brien, Saul Bellow, Kerouac, Ginsberg and co., Stanley Spencer, Scott Fitzgerald, Miles Davis, Alexander Calder, Thelonious Monk, Saul Steinberg, Lotte Lenya, Bessie Smith . . .

And that's before the Beatles and the Stones and Bob Dylan joined the party. Can I stop this answer now, please? It's doing my head in.

Of course, but before we move on can you say something about your cathartic experience in a life-drawing class?

Yes. As I said, RADA was, on the whole, a dead experience. We just learned the lines and applied our newly learned voice and movement techniques to the main task of 'not falling over the furniture'. There was no discussion. No research. We never asked questions beyond the immediate surface action of the play, questions about the characters, their world, the meaning of the play, how the play or the characters related to real life, to our lives, to

the world out there. Of course, I was dimly aware of this, but only in a half-conscious, naive, passive kind of way.

Then, a year or so after I'd left RADA and done a bit of acting, I enrolled on the foundation course at Camberwell Art School. One day I was in the life-drawing class. Drawing was a big thing at Camberwell. They were famous for it. At that time they'd taken over an old primary school in Peckham. Twenty or so of us sat quietly drawing the model – a real naked woman sitting on a chair. Bright sunlight beamed through the generous Victorian windows. There was total concentration; you could have heard a pin drop. I looked around and – ping! – it all came to me in a clairvoyant flash. This was what it was all about. This was what we had never experienced as drama students. Everybody was totally absorbed in making an organic discovery of something real, something meaningful to them. We were each investigating a unique personal experience. We were looking at the world and we were being creative. And I thought, 'Why can't rehearsals be like this? Why should they be unfocused, undisciplined affairs where people read newspapers in the corner of the room and take no notice of the work? This is a group of individuals each doing his or her own thing, yet this is more of an organic ensemble than many a rehearsal, because here each student is centred and secure, and not made insecure by other people's insecurities. Why should actors only practise interpretive service skills? Can't they be artists in their own right? And why, for that matter, should directing be an interpretive job? And why should writing and directing be forced to be separate skills? And couldn't writing and rehearsing be one and the same process, involving the actor in a truly creative way?' And a million thoughts . . .

It just suddenly all became clear at that moment.

So, after completing those courses in London by 1965 – RADA, the London Film School, Camberwell Art School, the Central School of Art and Design – you must have been very eager to start work.

By 1965 I felt as though I'd done the training, such as you might call it. I'd had a small acting part in a film called *Two Left Feet* (1963). I had directed, with great difficulty and no success artisti-

cally or otherwise, the original production of *Little Malcolm and his Struggle Against the Eunuchs*, written by and starring the late David Halliwell. It became a very successful play subsequently, but when we did the original it was a disaster, mostly because I derived no pleasure from directing it. It was a constant battle with Halliwell. He was very close to the material, and he used to say the director was just a chairman. I was very fond of Halliwell. He remained a close friend until his tragic death in 2006.

So I had a desire, a need to write, to make up plays and films – a conviction that I could and should direct. My most successful experience up till that time was, in fact, the first thing I directed: a production of *The Caretaker* at RADA. But a fascination with actors and acting contributed towards the idea of a practice where you get actors and make things happen in a collective way.

It didn't take too long for you to get going.

The first opportunity I got to carry out any of this stuff that was buzzing around in an unformed way was when, out of the blue, I was offered a job at the Midlands Arts Centre in Birmingham, which was a brand-new edifice built in the middle of Cannon Hill Park. When it opened, it had a state-of-the-art studio theatre. It was the brainchild of probably the most conservative and bourgeois person I've ever met, John English, who for years had run a children's theatre in a marquee in the park. He'd had an idea about increased leisure time in the future, and he'd gone out and raised vast amounts of money on that premise. He and his wife were really the most small-minded and anti-creative people you can imagine . . . but I was to be assistant director in the new set-up. My instructions were to 'do experimental things' with this arts club for older teenagers and young adults. Suddenly I was presented with an empty canvas to do just what I liked, just how I liked. That's where it all started.

I should say that just before I got offered the job in Birmingham, for £17 a week, I went with my portfolio to see the now-veteran animator Bob Godfrey, who had a company called Biographic Films in Dean Street. He said, 'We just make commercial films here. You'd get £10 a week and be a runner.' My work was very animation-orientated, so I was torn in half. I really wanted to do

something to do with film. I really wanted to stay in London. I hadn't lived in Birmingham previously, so I didn't know what a God-awful place it was going to be. I wanted to be carrying film cans around Dean Street and Wardour Street, and I thought it would lead in all sorts of interesting directions. It's impossible to imagine what would have happened had I taken that job at Biographic Films. Some instinct took me to Birmingham: I was properly spotting what I had to develop in the long term rather than a job that held an immediate attraction.

Did you manage to have a good time there?

Of course. The job was very good news; there was a bunch of highly intelligent and lively young people to do things with.

We did my first play in December 1965. *The Box Play* was undoubtedly a proto-'Mike Leigh play'. There was a family in a cage, and the rest of the world was going on outside. It was very stylised and cartoonish, lit in a heightened way, with jagged music. But its core was a sort of realness. It was also very funny.

The Box Play was conducted entirely through rehearsals in which everybody was there, all the time. But it took a couple of years to refine the way I worked, to spot what it was about. To start with, I was preoccupied with it being about the group experience, the ensemble – influenced by a hell of a lot of things that were going on at the time. What I had to learn – what has become a key-stone in the whole operation – is that you can only build a proper ensemble when each individual participant is absolutely rock-solid and confident with what he or she is doing.

So in the first three plays at Birmingham, the characters were either very simple, stereotypical characters, or the young actors were sort of playing themselves. In 1967 I did a play at the RSC where I decided everyone would start individually with a character and I'd then bring them together. The stage manager and I filled a room with a massive number of vessels of all kinds. I told everyone to pick a vessel and to improvise a character suggested by it. Now that is about as far away in spirit from what it's actually about as I ever got. It was just a doodle device to get something off the ground.

When was the turning point?

In 1968, when I did my fourth play at East 15 Acting School, *Individual Fruit Pies* – the first proper ‘Mike Leigh piece’. It was about a guy’s mother dying in one room, while he lets out other rooms to various tenants. For the first time, the play came into existence by working very separately with the actors and building up very detailed, individual characters. The actors never knew anything about the rest of the work, other than what their character would know. The characters were originated, sourced and created from people the actors actually knew – which, basically, is how I’ve worked ever since.

Do the actors choose the characters themselves?

Of course not. The choice involves dramatic, thematic and aesthetic decisions. It can only be made by me.

Did you have a clear idea of the sort of characters you thought would come alive in your films?

When I started, in some way it seemed that you couldn’t go beyond doing relatively inarticulate or non-communicative people. As much as anything else, it was creating a kind of anti-theatre or anti-cinema that was about the raw world of interior emotions: the way that people live in a state of complete suppression of what they really think or feel. I started to realise that you didn’t have to be limited just because actors were improvising organically; they could be so much more than characters who bottled it all up.

I have mixed feelings about the fact that I didn’t make a film when I was twenty-two. I could have done; I had the skills. At that age I would have made one of two films: either a completely autobiographical thing about a kid growing up, which would probably have been influenced very directly by *Les Quatre Cents Coups*, or – and thank goodness I didn’t – a film about an abortion. I can even remember – and this shows what a journey I’ve made since then – thinking about filming it in a particular old, rambling house that belonged to somebody I knew in Liverpool. I even wondered if the great Peter Sellers would come and do a brief appearance as an abortionist because of an experience I had of a doctor showing

up, setting everything up and disappearing with the money, not to be seen again. That shows how little I knew. I was very young (and, incidentally, I was not personally involved with the pregnancy in question).

What sort of specific techniques were evolving at East 15?

I will happily talk about some of the techniques I use to get things to happen, but others I simply will not discuss in any circumstances, partly because they’re a trade secret (*laughs*), but mostly because they involve elusive things like inspiration, intuition and telepathy.

In principle, I’ll say, ‘Let’s start with this particular real person,’ and then I ask the actor to start to act the character by him- or herself in a room, without making anything interesting happen – just to get him or her into the character.

If, as has evolved over the years, I do a character with an actor that is based on maybe three people or even more, then there are ways of going into character, going back and forth and mixing them together through acting, rather than just talking about it. It’s about saying to the actors, ‘Just do whatever you like – whatever your character would do. You’re by yourself, you’re not pretending you’ve got an imaginary friend.’ So when the actor gets very used to being the character on his or her own, he or she can then go and inter-react with the other actors in character, who’ve been through the same preparation. With some solid basis: they know who they are, what they’ve been through and everything else about their character.

In the early days – and this certainly lasted as far as *Bleak Moments* – I would encourage the actor not just to be the person alone but also to talk to themselves. I was at least partly motivated by having dabbled around with Shakespeare and all his soliloquies, and also by the massively influential *Little Malcolm and his Struggle Against the Eunuchs*, in which the central character talks to himself relentlessly. Not forgetting that I was massively in love with Beckett, where there’s all that stream-of-consciousness talk. I still use that device in certain circumstances to bring out certain things.

But I had to learn the patience and the understanding to negotiate the massive difference between something that I found attrac-

tive or interesting as an artefact and something that merely had to happen as part of the foundations of where we were going to wind up. In my early improvisations, I wanted to see the characters in evolution, to see the wheels going around. I wanted to enjoy the image of them talking to themselves. Somewhere along the line I spotted that this could be extremely counterproductive. In other words, I had to learn the difference between the foundations of the building and the building itself.

The generally received convention of what a director does with actors is that you start to manufacture the end product as soon as you commence rehearsals. What I had to learn – and it's the hardest thing to explain to people – is that a very large proportion of what I do is merely preparing the conditions in which the end product will eventually be created.

I don't think that I would have been able to do what I do at all had I not spent time, brief as it was, at art school. I have the ability to draw a character and the details of a character's face with a very fine pencil. When I went to Camberwell Art School, we'd sit around in the life class. There I'd be with a finely sharpened pencil, drawing the lines round the eye of the model. This wonderful teacher called Chris Chamberlain came up once and said, 'Give me your pencil.' He snapped it in half and told me to draw with the blunt end. 'Understand the structure of what you're doing,' he told me. 'Don't worry about the detail till you've got the bigger picture.' It was a major, major educational moment. Whether I'd have learned that if I'd done an English degree at Oxford or Cambridge . . . probably not.

All art is a synthesis of improvisation and order. That's what artists do. But I was lucky enough to have to learn to understand that. I'm now talking about the method of what I do. You can break down what goes on in the evolution of one of my films in terms of creating the characters, building up their history and their relationships, doing all kinds of research to inform the whole experience, then structuring it through rehearsal and finally shooting the material.

But built into all that is an exploration of the unknown, an investigation of things in a way and for reasons I don't necessarily know about when I initiate them. Things happen because actors are being spontaneous and creating in an organic way. So it's com-

pletely unpredictable. You're talking about things that could only happen because a very particular and special kind of rapport is constructed whereby everyone, including me, operates in completely free conditions, without being inhibited or driven or motivated by any sort of compromising or preconception about what it should be.

If you want to know why I am generally reluctant to talk about what I do, it's because you can't really describe it, you can't really do it justice, any more than Van Gogh could explain the sunflowers, other than by describing technically how he applied the paint.

What do you tell an actor working with you for the first time?

When I gather everyone together at the start of a film, the first thing I always say is, 'On such-and-such a date in six months' time, we're going to go out and make a film. Anything we do between now and then is merely preparation so that we can embark on that creative journey.' It's only much later, during the shoot – on *Naked*, say, when we're rehearsing at night in the office block with Johnny and Brian, knowing that we are going to shoot again in a few nights' time – it's only then that I can see the images and the event. Only then can I get down to defining it, to writing it.

The actor is going to experience the magical mystery tour when it happens. But I've rarely had to sell it to an actor. On the rare occasion I *have* sold it, I've wound up regretting it. There are people who don't get it: a few walk away; a few I've chucked out. So the trick is to make sure you get the right sort of folks in the first place. You might think that's no big deal; surely this is what actors do? But it's not. There are plenty of actors out there who wouldn't have a clue in hell what I was talking about. 'Acting' for them is carrying out a job; it's not about getting inside real people in the real world. The truth is, large proportions of actors aren't really pretending to be someone else in a make-believe situation; they're just being themselves in an actual situation, on a stage or in front of a camera. But I look for actors whose total immersion in their character and whose imaginative commitment allows them to know instinctively what to do when, for example, the police come round to arrest Vera Drake. That scene was the result of a ten-hour improvisation that took place three months before we shot it. To

ask grown-up people to dress up for ten hours and pretend to be somebody else, with all the commitment and willing suspension of disbelief of a group of little boys playing cowboys and Indians in the woods . . . it's a massive thing.

So how do you make sure you choose the right actors?

I interview people. I have meetings with them first, never for less than twenty minutes and with nobody else in the room. I don't think it's appropriate to have a casting committee. Auditions are frightening enough for actors as it is. Whoever I work with I finally have a very personal relationship with: that's what I'm looking out for. So I get people to talk about their lives and experiences – I chew the fat with them. If I feel they're any good and we get on, I get them back in. Then I spend an hour with them and get them to talk about somebody they know a bit and to 'do' them. How they talk about that person, how they act them, their response to my direction . . . you can tell a lot about their general philosophy. I also want to know if they've got a sense of humour or whether they can't get over a rather misplaced pious attitude to what we're doing. Certainly I've cast loads of people who I haven't seen working and, indeed, avoided lots of people I have!

Here's a story. In 1987, when I was seeing elderly ladies for *High Hopes*, a very old actress with white hair and round specs came to see me. As usual, I said, 'Tell me about your life.' It turned out that after the war she was very much around on the Fitzrovia scene. 'I knew Dylan Thomas,' she said. 'I knew him very well. We used to drink in the Fitzroy. In fact, the day before he went off on his fateful trip to America we went to the cinema together and I wanked him off . . .'

How much support do you offer your actors once they're on board?

I can't just expect people to do these extraordinary things without a massive and elaborate support system. As I've said, knowing not to put the icing on the cake before you put the cake in the oven is crucial to the whole thing. But all the time, even though my job is to set things up in order to explore and not to worry about where they go, I'm still cajoling and manipulating so that things are

pointing in the right direction. When I teach film students, I encourage them to think about what I call 'the film in your head'. It may change, expand, contract, evolve, but there does have to be a film in your head. You may never make a film that turns out anything like the film in your head; the concept may just be something that drives you. That doesn't matter.

If some regime put a gun to my head and said I had to put on paper exactly what my next film was going to be about or they'd kill me, I'd have to die. I could articulate a few possibilities but nothing more. Yet I've got a very clear sense of the film. I just couldn't tell you what it is in conventional narrative terms. If, as some people always assume, I always know exactly what I'm going to do in advance and I am merely keeping it a secret, then what would be the point of doing what I do? I could simply write it all down and get on with it. Why go to these elaborate lengths? Why give myself such a hard time? If you're going to invite people to come and make a creative contribution, there's got to be some point in it all. It's got to be for real. It makes for an unpredictable and adventurous and dangerous voyage of discovery.

Another way of decoding what I've been talking about is to understand what happens in the so-called rehearsals. They are really not rehearsals at all but the preparatory work out of which actual rehearsals will happen and define the action. I see it as the actors living the characters in a metaphorical dimension, in a non-literal mode. At a certain stage, it becomes much more literal.

Let's talk about *Secrets & Lies*. After three months of hard work involving all the actors playing the family, in which we'd gone through in painstaking detail everything that happened to all of them in their relationships and their lives, Brenda Blethyn said to me one day, 'When are we actually going to start doing some acting on this film? Will we ever get up and start playing these characters?' It's a standard worry. I should first of all tell you that when they did stand up to act those characters, they were brilliant. It was all there. It takes a little while to adjust to details.

So, how does it work? In principle, and in a nutshell, the world of the characters and their relationships is brought into existence by discussion and a great amount of improvisation – that is, improvising a character. And research into anything and everything that will fill out the authenticity of the character.

Gradually we build up the characters' lives, progressing chronologically through the years. Sometimes the actors are in character; a lot of the time they are talking *about* the character objectively; and sometimes I get them to work in ways that are halfway between the two.

Over the years I've developed a whole range of devices, techniques and procedures that make it possible to explore and experience every aspect of the character's existence, safely and with propriety, including sex, violence, travel to remote places and what happened when he or she was a small child, even a baby.

What are the techniques?

Oh, I can't tell you the details because it's a trade secret (*laughs*).

Well, can you give an example of an actor being a small child?

I remember Roxanne's fourth birthday party in *Secrets & Lies* going on for about ten days. It's all there in the foundations of the film. Everybody involved in the family was there.

Which meant that Claire Rushbrook, as Roxanne, had to be a four-year-old?

Yes. But she was able to do it through the methods I've referred to. To do it any other way, like pretending to be a four-year-old, would be embarrassing.

In *Two Thousand Years*, the grandmother dies during the play. We never actually meet her, but we learn she's poorly during the first act and then she snuffs it between the first and second act. During the whole evolution of the thing I 'played' her. I often do the off-screen characters. If I did actually have to play them, apart from anything else no one could get through rehearsal without collapsing with uncontrolled mirth. They'd be corpsed to death.

Now a whole lot of things go on while all this is happening. First of all, what I've just described – which happens while sitting around a table – is great fun. It can go on for ages. It's terrifically stimulating. It's often very funny. People make jokes. Then, in another moment, it can be serious, sad, moving. It's a wonderful way of building an ensemble.

If you have two actors whose characters are or become a couple, do the actors have to have some kind of chemistry between them to make it work?

If it were necessary for them to have that chemistry with each other, you'd also have to say that where a relationship became hostile, they'd really have to be hostile to each other. But neither is true, and both would be dangerous. That's the bottom line. If it ever goes wrong, it's because people can't draw a distinction between themselves and the character – the point at which it blurs. That's happened on occasion, and everything goes to pieces. Of course, people have to understand and empathise with their characters. They just don't have to *be* them.

We've only talked briefly about the fact that the actors take a character that's based on between one and three people they've met or know.

I encourage each actor to begin the whole proceedings by talking about a large number of people he or she knows. Depending on the actor and/or what I think we need, I may give some other specification, but quite often I don't. The list is as long as a piece of string; there are actors who can come up with thirty-five people and others who come up with a hundred and thirty-five. Often people assume we're going to create a character based on someone they know well. But it can be anybody, and it doesn't have to be somebody they like. A lot of time is spent on this. It's a massive part of the creative process for me. I'm imagining all kinds of characters. In the morning I'll be talking to actor A and in the afternoon actor B, so I'm constantly thinking creatively.

David Thewlis came up with over a hundred people before we arrived at Johnny. Stephen Rea, when we first worked together on *Ecstasy* at the Hampstead Theatre in 1979, talked about a large number of people in massive detail. I pushed him for more. One day he said, 'When I first came to London, there was a guy in an Irish pub on the Kilburn High Road, whose name I don't know, but he had a look in his eye and he used to wear a ring.' When I eventually picked this guy as our starting point, Stephen was *outraged*, in a good-humoured way. But we developed a great character: Mick McSweeney, Irishman, builder's labourer and drinker.

Where do the names of the characters come from?

I sit down with the actor and say, 'OK, we're going to name the character.' Then we make lists of all the possible first names and surnames the character could have. And we gradually whittle it down to what seems the best combination.

Obviously it's very much up to me. The actors can't just randomly choose by themselves, not least because a character's name is as essential an element of the poetic imagery of the film as the music or the title or the visual style. And, apart from anything else, they could all end up with the same name! Or names that didn't go together.

If the character is another character's offspring, I do a complicated piece of negotiation so that everybody has shared appropriately in contributing to the decision.

Once characters have been established and relationships are starting to evolve, what's the next stage?

(*Long pause.*) Let's just stand back from the rehearsal process. It's possible to be sidetracked by it and to forget that it's only a means to an end. All that matters is the final film.

On the whole, I don't really distinguish between my two jobs as writer and director, but it might be useful here to separate them and to look at their respective functions, as well as how they eclipse.

As writer, my job is obviously, like all writers, to think up the story. As director, the job is to tell it. So from the word go – long before I've cast a single actor – there's a conception, some notion, however vague; a tentative, putative film in my head. And that premise for the film we're eventually going to make – and don't forget, the one great bonus of working the way I do is that a film has to be made! – that film in my head changes and expands and contracts and evolves as I cast it, as I rehearse it and as I shoot it; and even, of course, in the editing, it being a fact of life that all films are made in the cutting room. All you do when you shoot is manufacture the raw material.

So there I am in rehearsal, a writer with an evolving film in his head and a director with the task of organising the proceedings so as to make them progress usefully. Every direction I give, every

question I ask, every answer I supply, every idea I introduce, every reaction I have, every feeling I experience, every juxtaposition I arrange is motivated by the film in my head.

It goes without saying that there'd be no point in going to all this trouble if my notional film was a *fait accompli*. Obviously it isn't. Some people think I know exactly what I'm going to do before I start; others insist I never have a clue. Well, in a way, neither is true – and both are! What's certainly true is that I'm only able 'to know what to do next' or 'to know where to take it' by two essential processes: using my imagination and taking from what's going on. I may have a clear notion that 'x' should happen. But then 'y' happens in an improvisation. What do I do? Well, sometimes I think, 'Great. That's much more interesting/makes more sense – let's go for it.' Or I might reject it because I know it must be 'x'. Or, as a result of being confronted by 'y', I realise it should be 'z'. Or, indeed, what often happens is that we explore and develop the thing, and the results are neither 'x' nor 'y' nor 'z' but something else altogether!

So as writer I'm imagining the film (I'm certainly not writing anything yet), and as director I'm responsible for organising the comfortable working conditions necessary for the actors to function freely and creatively, in a disciplined way. I never argue with actors. To move things in the direction I think they should go I have to make it work for the actor in terms of the character's motivation. It has to be feasible for him or her. I simply never dictate. That would be completely pointless.

Actually, as I say all this, I'm finding it immensely difficult to separate my two functions. They really do merge. And if you ask me how I arrive at my decisions – that is, where they come from – I'd have to say it's a combination of conviction, lateral thinking, logic, practical considerations, emotional recall, gut feeling, intuition, telepathy, imaginative leaps, blind panic and my sense of humour.

But even what I've just said could be easily misunderstood. It could sound too abstract. The thing is, we're talking about the *film* in my head. It's not a novel or a poem or an article. What I'm imagining are cinematic images. And this is important because, as I've said, I'm not just working with the actors. The cinematographer, the production designer, the locations manager, the costume and

make-up designers all need to access my ideas as they evolve.

To go back to your original question, what comes into existence during the rehearsals is a kind of three-dimensional metaphor, the imaginary world of the characters actually going on. From the actors' point of view, two things are important here. Firstly, that each of them not only knows all about his or her character but also that he or she knows how to play the character – what we call the characterisation. Secondly, that a believable organic experience is hard-wired into the actor's character memory, and indeed into the collective memory of groups of characters. This may involve events that will become scenes in the film, but frequently not: they just remain things that happened in the past. And, conversely, on location and during the shoot, scenes and moments are often invented that certainly never happened in the development rehearsals. But these can only be created because the character's experience actually exists and I fully understand him or her.

We keep talking about 'rehearsals', but rehearsing in the conventional sense never goes on. It's all about preparing us for going out on location to make up a film. At the end of the period, just before shooting begins, I write a scenario – a shooting script, I call it. It's a very short thing. Merely a structure. No dialogue. No detailed descriptions. From my point of view, the whole operation is designed to make it possible for me to be genuinely spontaneous and creative on the shoot – literally to make it all up with the team.

It's only when we get on location that for the first time we do real rehearsing – repeating it till it's right. This is really the writing stage. I never go away and write dialogue and come back with it on paper. In fact, the actors never see it on paper. I'll set up an improvisation, and when it's all over I'll analyse and discuss it. Then we'll do another, and I'll stop that at some point and start to fix what happens and who says what. And change and restructure, and suggest better lines, or try different ones, and cut and paste, and weld different bits together, and refine and refine . . . until the actors are word perfect and the actions and the dialogue are totally integrated.

Then we shoot it.

And all the time the actors are only aware of their own story . . .

The deal with any of the actors taking part in one of these opera-

tions is: come and be in the film; I can't and won't tell you what it's about. You will never know anything about anything except what your character knows. Interestingly, in passing, with hardly an exception actors love it. You might think they'd be inquisitive or they'd cheat or they'd be frustrated, but they never are. Each actor takes total possession of his or her character and has complete responsibility for him or her and is able, as in real life, to see his or her character at the centre of his or her universe. They don't see their character as being the fourteenth most important character; they don't know what the film's about or where it's going.

Anybody who does any sort of fully fledged character gets one-to-one time with me; I even spend a little bit of time with actors who come in later on to do tiny characters. I take responsibility for the evolution of their character. Of course, I am totally responsible for the pastoral care of the actor, but more importantly, the totality of the performance can't be compromised, because the small-part actor can't just learn the lines and come up with an instant characterisation, as in ordinary films. I have to make it all work, totally, for everybody.

There are constantly things for people to go and find out about, to fill out this whole life. People don't worry about what the film's about or what another actor might be up to. In fact, it becomes intriguing not to know – it becomes part of the fascination. They also understand they are holding onto something very private that they don't want anyone else to know about.

Do you encourage privacy across the board?

Yes. The issue of privacy goes beyond evolving a story: I'm very, very strict about actors being private about their own creative process and their own creative problems. Acting is a very vulnerable business, and what screws up so many actors in conventional films and plays is having to sort out problems in front of everybody. Don't forget, a problem may have to do with the acting or the character, or something technical or practical, or with the actor's own personal feelings or emotional experience. What becomes standard in my rehearsals and right through into the shoot is the use of the term 'pop out'. I can be working with a group of actors and something will come up, so I'll say, 'Everybody

pop out of the room except so-and-so.' Or the issue may concern just two people. Then we'll discuss it, and everybody else can come back in. Nobody ever talks about their motivation in front of anyone else, neither in rehearsals nor during the shoot.

As for having to talk about their character in the first person – I don't allow it. Nobody's allowed to do it. The actor is first person, the character is third person. I insist partly because I'd be embarrassed for them to be talking as the character and in the first person. But, more importantly, a distinction needs to exist between actor and character – and much acting elsewhere flounders because this principle is not understood.

I don't think it helps if one actor is party to another's acting problems. Sometimes I'll ask for someone to pop out so I can deal with something to do with the acting. Not everything works for everyone all the time. I've got to maintain a very clear, disciplined surveillance of what's going on that's to do with the actor and what's going on that's to do with the character. Sometimes characters start to go in a direction that's wrong . . . perhaps for some red-herring reason.

We therefore have to conduct these operations with a massive amount of elaborate security about who knows what, who is party to what. That's why, when I get people together on day one, it's invariably the only time some people meet till the wrap party.

I'm also excessively, obsessively strict about the actors not talking to anyone about any aspect of what they're doing – not even their partner, husband or wife – because the grapevine in a community of actors is massively efficient . . .

Do you always put up a copy of Fougasse's poster with its warning that 'careless talk costs lives'?

I used to. I had it up for a number of productions, then I had it up for one that went wrong. I decided it was bad karma. But then we stuck one up during *Vera Drake* because someone came back with it from the Imperial War Museum, where you can buy it. I worried it was tempting fate, but it was fine. I've got three originals up in my flat. I love Fougasse.

If you're doing a really emotional, difficult scene, such as that fol-

lowing Vera Drake's arrest, do you have to help the actor unwind afterwards?

Yes. But this is important even if it's not such an emotional situation. The actor needs time to come out of character, to come down, just as he or she needs to take time to warm up into character at the beginning of an improvisation or scene. I never jump in immediately and say, 'Right, let's discuss it!' I always leave time, absolutely.

People often suggest that I must love the rehearsals and find them very exciting; do I like the shoot as much? In some ways I hate the bloody rehearsals! They're a chore. At the end of the day you have nothing to show for it except, perhaps, a possibility. You haven't actually made anything. You're just endlessly bugging about with the foundations. At the end of six months, you've got fuck all, basically. Whereas I love filming. It's wonderful. And there are more people around.

Is it a simple matter to find the kind of space you need available for hire throughout these long rehearsals?

It isn't. We had huge hassles with 'Untitled '06', trying to find a space in London – we have to find a fairly big building with no one else there and with heat and light. If you want a space in the middle of London, as I currently do, it's very tough. It used to be easier: there were empty schools, churches, warehouses and so on, but they've all become real estate – fancy apartments made out of any and every kind of building.

Is it cheaper to work in London?

Overall it is, yes – cheaper than having to pay overnights to crew and cast. It's not cheaper to hire a disused building, though.

Do you enjoy the technical side of film-making?

Oh yes. But I don't regard it as technical; it's part of the joy of film-making. There are technical things I ignore, a lot of photographic mathematics that I don't have to worry about. But the actual application of these things I'm very excited by. I also get very much involved with the sound. I'm proactive and creative with it.

Of course, it's now possible with video playback to sit at a large monitor and direct the whole thing away from the action. It's possible to look at every take of every shot immediately after shooting it and for a whole committee of people to analyse it. I hate all that; I learned to make films the old-fashioned way. That's what it's about for me. So I don't sit glued to a monitor and I don't look at every take immediately after we've shot it; I think it's a massive waste of time and slows everything down. Also, I don't let actors see the rushes. Watching them is a menace for an actor. It can destroy a performance.

Is there a definite divide between cast and crew?

Yes and no. No, ultimately, because the crew are in on it; they are very much sharing it with the actors. And the input from costume and make-up, from the set designer and cinematographer is massive. I share everything with them.

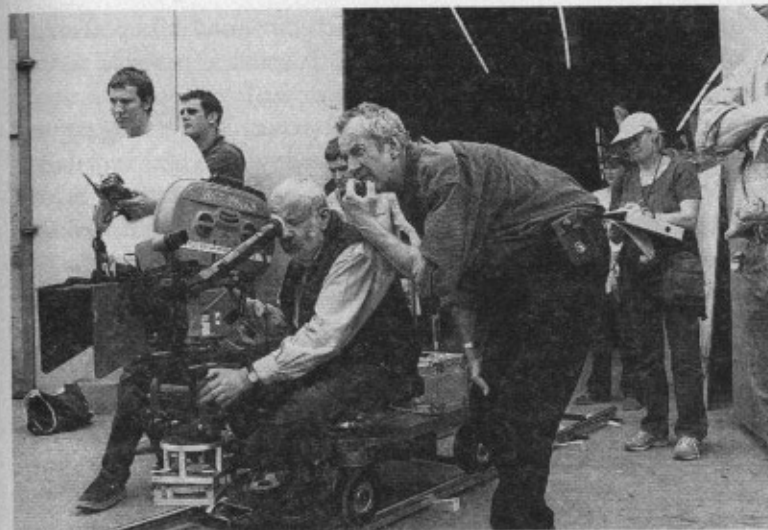
But, on the other hand, the actors have been on this special journey with the characters. They have to spend a lot of time together and they have their own subculture. They're both separate and together.

The atmosphere on a film is core: if people aren't enjoying themselves, it's going to be a lousy film. And any suggestion of bad behaviour, bad vibes, rancour, neurotic stuff – I don't want to know about it. If you get the right people, you get a really good working atmosphere. People have a laugh on my films, there's no question about it. Often, both during rehearsals and the shoot, I'll walk into a room full of actors, and they'll be having such a good time telling stories and laughing so much that I'll feel very excluded from it. Which is very good news.

Don't forget that a large part of what I do is driven by my own paranoia and insecurity: paranoia about it not happening or it not gelling or it not being meaningful or it being awful. That keeps me going.

Has working with cinematographer Dick Pope changed the way you make films?

I started working with Dick on *Life Is Sweet* in 1990. We're still stringently resistant to being gratuitously flashy or letting the cam-



2. Mike Leigh seated on the dolly, in conference with director of photography Dick Pope (standing).

era do anything that isn't motivated. The work I did with Bahram Manocheri, Roger Pratt and Remi Adefarasin in the years preceding Dick was pretty sophisticated but perhaps more restrained. Dick and I have definitely become much more adventurous. I've allowed myself to ease up on some fairly fundamental and rigorous preconceptions about what the camera should and shouldn't do. If you look at the earlier films and where the camera is, what it's looking at is very specific, very strict. That principle has remained, but I've become more emancipated about the camera doing more dynamic, quirky things.

Is that because you've grown in confidence?

Partly, and it's also a case of simply becoming more mature with the medium. It reflects the more sophisticated subject matter and way of telling stories. Take the mother of all these films, *Bleak Moments*: it's defined in part by its severe, austere and for the most part static nature. But there are also two adventurous uses of the camera. The scene where they all sit round not saying anything at the tea party is a series of static shots; in order to achieve it – and since no one spoke and the eye-lines had to be so tight – we took

off the magazine and ran the film with no sound blimp at all. It was very noisy. The camera had to be as small as possible so that the actors could all see each other.

There's also a shot of Joolia Cappleman as Pat rushing to visit Sylvia, which was actually a shot done by drawing a very large, perfect circle in chalk on a wide piece of pavement with houses in the background. She rushed round in a circle while Bahram Manocheri handheld the camera and revolved on the spot in the middle.

The shot right at the start of *Naked* where the handheld camera rushes jaggedly down an alleyway towards Johnny and the woman: I actually suggested it to Dick Pope and he wasn't sure he could do it. But he gave it a try: he ran with the camera on his shoulder. I wanted it to be disjointed, and it worked.

On the whole people assume with my films that we're mainly talking about people and relationships. But one of the major elements of what preoccupies me is time and place. You could go through the films and isolate a whole compendium of shots where I am naturally drawn to just looking at and enjoying place for place's sake. In *Grown-Ups*, when the girls have a conversation about and experiment with folding brown doors, it's obviously consciously constructed. The camera stays static and enjoys the space and the dynamics of the scene. Another one that springs to mind is a moment in *Home Sweet Home* that I'm very fond of: at the back of the house, when Stan has brought his daughter back from the home. A static shot on the back of the house, in which they're talking about some television aerial she once brought home when she was a kid. It's about the environment and the space between them. *Meantime* is all about that too.

When it comes to the shoot, do you constantly discuss scenes with Dick Pope?

Everything I do in the preparatory period is only preparation for going out on location later and making up a film, defining things specifically in dramatic and cinematic imagery. That's where it counts and that's what it's about. Though it may draw from the preliminary rehearsals and may in some areas virtually replicate certain things that have happened, the film will also contain much

material which is only discovered and created during the shoot.

Part of what I have to do to change or modulate or dramatise a scene is to do with changing the motivation, and is often merely to do with changing the order of events. Improvising, pinning it down and fixing it, improvising again. We'll get to a rough version which we will then refine. We'll cut it down and change the action and words until we've got something that's very precise – which I can only do on location. I can only script it, as it were, through rehearsal and by seeing it at the same time. I'm also thinking about shooting it, as well as who says what.

As to the actual procedure of arriving at what shots to shoot, I can develop a scene without the crew there and the following morning we'll run the entire scene. I may then say to Dick Pope, 'Let's do this. This is how I've constructed it and the cameras are here.' He may say, 'Fantastic, of course.' He may also say, 'Well, yes, but I watched it from over there and it was really interesting. And the light was better.'

With longer sequences, such as the barbecue scene in *Secrets & Lies*, I will then share with Dick how we're going to shoot. My policy is that if it has to take two or three hours during shooting time for me and Dick to work out how to shoot a scene, then so be it. The actors will wait patiently and run the action as we need. We are looking for a way for the camera to serve the action, of course, but the actors are so solid in what they're doing that the action can and must also serve the camera.

What if you and Dick Pope really disagreed on something?

Even if we disagree, we know what we're doing. In the end it is down to me, but we are doing it together; it's a collaboration. What's interesting about Dick is that he didn't go to film school; he started in the industry as a lab technician in the processing room, then became a cameraman. He shot a lot of Granada's *World in Action* documentaries and brings huge experience to what we do. He also has feature-film sensibility. He loves to operate himself; I don't like working with a cinematographer and a separate operator. He even operated on *Topsy-Turvy*, a bigger canvas and the sort of film that usually demands that the cinematographer hasn't got time to operate as well as light.

There's more to it, of course, than just what the shots are: there's the whole conception of the film, the look of it, the palette. There's also what happens in post-production. The journey of discovery with Dick has been massive. I never made a film where we properly shot tests until *Naked*, although Roger Pratt shot experimental 8mm footage during the preparations for *Meantime*. There were *Plays for Today* where you never saw the cameraman until he showed up at the beginning of the shoot. The guys from Pebble Mill who shot *Nuts in May* spent most of their year shooting *Farming Today* and the occasional documentary. So the idea that you would be in communication with the cinematographer and you'd actually discuss the look, the feel, the spirit of the film and you'd go and shoot tests, I was very green about.

Let's return to the method. Timothy Spall says, 'The moment you go from the improvisation to words is almost impossible to explain.'

I agree. Next question?

Can the actors remember their lines?

Yes; their capacity to remember is amazing. It just goes straight into the brain box. That's because it's organic. They know and understand where it's all come from, and words and action are inseparable.

Is there a difference between actors you've worked with before and those who are new to the game?

Not really, apart from the obvious fact that anybody who does anything gets better at it the more they do it. First-timers are into it in no time. People who've done it before just get back into it. Without exception, this is what happens in my films. Sparks often say, 'I don't understand this film. There's no script, they all know their lines, they never fluff them, nobody gets into a right old state or rows with anyone. Every take is word perfect. I don't get it.' But it's just all there.

Can we talk about some examples of your method at work in the films?

Well, OK. Let's start with *Naked*. At some stage of the preliminary rehearsals of what was then 'Untitled '92', I set up a night-time improvisation where Johnny comes into an office block (our rehearsal space happened to be an office block). Brian was there, and they went into the building and walked around. They chatted. End of improvisation. It was a pointer in the direction of a putative scene. I also set up stuff where the woman was at the window. There was a configuration in the rehearsal space where you could do that.

However many weeks later we'd got a proper location and had dressed it. We then went into rehearsal mode – rehearsing, incidentally, at night for the full atmosphere. We did what is standard: we re-explored the improvisation, only this time with a real location. I then did what I always did: I stopped it, broke it down and built it up. Reconstructed it. In the case of that particular scene, we did a lot of improvisations and we also introduced a lot of stuff objectively by saying this or that could be in there. It's a very elaborate process which also involved sitting around and talking about what Johnny and Brian might say and sorting out all the ideas that were on the go.

But what also happened is that they simply improvised as they walked around the building, with Brian turning the lights on and off and so on. My job at that stage is just to watch and listen. At some point, I was in a particular spot where the lights came on through some interior windows dividing two offices and Brian had to walk right across the room to turn them off, which left me looking at Johnny silhouetted against light through the windows. Because he was in the dark, Johnny stayed where he was and was going on about things. I thought, 'Wow, how amazing, how cinematic! This is just fantastic!' So we used it, obviously. Then I took something we'd structured in another place – all the stuff Johnny says about bar codes – and reallocated it to this place. And, of course, the whole point of this is that I discovered this imagery by working three-dimensionally, by being there. I couldn't have thought it up at my desk.

*How about the bathroom scene near the end of *Naked* where Johnny and Louise sit on the floor talking?*

Interesting. The front end of *Naked*, when Johnny shows up at

Sophie and Louise's flat, had been investigated in the rehearsals. But the back end of the film didn't exist. It was explored and rendered at the same time, at the back end of the shoot, during a period where producer Simon Channing Williams – as he's done on a number of occasions – negotiated a week off with the crew so we could rehearse action.

We'd already shot everything to do with Johnny up till that point. So I set up an elaborate improvisation in which he came back to the house. We then distilled this down to the precise action we shot.

The scene in Meantime where Tim Roth as Colin pulls his hood down after sleeping in his coat to reveal a newly shaved head.

That's the real thing. We were waiting for Tim. He was having his head shaved. I knew, he knew, but, of course, none of the other actors in the improvisation knew. His mum, dad and brother didn't know where he'd been. They thought he'd been to do the painting job for his auntie. It was a very long improvisation in the flat – about seven hours. I remember it because I sat in one place and Chris Rose, who was the first AD, sat with me the entire time. It was a real fucking cliffhanger. He showed up and kept his hood up for hours. You could have burst waiting for him to pull it down! Eventually it came down when he was in his room with his brother Mark. So we dramatised that. Separately, we improvised and constructed all the stuff about 'Where have you been? Get yourself a proper job' and so on.

There's a constant distinction between what's happened in the rehearsals and stuff that can only be done in the actual situation. *Meantime* we rehearsed in an old warehouse on the Kingsland Road in Dalston. Barbara invites Colin round to help her with some painting. We did an improvisation, in a real house, with Barbara there in character with all the paint. We worked out that she had got out John's old pyjamas for Colin to put on while he was painting. The costume designer went to great lengths to get duplicates and triplicates of everything, because without a shadow of a doubt Colin was going to cover himself in paint, and there would be more than one take. Of course, when we investigated the situation, not a paintbrush was touched . . .

The scene where the sword falls on Gilbert's head in Topsy-Turvy.

That's more conventional: a reconstruction of a historic moment, a built set within the location. The sword had to fall off the wall at a certain moment. We filmed it 796 times hoping it would fall . . . No, seriously, a prop guy knocked the nail out from the other side on cue.

Gilbert's wife Kitty in bed towards the end of Topsy-Turvy, talking to her husband about her surreal dreams.

That's like the scene at the end of *Naked*. Some of what Gilbert says in that scene is a direct quote, such as, 'There's something inherently disappointing about success. I don't quite know how to take praise. It makes my eyes red.' But first of all we did the improvisations. I worked with them, putting in ideas, suggesting all the elements. Lesley Manville went away to think about it, and then we talked about it some more so she could get her head round it. I wanted to bring out Kitty's repressed creativity. This is an example of material throughout the films that represents my more obvious writing contribution: it's not all just organising what happened in the improvisations.

The scene where Cynthia discovers her daughter is black in Secrets & Lies.

At the start some of the actors knew each other and some didn't. They all assembled together for the one and only time in the upstairs room at Kettner's restaurant in Soho. You can read a more detailed description of this occasion in Michael Coveney's book *The World According to Mike Leigh*. One of the actresses there was Emma Amos; she was going to play the woman with a scar down her face who has had a terrible accident. Brenda Blethyn vaguely knew her.

When we decided to investigate Hortense phoning Cynthia, we did it with mobiles. Marianne Jean-Baptiste, who played Hortense, was tucked away somewhere near by. At no time had she and Brenda seen one another during the rehearsals. It was always organised so they'd never overlap, and everyone is under strict instructions never to show up unless they're called. So she phoned her up. It was a pretty devastating and accurate investigation of

what we eventually dramatised, although it didn't happen when she'd just had a row with Roxanne.

Brenda (not as Cynthia) told me subsequently that – outside the rules of engagement and in one tucked-away corner of her brain – on hearing the voice she decided it could only be Emma Amos. She assumed the baby she'd given away was white, since there weren't that many actors there and some of them were already in her family. She didn't even go as far as thinking it couldn't be one of the two black actresses – that simply wouldn't have occurred to her.

Her disbelief when she finally met Hortense must have been even greater.

Well, there she was, assuming it was Emma Amos. They arranged to meet. I decided they'd meet outside Abney Park cemetery in Stoke Newington, just because it was convenient; we were rehearsing in a disused school across the street. They met at dusk. I watched from the other side of the road. It was very powerful and tense. Of course, as always, I was watching the putative version of something that was going to be in a film, constantly checking it against the evolving story in my head.

Cynthia showed up and walked up and down. Hortense showed up and walked up and down. Neither knew who the other was. Not only did Brenda expect to see Emma Amos but there were also a lot of black people walking around. Brenda didn't recognise Marianne; it was twilight and she wasn't expecting her.

Marianne – Hortense – was on it and approached her. Brenda almost said, 'I can't talk to you, I'm doing an improvisation.' It was for real! So when she announced herself as Hortense Cumberbatch, the experience Cynthia had was as real as anyone can have in these situations.

Much later, we reinvestigated the dialogue and shot it outside Holborn tube station with the camera on a long lens on the other side of the road. We had rehearsed the main structure and dialogue of the scene, and then, on the day of the shoot, the great thing was that in one take this woman materialised. A big woman with a suitcase and specs. She was hanging around and then she walked towards Hortense, absolutely on cue. That was the take we used.

How did you deal with Sally Hawkins as Susan being date-raped in Vera Drake?

Here we're in a very particular kind of territory. This rape had to happen. Sam Troughton, who plays the chap, didn't know any more than Sally did that we were in a film about abortion and that the abortion was a foregone conclusion. But we explored the relationship through a tactile investigation. Then we stopped it. We isolated a moment when the character might either force her to have sex or back off. Sam said he'd back off. In many circumstances I'd think, 'OK, he backs off.' But in this particular circumstance it was the worst news I could've heard. I'd created this character knowing exactly what his dramatic function was going to be. Of course he bloody well could, and of course he did.

So occasionally there's a *deus ex machina* whereby I have to provoke something to happen. I remember one particular circumstance in which there was a very interesting relationship on the go between two people who were not getting on. It went on and on. It was very important to me as part of the whole scheme of things that they got married. This was for *Babies Grow Old*, the play I did at the Other Place in Stratford in 1974. On that occasion the two of them [Sheila Kelley and Eric Allan] came in on Monday morning and I sat them down. 'The premise is', I told them, 'that they get married.' They both looked shocked. They digested it, thought about it in relation to the real world and agreed to go with it. And it was great.

So, in *Vera Drake*, I had to tell Sam Troughton to do it. Of course, I put pressure on him, but he knew it was entirely feasible for that guy to be so beastly. He didn't agree at first; he was making a moral choice, which was fair enough but not good enough. We investigated it, left it alone until we came to shooting it and then we simply set up an improvisation, constructed the scene and shot it very simply.

This is the thing about it: for all its discipline and integrity, at the end of the day the job is to make a fiction. There's nothing holy about the improvisations. They are only a means to an end; they're not an artefact in their own right. You have to remember in the context of all this why it's important to have honest and intelligent actors.

It must be tremendous when it all comes together.

I just get an enormous buzz when the whole thing takes off and actors start being brilliant. What happens on the journey with every actor and every character is that there's a certain moment when something clicks. Up to a certain point, we're both developing the story of the character and still working on how the actor plays the character. There's always a moment when it goes *Clunk!* and I can stop worrying about the acting. It settles, becomes three-dimensional and grows.

I mostly enjoy watching my films, but if ever I couldn't watch them for some reason, I do have fantastically glowing memories of sitting in rooms with people, watching them doing things without a camera even being there.

Can you imagine a life where you weren't making films?

On one level I'd be delighted not to have to do anything – just to lounge about and be lazy. But actually the buzz and excitement of making films is so colossal that it would be devastating not to do it all the time. For ever.

Bleak Moments (1971)

Sylvia (Annie Raitt) lives in a south London suburb with her mentally disabled sister Hilda (Sarah Stephenson). By day Sylvia works as a typist in an accountant's office with her friend Pat (Joolia Cappleman); by night she cares for her sister, drinks sherry and reads books. Her secret dream is to be a writer. Her lonely life is interrupted by two men: the first, Peter (Eric Allan), is an awkward, emotionally frigid teacher she vaguely knows who asks her out to dinner; the second, Norman (Mike Bradwell), is a hopelessly shy hippie who comes to do the printing when Sylvia rents her garage to an underground magazine.

Peter is nervous around women. He interrogates Norman about his education and criticises him for dropping out of school before A-levels. Peter takes Sylvia to a Chinese restaurant where there is only one other diner. The silence weighs heavy. Finally, they leave and return to Sylvia's house, where she offers Peter sherry and keeps topping up her own glass in an attempt to relax. There is more silence, yet the atmosphere is charged with unspoken desire. Sylvia desperately tries to lighten the mood by telling Peter that, in her head, she was telling him to take his trousers off. Peter refuses more coffee, pulls on his gloves and leaves.

Sylvia knocks on the garage door to see if Norman would like to come in the house for a drink, but he already has plans. At the office Pat tells Sylvia she wants to take Hilda to see a spiritualist; Sylvia is against the idea.

Peter is in the school staff room. When another teacher discusses next term's 'humour project', he says that he doesn't think teenagers have a sense of humour.