

A PINEWOOD DIALOGUE WITH MIKE LEIGH

British director Mike Leigh's films evolve from a unique and remarkable collaborative process. The actors spend months on rehearsal, story development, dialogue, and discovering the emotional truth underlying the drama. Although often described as documentary-like and naturalistic, Leigh's films are highly crafted, precisely detailed, and deeply stylized. *All or Nothing*, starring Leigh's frequent collaborators Timothy Spall and Lesley Manville, was a return to the contemporary working-class milieu of Leigh's earlier films following the success of the period costume drama *Topsy-Turvy*. In this discussion just before the film's New York premiere, Leigh, Spall, and Manville elaborate on their creative process.

A Pinewood Dialogue with Mike Leigh, moderated by Chief Curator David Schwartz (September 25, 2002):

SCHWARTZ: Please welcome Lesley Manville, Timothy Spall, and Mike Leigh. (Applause)

Thanks so much for being with us. One thing that really struck me about this movie was the physical beauty. I just wondered if you could talk about that first before we talk about the performances and the writing, what are some of your ideas in terms of the way you use space.

LEIGH: It's hard to talk about that as a kind of abstract thing. This of course is a film about people, but it is also a film about place. Speaking personally, I am endlessly—though I'm primarily motivated to make films about people and relationships and love and feelings, which is what this film is about—that element is also about place, the poetry of place, the spirit of place is very much something that informs this film.

Making films, as everybody here knows, is a very practical business. Writing a novel is in itself a practical process: You've got to actually write the novel. What we try to do with this kind of film is to make movies with the same kind of organic freedom with which other people write novels. But it is finally about being out in places with characters and looking at them. And in some way, which is hard to explain, when we made this film it was curiously blessed with an extraordinary run

of...oh, I suppose at the lowest you could call it good luck.

For example, we evolved the characters and the emotions early. We rehearsed this film for six months before we actually started to shoot anything. During the earlier part of that, I decided that yes it [the film] would take place on this public housing estate. When I said that to the design team, they were horrified because, famously, these kinds of places where there are hundreds of people living in apartments, are very difficult to shoot in. It upsets people's lives, and people are not necessarily friendly when you want to film them and so forth. But I was insistent, and we were developing the film in the district of Greenwich in London. And I said in an ideal world, we'd find an estate in Greenwich. They said, "Well, that's a very tall order. Very unlikely." And a couple weeks later the location scout, as you call them here, came and said, "Amazing! We found this housing estate right in the middle of Greenwich, and the great thing about it is it's empty. Everybody's been moved out. We could do a deal with them and it's completely available." The [production] designer, Eve Stewart, and I went to see it, and of course it could have been available and empty and horrible and not the least bit inspiring. But in fact, it had an extraordinary poetry about it, in itself. So, as I say, obviously it's all about the characters and the relationships, but to be able to put them in this environment and to get the kind of real inspiration back from what you could see—that's the buzz of filmmaking, really.

SCHWARTZ: You talk about a six-month rehearsal process, which is extraordinary for film. How is the writing process separate from the rehearsal process for you?

LEIGH: In what we do, the important thing is that we arrive at a film, and that we eventually arrive at something which is very precise. But there isn't a separate writing process. When we finally create the characters and the relationships and the whole world at the time of shooting, when we actually pin down moment from moment, exactly what happens down to the last word or the last moment, that is done through rehearsal. It's written through rehearsal. I don't go away and write something alone because these guys contribute something that is absolutely organic and three-dimensional.

SCHWARTZ: What is the preparation process? Is it the traditional idea of method acting? [To the actors] Do you go off and drive a cab for six months to get into character? How do you find your character?

SPALL: Method acting, I've never read about it. But I presume it's about knowing where your character has come from and where they might be going. Or invariably, not where they're going, because like most human beings, they don't know where they're going. They may have various appointments, but on the whole they don't know what destiny... (Laughter) I assume it's the entire exercise of rehearsal is about creating a whole parallel universe of information and facts about these people you're going to eventually depict in a movie. And it's more preparation isn't it, than it is to do with rehearsing what you're going to end up doing?

It's all about creating an entire lagoon, a huge lagoon of information. It eventually becomes part of the psyche and the physicality of the character and just the mere day-to-day information, shared information about what makes these peoples' lives. So it probably *is* method, but most people who talk about method haven't read Stanislavsky. I think it means it just looks real when they watch it.

SCHWARTZ: Just to take one scene as an example, in the scene where you say that she

doesn't love you, that powerful scene. It is played very precisely. It certainly doesn't seem improvised. Every line of dialogue seems very... Can you tell me how that scene evolved? How you worked on that.

SPALL: The simple fact is that everything you see on screen is not improvised. It's structured and shot and rehearsed exactly the same way as any other scene is made in the film. But it's just the tip of the iceberg of preparations you've made as it were. Because you know these characters inside-out psychologically, more than you know yourself, because you've created them and you haven't created yourself, to a certain degree, you know through the process of rehearsal and preparation where they stand. You know where they are at the moment where they are. You never know what's going to become of them.

So by the time my character, Phil, expressed his despair, which is what he's carrying with him right from the beginning of the movie... Although he doesn't understand it until the French lady says, "Do you love your wife?" When she eventually did the improvisations that that scene was based on, my character was desperate—not me—my character was desperate to express himself. It so needed to be said. It wasn't in any sense planned and it wasn't in any sense contrived. It happened to come out in the improvisation. Lesley, I don't know what you'd say from Penny's point of view.

MANVILLE: Well, just to add to that, I found that a lot of the press that we've been doing lately, a lot of people said to me, "Why didn't Penny stand up to her son? And why did she never say to Phil, 'Get your act together' or whatever...?" But the process is not about sitting down and making decisions like "Let's make her like this," or "Why doesn't she say that?" It does evolve in a sort of pure way. When people have said to me, "Why doesn't she stand up to...?", it's quite a hard question to answer because she just doesn't. She just doesn't because of the girl that we created, and the teenager we created, and then the woman we created. She was all of those things as a person always. So when the film begins and picks her up as a late 30-whatever-she-is-year-old woman, she is the product of everything that she was. Which is why the process, the buildup to the filming works.

It's about creating a three-dimensional character that then takes care of itself. You don't ever have to think, "How will she react in this situation?" because you just put the characters in the situation and it happens. And at the end of the film you give these two people who have these two people who have stopped communicating with each other for so many years, and you give them an event like their son having a heart attack and it brings out of them both the ability to finally say what they feel.

SPALL: Yeah, painful, awful ability to actually confront. Because like most people, these characters don't have any control, any self-authorship about what they're going to do. They're the sum total of their despair, and the sum total of their frustrations. And when they eventually do it, because of the process, it feels like it's actually real—for the characters. Not for you, you don't use yourself, you use the character's predicament, because there's a very precise ring fence around you and your character. Because, as I say, the process only allows you to know where you are precisely at any given time, in situ, you can't predict what's going to become of you.

SCHWARTZ: So when you're filming that, you don't know the ending is going to be really optimistic.

SPALL: No, you only know what your character knows. Like life.

SCHWARTZ: You've said that filmmakers should aspire to the condition of the documentary filmmaker. Not that movies should look like documentaries, but that... Could you elaborate on that?

LEIGH: If you make a documentary, the subject matter exists whether you film it or not. And I only say that because it's the case with any number of dramatic feature films, that it's kind of fake, and it only exists in an implausible, two-dimensional way, just in front of the camera. There's no sense that it exists whether you film it or not. So I said that, which is not to be taken too literally, as an expression of that aspiration in making these kind of films to create a world in front of the camera that you really feel is living, and isn't just a kind of

artifice that exists only at the moment the camera is turned on.

SCHWARTZ: Food as a motif, is so important in this film. How people eat, what they eat. And actually if any of you could talk about how this evolved?

LEIGH: I would simply say, not to dwell on it, but it's simply part of what their lives are about. I don't think I would want us to dwell in any depth on it, as the basis of anybody's thesis.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) How long are you actually shooting, like once you do start the shooting?

LEIGH: Twelve weeks.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Your character, his eyes kept darting around all over the place and he's always looking aside. Is that somebody you've encountered or just...?

SPALL: I don't know, I mean the characters tend to be based on someone or various people you may have known, but they quickly become their own personalities. It's hard to be objective, one can only do it after the event, but looking back on it, one of the aspects of Phil's character was that he was totally un-aspirational and completely non—he wasn't interested in being successful in the first place. Also he's quite an intelligent man with very little education but is very perspicacious in a sense about people, very aware of people around him, aware of his situation, but having said all of these things, absolutely no ambition. He's completely and utterly and eminently ignorable as far as the rest of humanity is concerned. Most of the time people react to the back of his head. They don't see him. They just see this greasy hair. And they put what they want onto him, they don't ever really connect with him. The one person who does, incongruously, is the sophisticated French antique dealer he encounters. No one else really, as far as his 'clientele'—for want of a better word—really...

But what he is is, he's bright—aware of what's going on but he's in a state of great melancholy because of what is bugging him, which he doesn't become aware of until the French lady asks him directly whether he loves his wife. He's like a lot of people you encounter in mundane

jobs: They're eminently ignorable but they're actually just as human and just as intelligent as some of the great intellectuals, but they never had the opportunity.

LEIGH: Because what we do is--doesn't spend time on a page. It is completely three-dimensional and organic. What we do at great length, over a long period, is work not just at the idea of the characters and the condition of their lives, which is the kind of thing Tim's been talking about, but at the way they each manifestly exist. In other words, we're really dealing in the physical—psychological, emotional, palpable language.

Some people talk about body language. It's not in my vocabulary, but that's what people talk about. All of us...everybody in this room has a whole range of physical manifestations that are all to do with our idea of ourselves and our idea of how other people see us and our cultural, educational, class, aspirational—all kinds of stuff that motivate how we actually are physically and how we behave. And all that stuff. And that's equally important. That's all the sort of stuff that's there in Phil, and which your question is about.

SCHWARTZ: Lesley, what was the key for you to finding Penny's behavior? How did you find her character?

MANVILLE: It's very difficult to talk about it in that way because, as I said earlier, it's not about sitting down and making conscious decisions. Nothing is labeled onto a character. That you think... "Let's make her like this because that will make her interesting." It's really much more subtle than that. It does happen over a long period of time. And as I've said, it really starts with the child you get on the go, and then the child is what they are and as they become older and older and they develop, it happens in that way.

LEIGH: If I may say so, the question you asked is in the language of what normally happens, when people work on characters conventionally in a script. They say, "What shall we do? What are the keys? What can we hang on to make this character work, to come alive on the page? What can we breathe into this thing that's on the page?" And it's that sort of language. Over and above the lofty things we're saying, the main thing

about this is we make these people up! We actually invent these characters. We actually invent all these—we invent this whole world and it's all about that.

MANVILLE: When you're working on a more conventional script, obviously you are thinking in that way. You've got a script and a set of events and things that will happen to your character. You have to try to find a way as an actor that justifies those things happening. But we're not working in that way. We're coming at it from a different angle, so the same set of questions don't really apply.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The rehearsal process versus the production process. If you're rehearsing for six months, discovering stories, and then shooting for another three months. I was wondering if you already discovered the story by the end of the rehearsal process before you started shooting?

LEIGH: No, absolutely not. In fact, it's a very good question and a very useful one. The truth of the matter is we don't in any way during the preliminary six months resolve the whole thing. We absolutely don't do that. In fact what we do when we go out to shoot the film, we go out and make a film up. The film evolves and grows as we shoot it. What we do for the six months prior to that, we prepare ourselves for *that* process. Because what underlies your question is the fact that it doesn't matter what the hell you do before you get to shoot. What matters is what happens when you shoot, because it's a film. All the other stuff is merely preparatory.

In fact, not only is it all about actors and acting and characters and relationships and theme and all of that, the definition of the material as we film it is equally a matter of design and cinematography and shots and sound and all of those things, because it's a film. When we're shooting these films, technicians and people say, "This is extraordinary. How do they show up... Why are the actors so relaxed? How do they all know the lines? Why are they so solid in what they're doing? Why don't the actors on this film throw terrible tantrums like they do on all other films? Why is it that everyone gets on so well? Why is it so peaceful and harmonious? And why is it so creative?" People show up and there's no

scene, and an hour later there's a whole scene there. So because we prepare it and... When you see Penny and Phil at the end of the film, when they finally pull together and suddenly some light comes on and you see their relationship, you suddenly understand what their relationship once was. They are rediscovering something that once existed. She says, "You used to make me laugh." And there's a moment. What you see physically is something that we experienced in the long journey of the rehearsal.

Because the rehearsals are not rehearsals, in that preparatory period, they are living through the lives of the characters. So there was a time, way back at the beginning of the six months, when these characters came together as very young people and had this very positive relationship. And then we lived through the years and years and years and accumulation of the layers and encrustation of all the things that finally get in the way between them. That was an actuality. So to answer your question, what we've done in that preparatory period is not bothered with rehearsing a film or fixing up a story. It's preparing ourselves to then go and make up the film, working with a crew and developing it as we go along.

SCHWARTZ: But when you show up whenever you show up in the morning. What do you know about what is going to happen?

LEIGH: What you've just seen is a film where every moment was very precisely rehearsed, during the course of the shoot. Some days are rehearsing days and some are filming days.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: And it seems to me that something should have come out between that before this lady [the French lady]. You really didn't need this lady or the son to get sick, realistically speaking, because they had it within themselves beforehand and you knew that.

LEIGH: If I may say so, that is a romantic and certainly optimistic view of this. If we were to agree on that, then we would say, in an ideal world, that's the situation. Look, this film is a dramatic, metaphorical film. It is not a documentary. No, I'm serious. Of course as in any heightened or distilled, dramatic piece of cinema, or in theater, you see events that are arranged in,

what in this case I would suggest is, a kind of classical way in order to get to the core of the issues. Apart from the fact that I think it's entirely—in real-life terms, what happens to millions of people all around the planet—it is entirely plausible that relationships lie dormant and buried and communication breaks down, and it takes a crisis or something to precipitate something, to break that. That's what the film is about.

The main thing is that that also happens because the film is about, on some level, fate—the fact that sometimes it's curious how things do happen together at the same time. You could decode this film in all sorts of ways and if you want to talk about it in Greek classical terms, Phil is on a journey and he meets a messenger who tests him and then gives him a message. And at this precise moment something is happening of a calamitous nature. You know...

From a thematic point of view, it's for you to take away from the film the differences that you discern between those two couples. You have to look at it as all part of a whole. Why is Maureen so positive and so able to cope when she in some ways has less than anybody else? You have to look at these characters in relation to each other, as a thematic collective, in order to take away from the film conclusions about the nature of how we live.

SCHWARTZ: And Phil seems quite open to that. It's set up that he knows it. He talks about it, "You don't know what's going to happen everyday when you wake up."

SPALL: Well yeah. The thing about Phil is he's an armchair philosopher to a certain degree. Mike's films often say, which is an indirect answer to that question, this is the way people are, not how we want them to be. Phil's predicament is that although he's a naturally intelligent, somewhat lazy, man, every time he gets anywhere close to realizing what his problem is, it compounds his situation. It doesn't make him proactive and say, "I'm an overweight, unproductive man," who kind of understands that his wife is pissed off with him because he's not taking the bull by the horns and helping the situation by being proactive. What it does is it makes his despair compound his

situation. So, when he gets in despair, he gets lazier, instead of being a guy in another film, who if he gets in despair, wakes up and says, "Hey, I'm a boring fat man who should wake up!" What happens, like it does in life to a lot of people, is that they don't have that control. They don't have an objective view of their own lives. They don't have group therapy, or choices. They don't do that. They may be intelligent, but they are victims of their own predicaments. He's not going to be helped by anybody. This family is not going to be all of a sudden corralled into family therapy. They live where they do, and they're pretty low on the food chain.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You're saying that it's like divine intervention that they were saved and I'm trying to say that that's not really the case, that you set it up that...25:00

LEIGH: It's entirely your prerogative to think that. But with all due respect, that's more to do with your view of life and the world. What I'm inviting you to do in this film is to look at the way, as Tim says, people are in a less than ideal world.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Phil has this going on inside of him and when the French woman raises that question, he's listening to that question, because he has that question within himself and it has a meaning and a resonance obviously. If he weren't ready for it, he wouldn't hear it.

LEIGH: I think that's really a useful key to the previous question. Neither heart attack nor the chance conversation with the French passenger, in anyway, is absolute, cataclysmic causes of change. They simply exacerbate things that were already there. And in that sense of course that's what it's about.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You produce a great deal of emotion in the audience and the viewer. I wondered how your experience of that emotion is different from ours. Obviously it's many months longer.

MANVILLE: When I watch the film, I get very emotionally tied up in it. Other characters as well as my own. And that's peculiar. I find that rather peculiar that I feel moved by Penny. I suppose it's partly because she does feel like somebody

sitting next to me, as opposed to me. I do get very wound up in it watching it sort of objectively. Doing it is something else. For me, it's in a way like doing anything else that is emotionally demanding. At the end of the day, it requires an acting technique to get you through doing stuff like that. We know the characters and we know what they're doing, and we absolutely know how they're going to react, and how they're going to be. You just have to find a way that gets you through the day when you have to do a lot of emotional stuff. But it's not a kind of depressing experience where we're all walking around being grim and not speaking to each other all day. You get used to going into and out of character. The more in touch with your character you are—and by the time you get to filming, you're very in touch with your character—you can go in and out of character fairly easily without great buildup or preparation. You do a scene like that, you stop, have a laugh, have a cup of tea, and talk about something else and go back in and do it again.

SPALL: There's a very very strong definition between yourself and your character. It's absolutely precise. You put your character on and you take it off like a suit. Okay, so you have to get in touch with various things inside yourself to make the characters feel upset, but on the whole, there's you and there's your character and you put it on and you take it off. And it's very helpful...

LEIGH: I would say that on the most basic and straightforward level, there is nothing fake about any of this. The depth of emotion and the sheer power and resonance of all of that, absolutely happened when we shot this. Notwithstanding, what Tim and Lesley talked about was the necessary things that actors have to do to cope with doing this stuff. But in a way they inadvertently demean themselves in terms of their achievement because the fact is at the most emotional scenes, they really were in it. And of course, for me what is important and always very useful for me is the way the crew relates to what's going on. When we're shooting particularly the very traumatic stuff, the crew is there. The atmosphere, you could cut it with a knife! The bottom line is quite simple: If we don't actually experience it when we're making the film, how the hell can we expect you to? Now the tragedy is that you sit and watch any number of movies where

they didn't really experience it and they still expect you to and what you're looking at is bullshit. With this film, with the risk of being smug about it, but the emotions were there for real and we really felt it. Speaking just for myself, if I'm not seriously moved to the depths of my emotions when I'm working on this material, then I think it's not working and I don't want to put it in front of an audience.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My question is when you do "normal" work in which you show up and get a script, how do you make that transition?

SPALL: The difference between working with Mike and a conventional film, as you probably know, is the difference between six months rehearsal and six minutes. Which means... What you realize... What I am reminded of when I work with Mike, and like Lesley I've worked with Mike 6 times over 20 years, is you really have to do your homework. You do very little homework with Mike because it's there, it's shared and it's collaborative.

MANVILLE: Yeah, there's no getting away from it. The general state in England is I'm sure the same as here. There's no rehearsal and you just have to get on with it. And there's absolutely nothing you can do about that. Sometimes in England if you even have a few days' rehearsal you feel lucky. But you could have a few days' rehearsal with somebody who doesn't even know what to *do*. With a director who doesn't even know how to help you in those few days. Unquestionably, what I take from my work with Mike is the ability to kind of pre-see the whole process and do it by myself and get the character together at home and go to work and hope that you get a little bit of something that helps you. I don't like doing it on my own. I like working with people. I can come up with a character and I can do the acting, but I don't know if it's in the right mold, I don't know if I'm off on the wrong tangent. I *need* a third eye, telling me what's right and wrong. I don't enjoy it when, I think this happens a lot, people get you in because they know who you are, they think they like your work, and they think, "Oh, let's get Tim or Lesley because they'll turn up and come up with something interesting."

SPALL: Exactly. A director said that to me once. I said, "What are you expecting?" He said, "Oh,

you'll be all right because you've done all them films with Mike, haven't you?" (Laughter)

MANVILLE: And also people... When people know you've worked with Mike, they expect you to come up with something *brilliant*, by yourself, and they also think that if a scene doesn't work in a scripted piece, you can just start improvising it, not understanding that it's one thing to improvise in the way that we do, which is very carefully, and not an immediate thing that you do either. And it's quite a different thing to start improvising when there's no shared information, you don't know what the game is, nobody knows what the other character is about and it's all just to try to make a scene work that doesn't work on paper. I get really pissed off about that. Because well you think you've got a script, let's do the script. And if the script doesn't work, give it back to the scriptwriter. But don't get us in to try and sort it out.

LEIGH: I just suddenly realized I could be making money on this. (Laughter)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Do you ever get in a case where you kind of trying to bully or cajole the film in a certain direction and the actors are resisting you?

LEIGH: No. It's an interesting way to put it, but it has nothing to do with what it's about. I'm the writer and the director. I find it impossible to draw any distinction between those two. For me it is one melded, homogeneous job. If anything is going on that doesn't work for the actors, in the sense that they feel it's inorganic or an imposition or wrong, then it's not good enough to be in the film. What doesn't happen is a kind of free-for-all. A great deal of what goes into the film is organic and grows out of the characters. As I see it, the art of my input is to stimulate things so they grow in an organic way. Obviously, there's no doubt that the decision to have a heart attack is a *deus ex machina* decision on my part. But that is a function of a dramatist.

Similarly, putting together all of these characters is my decision somewhere along the line. I put them together. I use them to draw from and to use, to develop what happens after. That is in the nature of storytelling. It is not some kind of

impurity...it is in the nature of what we're doing, which is to make up stories and make up stories that are interesting. It is what it is. You plant things and water them and as long as you use the right seeds and plant them in the right place and arrange them in the right configuration and nurture and tend them, then they grow into a garden that makes its own kind of sense.

MANVILLE: A big chunk of what Mike's doing is observing what we're doing, and observing the people we're becoming, the emotional tensions and feelings that are developing between the characters. I see where you're coming from, but it's not like Mike is suddenly throwing in something that's going to make us all think, "Oh my God, he's doing this for effect because he wants to make the film go in this territory." It's borne out of what he observes that we're doing, and we do improvisations that last an awfully long time—hours—where there is no pressure on us ever... In fact, we are particularly informed to never try making an improvisation interesting. That is not the name of the game at all. We do improvisations for hours where this family just sit and eat, watch the telly most of the time. Go to the loo, read a book, do the crossword puzzle. You know, nothing happens, in inverted commas. But through all of that you get to see what these people feel about each other. And that's what Mike's observing. A huge part of what Mike's doing once we're up and running with the characters is to observe emotionally what's going on between them, so that when he does feed in something, because at the end of the day he is the dramatist, it's not like having something alien thrown in. It's all right.

SPALL: It always feels organic. Doesn't it. It never feels like an imposition. Mike's objective view is supreme, and his mixture of gardening and chemistry and alchemy that he's working all the time. You never feel in any sense that you're being forced into anything. I've often said that it's a raw mixture of being, from an acting point of view, incredibly subjectively aware of what your character's condition is. But as much as you're enlightened by your character, you're totally in the dark about where it's going. As an actor you just trust that Mike's—what he's doing is engendering everybody—his overview will lead you into this area and you go willingly. You don't even have to

go willingly. You go, like you are a human being and you go where this series of events eventually takes you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Are there other directors who have been working in this style that you've been talking about?

LEIGH: No. As far—I'm not aware of anybody working in this style. There are people that have attempted to, and people who've done what they call "using this technique." But I don't know what that means really. It doesn't mean anything at all. There's a Danish film kicking around that's supposed to be very good. I haven't seen it, but the director has claimed to use my technique. I don't sure what that means. It's like saying you use Van Gogh's technique to paint a picture of daffodils. But, I don't know what Van Gogh's technique was. It could mean anything. If you get a flat, there's a technique for changing the wheel on your car. But that's as far as I understand it. I don't see why anybody should do what I do because it's totally personal and utterly idiosyncratic and deeply eccentric as far as I'm concerned. (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: What do you start with? You talked about this whole nine-month process of rehearsal and shooting. What is the initial impulse?

LEIGH: For me, it comes out of feelings and just a general ongoing preoccupations. All art is a synthesis of improvisation and order. All art is improvised and then put order on it. Serendipity is involved in whatever you do. Part of the creative process is to meet actors. I know hundreds of actors in England, but it's always worth meeting new ones. When I was auditioning for this particular film—having already agreed with Tim and Lesley they should take part—I saw lots of young actors. Amongst these young actors were two actors, an actor and an actress. Who you wouldn't have to be particularly clairvoyant—in fact, you had to be blind or dead not to spot they were both quite fat and they could play brother and sister, and they could possibly be the children of this couple played by these other actors, conceivably. I thought, "That's a good idea." And they both turned out to be good actors, Alison Garland and James Corden, and I got them in and they became part of the mix.

Once I made that decision that then resonates back to ideas, which I'd dealt with before, about living and heart conditions and various other things and surviving and frustration and stuff, those strands go on in the film. There's a whole collection—as there is with any sort of art—of ideas and feelings. It's a film about love and those are things that I wanted to try to deal with in that area. And discovering what the film by making it. And that carries on right through to editing. That is how people make art. Unfortunately, it's in the nature of commercial Hollywood cinema that that doesn't happen very much because great committees of people kill any sort of investigation stone dead by trying to "formulize" everything that happens in a movie.

SCHWARTZ: Do you feel optimistic about conditions now in England? To make films? We've seen such a strong year.

LEIGH: It comes and goes. There are some good films being made, and quite a lot of bad films. But at least films are being made in the UK.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: When I see these films, I see a great deal of abstraction in the acting, very heightened, almost artificial acting styles, that's a

big part of the impact of the film, I'm always a little surprised that these films are discussed in terms of documentary acting, realism...

LEIGH: I couldn't agree more. Nothing is more ridiculous than when a film like this is discussed in terms of naturalism and documentary. I think it's utter nonsense. It's obviously a very heightened and distilled kind of cinema. Of course, what's important is that at any given moment this is about realism, not naturalism. You absolutely relate to these characters in a total way in the moment because they are reflections and depictions of real people as people are. But the actual dynamics and chemistry of what is going on is undoubtedly extremely heightened. And it's not at all about naturalism. So you're absolutely right. If I understand it correctly.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [Inaudible question about the process of building characters]

LEIGH: We sit together in a one-on-one situation and we christen the characters. Early. The whole process is one of simulating real life.

SCHWARTZ: Well, I really can't thank you enough for sharing this great evening with us. Thanks for being here. (Applause)

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