

**ROGER ALLAM – interviewed by Derek Paget – 12 February 2008**

**[N.B. RA generously gave the project two interviews. This is the general one, Heather Sutherland's was targeted to a specific research article she authored.]**

DP: I don't know if there's any particular place you want to start on those questions that I sent you?

RA: Of course I looked at the questions and now I've forgotten them!

DP: Well, what I'd most like, Roger, is for you to just talk me through the experience of acting, the experiences, of acting with facts that you've had. Clearly at some point I'm to be focussing some questions on *Speer*. But do feel free to talk about that as much as you want you as well.

RA: Well, as I said earlier, if I look back at the... Because there's several aspects to it, really, acting with facts, because sometimes, as you mention *Speer*, in which I played Adolf Hitler, sometimes you're playing a character, an actual historical character, you know, someone who's actually existed. Whereas other times one is researching a period. The very first play I did was for Monstrous Regiment, we used a lot of research when I was there and I did four shows with them and the first one was called *Scum*.

DP: David Hare was it?

RA: No, it was by Chris Bond and Claire Luckham and it was set in a laundry, it was about the Paris Commune. So there was a lot of research to be done on that, and indeed I think Claire and Chris were very busy at the time and the play really needed another draft. And so sort of completely illegally, really, we, as a newly formed company, we more or less re-wrote the entire thing, you know. So there was a, between us, really, using the characters and the situation and some of the stuff that you provided but, kind of...re-writing it. So there was a lot of research around the period then. So there's that kind of experience I've had. The next play we did was a play by Caryl Churchill called *Vinegar Tom*, about witchcraft, you know, so there was a lot research around that.

**[N.B. Feminist theatre group Monstrous Regiment formed 1975, disbanded 1993. In 1976, *Scum; Death Destruction and Dirty Laundry* by Claire Luckham and Chris Bond, traced the events of a revolution of 1871 and the creation of the Paris Commune. In 1976, the company produced *Vinegar Tom* by Caryl Churchill. Set in the 17th century, the subject was witchcraft.]**

DP: Could you, sorry to interrupt, but can you tell me anything that you remember specifically about the research you did for either of those shows? You personally.

RA: It's so long ago and, of course, it was one of those companies in which one did everything. It was a collective company and, doing the financial books, I was helping with, and writing the odd song and stuff like that, really. Obviously, on something like

*Vinegar Tom* Caryl Churchill had done the main body of research and written it, but one was... I suppose, you know, so very early in my professional experience, I suppose the habit of, or the practice of, researching around the period's subject became, you know, the norm.

DP: And was that something that you did when you were at University, when you did productions there, or was it new?

RA: I think it was very much part of the ethos at Manchester. I mean...I think in my first year Paul Clements was then the Fellow of Drama there and he...he spent a couple of weeks with us in our first term. And we did, we sort of devised a show about Manchester. I can't for the life of me remember anything about it, but that was based on...You know, he was very much of that kind of ethos, really, and I remember we all had a trip. I'd never been to Old Trafford and we went to it and saw a football match at Old Trafford and stuff like that. So it was about us sort of cohering as a year and getting to know Manchester a bit really, and then doing a show for the rest of the Drama Department in the Stephen Joseph studio.

DP: So coming back to *Monstrous Regiment*, that was that your first job, out of University?

RA: Yes. I was with them for two and a half years. And then the first show I did after there was *Mary Barnes* by David Edgar. In which I only had tiny part but, you know, nonetheless there was a lot of discussion and shared research amongst the actors. Especially, we met Mary Barnes and Joe Burke, you know, and so that was...

DP: Can you describe that, those meetings? Anything sticks in your mind from those meetings?

RA: What sticks in my mind was Mary, sort of...There not seeming to be much difference between her life and the play really. I mean to her the play was completely real, that's how it seemed, and she spoke to Pattie Love as though Pattie was just, you know, was Mary. She never called her Pattie, she called her Mary. We were all our characters' names, and stuff like that. I mean an ego the size of... an extraordinary kind of presence to have in the room. That was the first experience I'd ever had of like meeting people who are in the play, you know. But, again when I was at Manchester, we'd go to Stoke on Trent and we'd see stuff there and that was...And I think when Paul Clements ran *Contact* for a while, and it was, you know, it was very much around at that time, devising, devising stuff, as you mentioned earlier, post-*Oh What a Lovely War*. And then I suppose through that time I did a show at Stratford East by Rony Robinson called *All Our Loving* - it was dreadful. Supposedly about the 60s in which a lot of verbatim was used...

DP: Yes, he was quite an exponent of verbatim theatre.

RA: ...that just sort of slotted in...and that was, but you know I can't really...

DP: Was it dreadful because it was just shambolic theatrically or what was its problem?

RA: It was shambolic, theatrically, yes. The verbatim stuff that was slotted in was people, was characters speaking to the audience, speaking the verbatim to the audience. And it seemed to me to be kind of completely apart from the play. There was a play with sections of verbatim and songs, and none of it seemed to me to kind of mesh together in a very satisfying way.

DP: Did you have to do direct address yourself in that play?

RA: I think so.

DP: How did that feel, what was your experience...

RA: I'd already done quite, stuff like that with *Monstrous Regiment*. I mean with *Monstrous Regiment* we did a cabaret and I did a... Over a period of a year, in which I was in the band and had little sort of bit, a stand-up bit to do, and over the period of that year, had a song I had to do. And over that period of that year the introduction to the song grew from about five minutes to about twenty minutes, and then I cut the song and did something else instead. So I was kind of used to that.

DP: What's your experience of that kind of work, because it is very different from naturalistic theatre, isn't it?

RA: Well, it seemed to me completely natural, not naturalistic, but completely natural and the other stuff is sort of odd and, really, pretending they're not there. And then I did a play by Barrie Keeffe called *Sus* which was a response to the Suss Laws.

**[N.B. *Sus* was first produced in 1979.]**

Again, now I can't remember much research on that, but again that was sort of like, I mean, in the sense of acting with facts, it was dealing with something that was very, very current. And Barrie used, I think, a newspaper, something he'd read in the newspaper about some black guy being pulled in on suspicion of murdering his wife. When in fact she'd had an ectopic pregnancy and they just hadn't believed him or... I can't remember the, but that was sort of the bones of the situation. Because the situation became an occasion for Barrie to do a lot of stuff about the police and, in a sense, the factual research was the occasion for Barrie to, sort of wax – in a very amusing way. Because of course he loved the police, you know, as theatrical characters, he absolutely adored them.

DP: I never thought of it that way, yes. Yes, they gave him plenty of mileage as it were.

RA: Yes. And then I went to work at Contact Theatre where, as I was saying to you earlier, I did a couple of TIE shows when I was there. One the famous Craig and Bentley thing, I think, at Coventry TIE group...

**[N.B. Example, by Coventry TIE was first produced in 1975 – see Schweitzer 1980.]**

DP: What did you do in that show?

RA: ... which they devised. I played Lord Chief Justice Goddard. I mean, I can't... again a lot of that was sort of just reading about the story and the facts of the case. But we did do things. I went to a, we went to, I think a group of us, went to Manchester Court. I'd never been to a court before, and that was fascinating and has often been, is something that I've remembered and was useful only a couple of years ago when I did a play called *Blackbird*.

**[N.B. David Harrower's *Blackbird*, 2005 Edinburgh Festival, transferred to the West End in 2006 – it was about child abuse. The director was Peter Stein (see RA on Stein below.)]**

Because the case we saw, the Clerk of the Court said, 'Oh, I think you'll like this, this is an interesting case, very interesting.' We went in there, it was some poor teacher of about 26 who slept with one of his pupils, a girl of about, I don't know, I suppose she was 14. And... this was before the days where in such a case the girl would now be behind a screen or quite probably in another room. Then she was there in open court and she was rigid and shaking with the humiliation and the fear of it. And that seemed to be, to me to be, far worse than anything that had happened between her and the teacher. And the teacher, I remember him, being pressed in questioning, I think, as part of his defence was that, oh dear! he got into bed with this girl and his penis was only what he called 'semi-flaccid'. So, of course, naturally, the lawyer, you know... the questioning about the exact 'flaccidity' of his penis went on for a very, very long time. 'Flaccid or semi-flaccid?' 'Well, semi-flaccid.' 'So, half erect?' 'Well, more sort of semi...' I mean, it went on forever and when... I recalled all this when we were doing *Blackbird*, you know. So that kind of research can be something that, you know... and yet it's a most appalling case and he got banged up in prison and stuff like that. It's something that can sort of stay with you and kind of inform other projects, interestingly. And we devised a show about thalidomide as well. So that was all to do with researching. I think particularly there was a book, one the parents had written a book about it, and we based it very much around that book. That's kind of writing things, you know, throwing things together, really.

DP: Was this a matter of you all having a copy of the book and throwing bits in on the rehearsal floor, and saying, 'We can use that bit!' and then standing it up?

RA: It was entirely unsatisfactory because there was no real agreement about how we could make a show. And in the end we did a sort of, a biographical story of this father hung on the book, you know. But, you know, companies that do that kind of thing are very, very well practised at it. Coventry TIE, we were trying to do that and it was

probably alright in the end, it was informative and alright, but the process wasn't satisfactory at all. Later when I went to the RSC... And again for certain shows at the RSC it had become by then, this is like very early 80s, it had become by then, with certain, especially with certain directors, to do research on the period. The first play I did there was a play by Farquhar called *The Twin Rivals* and we'd all, everyone would take a subject from around the period, games and pastimes, money, servants, class, stuff like that.

DP: Were these dished out by the director or did you get any choice in this?

RA: I think it was a bit of both, really. You had choice. I did the law because I was playing an attorney. And one of those things, you know, one of the things that is very, very useful is, a friend of mine was a member of the London Library. I found referred to in a general history book – a book called 'The Attorney in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England' – you know, what could be more...? And she got this book out for me, so I had [laughs] the actual book that I needed. So that was very useful, very useful. Although in the end probably what came over in the show was simply that, you know, simply the facts that would be obvious to anyone, really, especially a historian, was that the law was a classic case where there was class movement. You know, a classic case of moving up a class or, if you were a younger son, sort of moving down a class and becoming part of the profession. It was like going into the Church or something like that. And so that informed the voice, you know, of the character and a certain thing about his energy and his utter amorality. [laughs]

DP: That's interesting. Could you say more about that? There's a question there on our sheet about the physicality or the voice...

RA: Well, that's probably the most important thing really, I would say. The getting of knowledge about a period if you're doing a period play is, of course, very, very useful. And stuff about sex and sexuality of the period that... 'Bucks', or something, I can't remember what they were called now. 'Bucks' or a particular group who were more or less sort of gangs of young, upper-class rapists really. Getting information like that can inform very much, can inform character, I think, very much. But a lot of that is in the play anyway, but, of course, a certain kind of style can gloss it over, you know. And it needs to re-emerge and perhaps be more emphasised to a modern audience, because it's just something... Something can easily become simply theatrical, simply some strange, some sort of accepted idea of style, or elegance, or whatever. Whereas a lot of those plays are very, very down to earth. They take a very cold, hard look at human relations, especially Restoration plays. Suddenly everything is about sex and money. In a very obvious way, of course, because women are on stage for the first time. But that's something we can't experience, women being on stage for the first time, so certain things have to be emphasised, and I think a study of period helps that a great deal. I remember doing *Way of the World* at the National and we did *Way of the World* set in a sort of modern Neverland, but nonetheless the study of the period was very, very... was again very useful.

**[N.B. This was a 1995 production.]**

DP: It's almost archaeological isn't it?

RA: Yes, absolutely, and archaeological and...what's the other word, the study of, like, tribes?

DP: Anthropology.

RA: Anthropological as well.

DP: Right, yes.

RA: Yes, so that would happen, that happened in a variety of ways in my long time as the RSC. Even when we did *Les Miserables*, which was a sort of, by which time that approach was becoming, if you like...Everything, everything that was good and cerebral about that approach was *Nicholas Nickleby*. To my mind in *Les Miserables* became about ways of staging, became a style. It almost became a style of itself, really.

**[N.B. *Les Miserables*, 1985 – David Edgar's *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, with its distinctive staging, was produced by the RSC in 1980.]**

DP: Was that a kind of, you mentioned that different RSC directors had different approaches towards this kind of...?

RA: Yes, it was very much a...Certainly John Caird and Trevor Nunn, separately and together, used that kind of approach. But other directors as well. I worked with Bill Alexander quite a lot and doing *Twelfth Night* [N.B. 1987] discovering the class thing about the steward, the upper servant, the incredibly important servant, was...And therefore the de-stablisng relationships in that family and Olivia's household. And then on new plays as well, I mean I realise how much David Edgar has to do with this. One play in which he wasn't involved at all was a play by Robert Holman called *Today* about the 30s, set in the 30s, and then...the Spanish Civil War [N.B. 1984]. And so, again, that was sort of period research as usual. Although I don't remember very much about it, I played a composer and that was Bill Alexander. That was sort of familiarising oneself with the period and also using the novels of Edward Upward a writer who I didn't know, who was to give one a flavour of things. And talking to people who were still alive then, Margot Heinemann and...[an historian] Communist Party member who'd fought in Spain...about their, about their... Margot Heinemann's lover was the poet John Cornford, I think.

DP: Yes, that's right, and he...

RA: Yes, and he died in Spain, so they were very generous with their time and their experiences, they were...

DP: She was a wonderful person...

RA: Yes. So there was that. Yes, there's loads, actually, isn't there? And then in that same year I did a revival of Trevor Griffiths play *The Party* [N.B. 1984] which David Edgar sort of... He didn't exactly co-direct it with Howard Davis, but he kind of, he was involved in the production. And in that inimitable way that he has, gave us a sort of, a chart of the, of what '68 was all about, I suppose. I was playing a character based on Robin Blackburn who then came to see it, that was the first time I'd ever played a... Although it wasn't his name in the play, I was Robin Blackbird. Nevertheless he came to see it and I met him, so that was kind of curious, really.

DP: Tell me about that?

RA Well, he much preferred me [laughter] to Dennis Quilley who played him in the original, because I don't think Dennis had a clue really of what Robin represented, you know. What, as it were, the New New Left and the, that particular group of the *New Left Review*, was it, was it that Robin edited, the *New Left Review* or was it – I can't remember – but a particular line. Were they IS, were they International Socialists? I think they were IS. And I don't think Dennis would have been particularly up to the mark on all that, really, God rest him.

DP: So when you met Robin Blackburn, you hadn't met him before, you hadn't seen him on any television or ...

RA: No, no, he came to see it. He and David knew Tariq Ali very well. He came to speak to us and they both knew Robin. And Robin, I think Robin came, I can't remember whether he came to speak to us, or whether he just came to see the play, but I certainly met him.

DP: Brings me to the question about impersonation in performance. You couldn't just impersonate him, because you hadn't met him, but was there anything in him that... He must have recognised something in you that he thought was in him, mustn't he?

RA: The... A certain sort of very brilliant intellectual style, I suppose. But again one's using a lot of things there because I was... In the '70s I knew a lot of people in the Communist Party and would go sometimes to various talks. And I remember seeing Stuart Hall speak about... there was some famous book by the French theorist Althusser that they had produced at the time which E. P. Thompson had written this fantastic diatribe against, because it was utterly abhorrent to the ...

DP: It was about ideological state apparatuses...

RA: I can't for the life of me remember... But I went to this talk at which neither Althusser or Edward Thompson were, where Stuart Hall spoke. And that's the first time I'd ever heard him speak, and that, I was... I couldn't tell, you know, what he said. I couldn't tell you the arguments in the Althusser book, but he, at the time, made

everything brilliantly crystal clear...with a kind of...But also with a wonderful warmth and generosity, that was very, very impressive. So experiences like that kind of informed the playing of a character of that kind, I suppose, although Stuart seemed a much warmer than Robin. We were talking about *Les Mis*, I mean, such was my pretension that when we were doing *Les Mis* I read that Foucault book, *Discipline and Punish*. And in our research thing, I did the law of punishment or something like that because I was playing Javier the policeman [laughs]. I gave them a lot of Foucault...I don't think that managed to work its way into the musical [laughs]. Yes. But use of a book like that, I've a very old and good friend who worked in the, who taught in the field of Cultural Studies for quite some time and, especially in my time at the RSC where there was a probably, a slightly more intellectual approach than...You know, but yeah, I mean there certainly was there and I don't know if there still is... I'd often ask him what...'Could you recommend me a book to read?' And I remember when I was doing *Measure for Measure* he suggested a very good book by Quentin Skinner called *The Foundation of Political Thought* which was very useful. And also that Richard Sennett book *The Fall of Public Man*, a great book. These would not necessarily be books that I'd read exhaustively but would raid, steal stuff from, basically. *Measure for Measure* was an interesting case actually because I was involved, I was cast early on and I was involved in the development of the design. And the design...And we had a visit to a prison where I'd never been before, we went to, because the production was very much around the, you know, it was 1987 so it was mid-term Thatcher and was very much about the falling of...Around that time there was that Channel 4 programme called *Voices* that Michael Ignatieff used to do. His book *A Just Measure of Pain* was very useful. And that kind of...The production, sort of, I think, reflected the disquiet that a lot of people felt about the diminishing of public power and stuff like that. Public space, a sense of the public, and the privatisation of everything, I suppose, really. So that was another way of kind of, a rather intellectual way, of acting the facts but a form of research that was very useful. But then the thing that was probably as useful as reading all those books was actually being in Pentonville, visiting Pentonville, and seeing the state of the prison. Pentonville was a very modern prison when it was built by Jeremy... based on Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. When each prisoner would have their own cell with a loom in it, or some kind of work, and a toilet. And now they were sharing, so it was very interesting to see how something that had seemed radical and quite civilised at the time was kind of falling apart. And there were formica tables that were all kind of grimy, and I remember that we had to have a formica table in our production. And because of that, you know...And there was a moment when the Duke's talking about death, about life actually, and the absolute for death, 'either death or life or thereby be the sweeter'. And he's talking about how flesh, I think, which is 'made of so much dust'. And there was the dust, and it all came from a visit to a prison, you know, there was the actual dust on the table, you know... Things like...it makes it sound as though I do this for absolutely everything. I don't because there's lot of stuff in between there where that kind of work isn't going on, or not in the same way, or not nearly in the same degree.

DP: So there is a distinct difference, then, between acting with facts and acting in....



RA: Well, I suppose you could say *Measure for Measure* was using facts and using research to inform a production and a performance in a way that...In that same year I did *Julius Caesar*...Even though I was playing someone who had actually existed, Brutus, and you can read Shakespeare's source material, you can read Plutarch on that era. You can go back to that. Not that it's accurate, you know, you have no sense of who Brutus is I suppose other than that...the sort of stoic. And things, I suppose, you can do when you're doing a stoic or philosopher.

DP: Was that a director's kind of bias or angle?

RA: I would say Terry Hands was not sort of...that wasn't his way.

DP: Yes, he was after something different.

RA: He was, yes.

DP: What was that would you say? Could you summarise that?

RA: It wasn't a historicist production but it wasn't, I wouldn't say it was anti-historical but he...What was his chief interest in it was the rivalry and envy of the young men around Caesar, for this sort of surrogate father figure.

DP: So did he talk about this the relevance of this to contemporary life, for example?

RA: No.

DP: It was the emotional focus?

RA: Yes. When I asked him what book, I said, 'Have you got any books you'd recommend on that?' And he said, 'Oh, God, no! I don't read any books!' And he said *Shogun*. And I read it, and it was very good because, of course, it's about a warrior culture so it was very useful [laughs].

[...]

Then kind of looking further down, I did *Who Bombed Birmingham?* [N.B. 1990] in which I played a journalist, who I've met, called Charles Tremayne...And, actually the experience of that was muddled for me because I hadn't done very much television by then. And if I saw myself on that now I think I'd be...I remember watching myself, because John Hurt was in it, who was just fantastic, absolutely brilliant. And I look at me, and I just seem to be coming...When I saw it, I just thought, 'Well, I'm just doing far too much which ...' Whereas John Hurt's just sitting there and thinking about it and being brilliant [laughs]. That was, it was very interesting, however, I remember. Now, Charles Tremayne's part in it, I can't quite remember how the story all fits together, but I did hold in my hand at one stage a document that had been sent to Granada which showed, I think, had the names of the people who had committed the murder, the bombings that the IRA

knew about, the IRA people who had committed the murders. And we shot one version using the real names, and one version using false names. But I held in my... And I've forgotten the names, I erased them from my memory as quickly as possible [laughs]. And I can't remember which version actually went out.

DP: It was the non-factual names, I think, that went out, yes.

RA: Anyway, I think that was Charles Tremayne's big thing... So that was very much acting with, that was very much... I mean, it was all based around real people...

**[N.B. Charles Tremayne is now Executive Producer in charge of factual programming at the US company Cineflix. At the time of the Birmingham Bombings, he was working on Granada's *World in Action*.]**

[...]

Again, the interesting thing about that was, because that was a film for television, it wasn't with me for so long. If you do a play at the RSC, you know, you could be doing repeat performances over a period of two years. So it sits with you in an entirely different way to something that you...

[...]

Yes, you're... One's experience, because you're dealing with something that basically only ever happens in your life for a couple of months, if you're an actor.

DP: On that, on *Who Bombed Birmingham?*, I mean, the process is obviously very different from how you set about creating a performance for a play. Could you just talk me through how you experience that from the moment your agent said, you know, 'You're up for..' whatever...?

RA: Well, I knew the producer very well and I ...

DP: Was that Ian McBride?

RA: No, it was...

DP: Or Ray Fitzwalter?

RA: No, it will come to me, a woman, an actress, and her name's escaped me. She became just so furious and enraged about the... I think she knew one of the Birmingham Six, had started going to visit him in prison and it sort of derived from that... Sorry, what was the question?

DP: So she asked for you?

RA: Yes, she asked me to do it. And I met Charles, and so it was very much just sort of looking a bit like him, really. And it wasn't, you know, it was an OK part, not a great part, and ...

DP: There was a read through??

RA: I can't remember, I'm afraid, it's quite a long time, it's nearly 20 years ago.

DP: It's more than 20 years ago. No, it's not, it's 17/18 years, isn't it? I mean, the scenes you were in, on the whole were they first takes, or did you get a chance to do them a couple of times?

RA: Oh, no. Yes, you get a chance, but not a very good director on acting. He'd done documentaries and stuff before so not very much help from him, I'm afraid.

DP: A lot of directors are like that?...Almost scared to say too much to actors?

RA Yes, whereas Stephen Frears...Although, of course, I was far more experienced by the time I worked with him on *The Queen*. Stephen Frears is very, very good at saying the right thing. And often just sort of something, something., technical, like, 'Don't do that pause there, because if you do, I just know that in the editing room it will give me a chance to cut it. So if you want to keep all that, don't let me.' [laughs] Which is a very sweet and generous thing to say.

DP: A TV film is also put together in bits, isn't it?

RA: Yes, yes...But, you know, I didn't have...It's also one's research depends on how much, how long before you know. It's going to be very interesting when we get to Hitler actually...So that really depends, you know. I didn't sort of get to know the workings of Granada, of what it was like to be a *World in Action* journalist at all. I didn't have the time or the wherewithal beforehand to do it. Obviously read about the case a lot, you know.

DP: Was it filmed in the Granada Studios?

RA: We filmed in Manchester. Not in studios though.

DP: They didn't take you to the, like where...?

RA: Not when were filming there, no, because you were filming and it's just, you know, it's all a question of economics, isn't it?

DP: Yes.

RA: Then I did my first Chekhov later the following year.

**[N.B. RSC production of *The Seagull* – 1990.]**

So again.. And later on, some years later, doing *Summer Folk* and *Cherry Orchard*, doing the same kind of research on period.

**[N.B. These were 1999 and 2000 respectively, both at the National.]**

Familiarising oneself with the period and the world. There were photographs, there were those wonderful colour photographs that are now quite well known but I'd never seen before when we did *The Seagull*. Very, very natural kind of look, the look that you'd recognise them instantly if I suddenly produced one of them... And they've been around every Chekhov and Gorky production that they've been around as getting a certain kind of look. Again that's all about class, all about Russian... Familiarising oneself with the literary world, I suppose, with Tregorin, and what the freeing of the serfs meant, and stuff like that... I did an Irish play around that time and I'd never been to the South of Ireland and I was playing a priest. My father was an Anglican vicar, so I went out to Ireland to meet the writer, who'd trained as a priest. And, basically, the play was very, very sort of anti-the hold that the Catholic Church had. It was all set around the time of the Pope's visit to Ireland, and the writer basically made me very, very drunk for about five days and took me round various places. To bars and discos and people's houses and, 'Shall we say that's this, you see, and this is the feel of this.' That was a very, very useful experience because I met this priest called Father Pat, I think his name was, he was friend of Michael's, Michael Harding the writer. And lots of conversation was very, very useful in just getting to know a world that was very foreign to me really. Michael Harding said [Irish accent], 'I was, I went to this particular town, to the seminary there, because it was a very good place for girls.' And I said, 'Oh!' And he said, 'And I was having this relationship with this beautiful girl, and at night I'd climb over the wall of the seminary, and I'd go and spend the night with the girl. And then I'd get back at about four in the morning, climb over wall, get into bed and sleep for 30 minutes. And I'd be up, the first there for Prime.' I said, 'So the vow of celibacy wasn't a particular problem for you then?' It didn't seem to me to be a moral kind of problem. He said, he was living with a sculptress at the time, although he'd never become a priest of course, he said, 'Oh, I'm a celibate. I'm still a celibate, I've always been celibate. You see celibacy means not getting married, that's the vow the priests take. I've never been married in my life, but I never took a vow of chastity.'

[...]

RA: I mean the amount of drinking that went on was just astounding. But also he had a book, his place was filled with books and the most interesting... I mean lots of interesting kind of recent books that were not to do with, I mean you know very, very intellectual, well read man, in this little parish out near Galway somewhere.

DP: What was the name of the play?

RA: *Una Puka*.

DP: And the writer?

RA: Michael Harding.

**[N.B. This was a 1992 production at the Tricycle Theatre. The play was first produced at the Abbey, Dublin, in 1989.]**

DP: Did you consciously base your characterisation then on this particular man, did you take his mannerisms?

RA: No, I didn't, no, it was very different. But I did spend some time with an Irish actor who I later worked with, and just worked on various accents and found an accent for him. And most of the rest of the cast were Irish and so I ... Finding a rhythm of speech really was very important. I mean, there are other ways in, there are ways in which facts can sometimes... When I did *Macbeth* back in the RSC in the mid-90s **[N.B. 1996.]** was when Dunblane had happened, or just happened. It sometimes happens that when, you know, you can do something and suddenly 'murder' seems to leap out of the newspapers at you. And sometimes I sort of collect those stories, you know, that seem relevant at the time. And Dunblane was particularly relevant because our production focused very much on how Macbeth seemed to want to kill all the children. Kill the future, if you like, in a way. And so that was...that was useful because, of course, one isn't a murderer [laughs], although one can feel murderous at certain times. But the thought, there was something about the thought of him with the...I wondered whether...I think I imagined what it would be like to see the bullets coming out of the gun at the end of your hand, and not be kind of completely attached to it as an experience. The gun killing them not you, you know, in a way, something like that. I can't quite remember whether that was something I got in, whether...But there was a...Yes, that's it, I think, that sort of helped in a part of what seemed to me be Macbeth's attempt to kill the feeling in himself, I suppose. So that he could kill the future, kill the feeling in yourself and that ends up with tomorrow, the sort of existential despair of 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow'. Much, much earlier I did Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* **[N.B. 1984.]** and I happened to be on holiday in Italy and had the chance to go to Verona or go to Sienna. And, thank God, I chose to go to Sienna because it was the, one of the days of what they call the Pre-Palio. Not when they have the actual race but they're parading around...Just there were all these gangs of young Italian men and...Have you been to Sienna?

DP: Yes.

RA: ... throwing flags up in the air, and the crowd chanting, and the shouting and yelling, it was just great. You know, experiences like that, it's sort of things that can be very, very useful. *Troilus and Cressida* **[N.B. 1999.]** I was playing someone who supposedly existed, Ulysses, and the...I think that something...There was some useful, I can't remember where someone, whether I did the research or someone did the research or...It was some book that was around, again that's, you know, this was Trevor Nunn again. And so there's often a practice of there being a table with useful books on, you

know. And Agamemnon, this is apparently true, Agamemnon was absolutely loaded, really profoundly rich and basically paid [laughs] loads of the Greeks to actually go there and fight, you know. And Ulysses was very poor, he came from a poor island, and that was a very, very useful piece of information.

DP: To find a relationship, I suppose?

RA: Yes, it became sort of a key to me about Ulysses probably the most intelligent guy in the Greek camp. Yes, undoubtedly the most, the cleverest and frustrated and furious at being there for ten years, you know. Also probably thought he should be Agamemnon and Achilles. I suppose that was at the back of my mind really, that Ulysses should be both, you know, that he felt... So that was just a bit of information that just dropped in that sets you off on a path. And actually when later the following year I did *The Cherry Orchard* with Trevor Nunn, a play that I'd never understood when I'd seen it, it never made... I didn't understand why Leparkhin and Varya didn't get married, I'd never understood why they didn't chop it down, the Cherry Orchard, and do his perfectly sensible plan of building summer residences there. It seemed to me utterly practical [laughs], I just never, ever understood it. And Trevor, I think who is particularly good on narrative on overall...he said, and I said this to him, and he said, 'Well, I think, you see, I mean that first scene you get whole of Leparkhin there, but he talks about when he was a little peasant boy and a beautiful, beautiful lady of the ... His father beats him about the face, he's bleeding and a beautiful young girl of the house comes and brings him in to this room, the room that used to be the nurse's...nursery and cleaned him up and washes his face. And says, 'Don't cry little peasant!' And he said that that moment is like Pip and Estella in *Great Expectations*. And suddenly it all fell into place with me. I'm not sure that in the end, actually, that I did it terribly well, but suddenly the whole, the whole narrative story of Leparkhin, about how, in a way, getting the Cherry Orchard was like getting her, how he couldn't...And therefore he couldn't marry Varya and stuff like that. Very, very useful. Now I come to the...*Speer*.

DP: Yes, we must talk about that. I mean, where did you start, I guess, is my first question?

RA: Well, again, you see, I was offered the role with *The Cherry Orchard* and I'd just done a whole year at the National. I'd had a project I was trying to get going in the West End that I'd postponed. It was looking like it was going to happen that year and *Speer* was a short job, but it was happening around the time that my eldest was about to be born. So I said, 'Look, I'm terribly sorry, I can't do either of these because, one, there's the West End thing later in the year, and this is absolutely around the time when... Sorry I'm going to have to turn it down.' So I turned them both down and then as Rebecca was going into labour with William and rehearsals were due to start, I think that very day, for *Speer*, Trevor Nunn rang and very flatteringly begged me to do it, basically I suppose he just hadn't got anyone he wanted. And he said, 'Look, it'll be alright because it's a short job. You're only in half the play, so you can be around, you know, you won't be in on all the rehearsals, we're not doing loads and loads of performances, so it'll be alright.' So in between contractions I discussed this with Rebecca and, it was a

long labour. I said [to Nunn], ‘I’ll tell you when he’s born and everything’s alright.’ Of course, the labour was something like thirty hours or something, so... But the interesting thing about that, I had no time for any pre-production research whatsoever. Very, very useful that was as well [laughs], because it... I mean, I’d had the most amazing experience of this new person coming into the world and all that, so I was in a very kind of, you know, heightened state of... And very cheerful, unlike when I did *Ulysses* the year before when I was extremely grumpy. And because, in a sense, I’d come riding to the rescue [laughs], I was able to say to David, David had loads of research, I said, ‘Could you give me a digest of everything you think I need to know?’ Which he did. I was able to say to the assistant director, ‘Go and get me this book, or this video tape, or give me stuff to watch!’ And, of course, because it’s Hitler, the appearance and physicality was of enormous importance because... and actually wasn’t... I mean, once you do the haircut and the moustache – you’re very close. It’s quite scary when you actually do it, you think, ‘Oh! God!’ And then I noticed something about his eyes, that his eyebrows were lower than mine. So I blotted out the top of mine, left the middle, and drew them in lower, and that was really, really scary. And, of course, there were fairly recently to that time, there were fairly recently his home... Eva Braun’s home movies which were like, you know. And the fact that one can watch a lot of this stuff on video or DVD, when you’re playing a character like that is just fantastic. You can see the picture of him outside the bunker giving medals to the Hitler Youth, you could see his left hand behind his back, the tremor... like that [RA demonstrates]. So there’s just lots of stuff you can pick up on, photographic stuff. Very, very useful. And also, of course, if the play had been called ‘Hitler’, it would possibly have been an impossible, it would very probably have been an impossible burden to do it any justice at such short notice. But because the play’s *Speer*, Hitler in the play is always Speer’s experience of Hitler. You know, you’re not doing, in a sense, the whole of Hitler, you’re doing the effect that Hitler has on people. Particularly this one man – charismatic, warm, generous, jovial... Reading stuff was very, very useful about how he’d often grasp, he’d be very physical and look for far too long. Stare into people’s eyes and **[RA does these things, leaning across the table & fixing DP with his eyes]** people talked about kind of falling into his eyes and stuff like that. Choosing moments like that. It became a sort of private joke between me and David Edgar that one could base a certain style of that on Trevor Nunn [laughs]. A certain physicality that Trevor Nunn is a very, is very like that **[RA demonstrates ‘the look’ again]**. So there was a certain... [laughs]. So I was released from the terrible burden of having to sort of, in any way give an explanation for Hitler and his behaviour [laughs].

DP: One the hardest things an actor has to do, it seems to me, is portray someone who they find totally inimical and bring out the humanity of that person. I mean, the notices are full of praise for your performance but full of doubts about how Nazis and Nazism are portrayed in the play, so it’s a real hot potato, this subject, isn’t it?

RA: I mean, and what are you supposed to do? Come on and be evil? I mean loads of people adored Hitler, you know. He could have furious rages and stuff but he was, there was the most incredible loyalty to him from... you know. So that was something I didn’t understand and the play, you know, it’s the point of the play, as well, is Speer’s... you

know how...He realises, you know, the evil, how the evil...and when Hitler comes back in the second half it's, it's a nightmare and it's the full schlemiel, so you can't...

DP: You'd got that fantastic speech in the second act.

RA: But it's only...There's a lot of the second act that he's not in. So also I think I'd reached a stage in acting when I was...I wasn't so...I think I'd got the hang of it a bit, really, you know. I mean, I wasn't so sort of anxious. I think part of the, one of the problems, something I haven't touched on, of course, is that one has to...There's always a point where you can't play your research, you know, either as a writer, there comes a time when you've got to get rid of your research and write the play. And there comes a time as an actor when you've simply got to forget about it, you know. And trust that you've done some work, you know, hopefully got some useful stuff that you can go back to if you need to. But you've got to forget about it and do the play.

DP: And inhabit the part, would that be a way to describe it?

RA: Absolutely. You've got to be able to walk around, and sit down, and speak. And you've got to be able to come on, and people believe, you know, have the audience believe that you're who you say you are, in the simplest possible way. And sometimes I think, having taken a more intellectual path in the past, it can overcomplicate things. I don't think acting is complicated. I think acting's quite hard sometimes but its essence is quite simple, you know. As James Cagney said when asked, 'How do you learn? What do you do?' And he said, 'Never relax, ever! And mean what you say!' Not bad is it? [laughs] Henry Irving said, 'Speak clearly, and be human.' Not, I'm sure, something that he completely achieved in his life [laughs]. Maybe he did in time? I don't know.

DP: But with...You looked at the video, did you? Were you at all, were you aware at all of any other actors portrayal of Hitler?

RA: No, I didn't do ...

DP: You didn't look at anybody else? You didn't look at Charlie Chaplin, for example?

RA: No, I didn't do that.

DP: Was that a conscious decision?

RA: I think it was. I think there was so much material to look at, there was so much film, and voice, you know, to get that you... It didn't seem necessary. Curiously, a few years later I was a hot ticket to play Churchill in an HBO movie. And I did two full screen tests with the whole thing, so I had to get Churchill's voice and I did watch some other performances of Churchill. Because it's the one after the one that Albert did, Albert Finney did, this one was going to be 'Churchill at War'. Albert didn't want to do it, you know, he'd got his ME or whatever it was, and was more interested in his race horses or



whatever, you know. So I was...I did quite a lot of that kind of research on Churchill over quite a long period because they took ages to decide not to use me. [laughs]

DP: So you did...look at other actors portraying him?

RA: I did, yes. I thought it would be useful to look at Albert simply because that's the sort of ....

DP: That was *Gathering Storm*..

RA: ... and it – Yes, that's right, *Gathering Storm*, and then I looked at Robert Hardy's in that whole...

DP: That Ian Curtis TV thing, was it? He's played Churchill a number of times.

RA: There was a series, yes... And I was intrigued, of course, because I thought, 'Oh, God! I could play Hitler and Churchill!' And by that time I'd also played Willy Brandt so I thought ...

DP: That was in the Michael Frayne ...

**[N.B. *Democracy at the National*, 2003.]**

RA: Yes.

DP: Which is a very different kind of play, really, isn't it? Am I right in saying that the meeting that is in that play didn't actually take place? It's one of those that he's speculating the meeting?

RA: It's a mixture of fact, and things that did happen, and speculation.

DP: And with Willy Brandt, was it the same, did you look at an actuality of him?

RA: Yes, I did. Again there's lots of video material. It was a very different approach because you're not having to present the mask of Hitler, you know, Hitler's face is sort of like a mask. Whereas Willy Brandt's...And it was a different production style. We started off at the Cottesloe. I did...Because I'd done Hitler, I thought I just want to go through the make-up route and I sort of tried, because Willy Brandt's hair receded right back there **[RA demonstrates]**. I tried sort of a temporary way of doing that and I tried the nose, and I took various pictures of myself, and it just looked absolutely dreadful. So I didn't go down that route. But it was very much looking about a way of, a certain stance, a certain watchfulness of listening and a certain...A kind of frown he has as well. So I was able to...It's sometimes important to feel that you look like someone. I'd also done Cromwell by this time. God, it's never ending, isn't it?

DP: What did you do Cromwell in?

RA: I did Cromwell in a drama documentary about Cromwell.

[N.B. *Plague, Fire, War and Treason – Cromwell: New Model Englishman – C4, 2001.*]

DP: And that's quite a recent thing then isn't it?

RA: That was, oh, five years ago, six years ago.

DP: That's the sort of stuff that's coming quite a lot on TV now .... How's that to work on?

RA; Well, you know, a bit of a joke, really, because, you know, you got two weeks and they've got no budget so...

DP: They have got a script though. ...

RA: Oh, there's a script.

DP: ...So not really very satisfying artistically?

RA: No, not really. I mean, interesting to read about him and stuff like that but... Yes, but being, having the feeling that you, you know... And then, of course, I did *Democracy* over a much, much longer period of time than I did *Speer*. I did it over six months at the National, on one of their very forgiving schedules, and then I did it for six months in the West End, eight shows a week. I never ever, ever got bored with it, it was one of those... It became sort of like... Sometimes you can just put on a suit and you think, 'Oh, yes, I'm Willy Brandt!' It became a very sort of contemplative thing to do. The repetition was interesting.

DP: So when you say the repetition was interesting, was that because new things were happening in the interaction every night, or what was it?

RA: There'd be little new things but it's just sort of... Yes, there were always little, lots of little, new things. But when you become, you become familiar with something so that you can get quite playful with it, in a sense, you know, you can reach a stage... You can reach a stage in which it becomes boring, but then hopefully it becomes interesting again. And as long as you're very present, you know, you can really get to know the material, really, really get to know it. It can sit very deeply, you know. That's probably the key difference between doing a, in my experience, between doing a play and a movie. I mean that you... You know I've never done the kind of role, or the kind of movie where that's been the case. And also you know in a movie you've never got, or I've never had... You know in a play you're your own editor, as an actor, you're judging the audience every night, you've got the responsibility. In a movie, my experience of doing

the movies that I've liked doing is giving the director options, various options to cut something together.

DP: Can you give me a specific example of that? Or is that something you'd need to think about further?

RA: Not every director, I suppose, because I don't think...I was doing a movie last year over the summer for the Wachowski Brothers.

They'd come to movies through comic books, so it was quite a theatrical kind of style, and I was playing the villain, and they'd write a lot of text so...And I think one of the reasons they liked working with the English actors they worked with is that you become the stage tradition where text...is part of our experience. And I was very comfortable with speaking a lot of text, and also I was able to take direction without worrying about whether my character wouldn't say those lines.

DP: Like Method actors would?

RA: Yes, it was very much about, 'Oh, alright, I'll try that and see what it's like.' Because if someone gives you a direction, I think it's always worth trying to see whether it takes you in, you know, a different path, or a good path or, you know. In a movie, of course, when they're giving me a direction and I do it...They've left themselves with the option of using that take. They've got various different ways of putting the scene together.

DP: What's the name of the movie?

RA: *Speed Racer*.

**[N.B. *Speed Racer* was released 2008.]**

DP: Could I ask you, could we just return briefly...I know I've had more than my allotted time so if you want to stop, do just tell me. But this impersonation and performance thing essentially comes from the interview Michael Sheen did for *South Bank Show* where he made that distinction which interested us in thinking about the project.

RA: Oh, right. Who was he talking about, Blair?

DP: Well, he was talking really about all things he's done...

RA: ...because he's done quite a few.

DP: Yes, he has. And he was saying that he couldn't do what Rory Bremner does and he made that specific comparison.

RA: Though he is a brilliant mimic, Michael, he's a fantastic mimic.

DP: Is he?

RA: Well, his Kenneth Williams, I thought, was absolutely brilliant.

DP: Yes. I mean, is it a useful distinction as far as you're concerned in relation to the work that you've done? I mean, I suppose what I'm asking you is did you think of impersonation or impressions when you worked on, for example, Hitler? Or was it some, were there other thoughts in the process?

RA: Well, I suppose in the end, you see, you're doing the play, you know. You're not coming out and doing what Rory Bremner does, which is doing a brilliant kind of instant cartoon. You're doing a play in which the character will appear in various different moods, hopefully, throughout the play... You... A certain... It's difficult to find the words, but I mean a certain level of impersonation is useful. If I'd come on as Hitler and not been at all like people's experience of Hitler it would have been wilful, you know, so... And not very good. So you've got to do enough, you've got to... As I say, hopefully, people have got to think, 'Oh, yes, he's Hitler!' And kind of relax with that, and think and believe that you're who you say you are. But, and, you know, certain aspects of his physicality and things like that were very, very useful to see... The fact that he often stood like that [**RA demonstrates – hands over crutch.**]. Apparently it hides some unconscious fear of the Desmond Morris kind of way. It highlights some fear of.. I can't remember now, of course, one forgets all this stuff, but there's some sort of fear of....

DP: Castration?

RA: Yes, sort of castration fear or infertility. But, of course, he only had one, didn't he? [laughs] But it is a covering, a protective thing. Quite interesting, you know, how people stand, and what they and their facial expressions and things like that, tiny things like that can be tremendously useful. I remember seeing one picture of Hitler sitting in an armchair like that [**RA demonstrates**] and I thought, 'Oh! Great! I've got to get that in!', you know.

DP: So does a phrase like 'pointing towards' the historical character work for you? Or the idea of 'ghosting'? Academic acting theory's played with that idea of actors being like ghosts.

RA: Ghosting?

DP: Yes.

RA: Haunting the character.

DP: Haunting, yes.

RA & DP [together]: Or the character haunting you.

RA: Funnily enough about the character haunting, Trevor wanted me to keep my own moustache for that, because I was doing *Summer Folk* before... I started rehearsing it but I still had a beard. So he wanted me to have my own moustache, but I did try shaving everything off and having my own moustache, and then I shaved the moustache off and Trevor said, 'Betrayed, betrayed!'... And I said, 'I'm not going to have to go home on the 381 bus to Stoke Newington with a Hitler moustache.' And, of course, it was the applying of a mask-like face like that, it's useful to be able to take it off because the character doesn't haunt you. Often people who don't work in the business ask things like, 'Do you feel, ever feel...?' You know, and certain things about certain characters can be very upsetting. You know, playing Macbeth, it's not... But it was useful to be able to, as it were take Hitler off and leave him in the dressing room, as a sort of a mask. And, curiously, when I did take him off, the first thing I'd do, I used my own hair, would be to brush my hair back. It had a lot of gel in it, so it looked very dark and going back like that. Then I'd take the wax out of my eyebrows so my eyebrows looked big and bushy, and I still had the moustache, and I looked like Stalin. [laughs] But... what it is you're doing, I think there's a difference, I think there's absolutely a difference between doing something that people have... You know, when I played Hitler I was doing some of his face, his instantly recognisable... I mean, probably becoming less so now but certainly for someone of my generation even, and possibly younger than me, and certainly older than me. A face that sort of haunts all of us. And haunts the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a... you know... Like Stalin's would, like certain faces do, certain... You know, playing a giant character... And there's a difference, I think, between that, and also playing some of the people who have been alive in living memory, or maybe still alive, you know, other characters – to playing someone from far in the past. Like I recently played Leonardo da Vinci, and there are lots of descriptions of da Vinci of the period, but you can't, you simply can't do the same thing. People haven't got the same experience of Leonardo da Vinci, although he's enormously famous, most people would know who you were talking about, or a lot of people would.

DP: So he's a name without much of a personality perhaps.

RA: He hasn't got the flesh on his bones, I suppose, that Hitler has. Especially British... The history that's taught in schools, you know, the only thing that ever happened was the Second World War, it drives them fucking mad in Germany, you know. It's the only thing we teach because it's the last time we were any good. The only history [laughs]. So he's part of British mythology, I suppose.

DP: What about your experience of theatre audiences' and press critics' responses? What sort of feedback from audiences and press coverage and anything that distinguishes 'acting with facts' from the other kinds of feedback?

RA: Well, yes, I mean because ... I can't... You know, one has a sort of difficult relationship with reviews and things like that. But I tend to try and not read them when I'm doing it because whether they're good or bad something can make you self-conscious in the wrong way. But I sort of allow myself to read them afterwards, sometimes. And then if you do something like Hitler someone's going to say or... You know, it depends, really, whether they liked the play, that's the thing. And then they find ways of criticising the thing in the most obvious way, like the moustache is too long, or he's too tall for Hitler, or was too nice to begin, with or something like that.

DP: Yes, isn't the whole thing about the humanity of Hitler which we've touched on earlier, I tend to agree with you about this, if the only option was to play him as a monster?

RA: Yes, you've got to see his monstrosity... You've got to see not just that, otherwise what use is that to an audience? That's no good, because the whole point of *Speer*, of Gita's book and of David's play, is how someone, how Germany, you know, how someone representing intelligent and cultured Germany could be a Nazi. Speer made the war longer. He was such a brilliant armaments minister, had such a genius for organisation that he probably made the war last another year, you know. That's the point of this and to see not just one thing about a character, but how various they are, what their effect is on other people. Hitler, of course, people are going to have a much, much more strong reaction to than Willy Brandt. Because Willy Brandt, although another immensely important German, is not so remembered. He lived through far different, although he lived through that period, when he came to power, he lived through far different times and people haven't got the same experience of him. He's part of the Germany we don't want to know about. There is that, you know, we're not terribly interested. [laughs] I think that's one of the reasons Michael wrote the play. Michael went to Germany as a journalist at around the time Willy Brandt came to power and became immensely impressed by how, in a relatively short space of time, they'd built a relatively decent society, you know. And gone about re-building a completely shattered country, you know. I've done a couple of movies of Berlin over the last few years and the first film I did I went out there with the actor John Standing, who said, 'I haven't been to Berlin since I was on National Service!' And he said, 'And here's a picture of what it looked like.' He was on National Service ten years after the war and everywhere, all the rubble had been cleared obviously, but everywhere was still just shells of buildings. So it is an amazing achievement... People had a different response to that, I suppose, because it's not such a... not so visceral a response, you know. And I was summoning up someone who was their worst nightmare, and they're not quite sure anymore who he was.

DP: Is acting with facts something that you would seek to do as a result of the experience?

RA: No, it just depends what turns up, you know. One always uses, not always, I mean, not doing a Panto! [laughs] But, you know, you're always... I mean, that's why I always talk such a lot about research, I suppose, because facts, studies of history when you're doing a period play, things like that. There's an enormous amount that can be of

use and can get you going and get you started. But, as I said, you can't play the research. Research can inform the way you might do a play, or play a character, but in the end you've got to do the play.

DP: Literally my last question – acting theory, does that inform you at all?

RA: I don't know any more, really. I don't really know any more. I'd probably try and think about it less than I did when I was younger and more anxious, or anxious in a different way. I'd probably try and let it happen, or not get in the way of it. I'd probably, I think, when I think back at my time at the RSC, I think one of the difficulties of doing classical plays, especially over a long period of time, I was there quite a long time, is that especially when you're doing Shakespeare or one of those plays is that sometimes you try and be too original. You can try and sometimes seek out your tiny little, tiny little niche in history as, you know, part of the many, many, many people who've played that character, rather than play the character. And I try and dive in now, really, and I try and learn lines earlier than I used to. Rather than wander about with the script as a sort of pretension. I was hugely impressed and influenced by working with Peter Stein [**N.B. On *Blackbird*.**] a few years ago because he was someone who worked very, very closely on the acting along with the physicality of the acting, he would say things like 'The body could be telling a completely different story to the lines' and I'd never worked with such intensity on the physical aspect of a performance.

[...]

RA: I think I've got to decide this week whether I can do Michael Frayne's next play in which I'd be playing Max Reinhardt.

DP: Wow, gosh! And do you think you might do that?

RA: Oh, it's a most wonderful play which I'd love to do. It's all a question of economics – who was it who said the economics are the aesthetics...?

**[N.B. RA did indeed act in Michael Frayne's *Afterlife* at the National later in 2008. He contacted DP to get hold of some *NTQ* material on Reinhardt as part of his research process for this role.]**

I think the thing about acting theory is that my acting, for it's worth, has built up over... I try and think about it less, I suppose, is true, but I'll try anything, you know. I'll try any theory. That's why it was very interesting to work with Peter Stein who has some definite ideas. So I don't, I guess I try and feel less defended. Not always with success, you know, but I attempt to do that, I suppose, really. And I think Simon Callow said, yes probably very drunkenly one night, he sort of said, 'You can be... You're sort of, you're in the wings, and you're not the character, and then going on stage is like jumping into this pool. Into this swimming pool, where you're immersed suddenly in the world of the play.'