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Karel Reisz, film director.

Interviewer Norman Swallow, recorded 17 April 1991

SIDE 1, TAPE 1

Norman Swallow: Where and when were you born

Karel Reisz: I was born in 1926, in a small town in Czechoslovakia called **Ostria**, which is a Sheffield of Czechoslovakia, a mining and industrial town, to a middle class Jewish family. My father was lawyer, and lived there until 1938, till the Occupation. A very uneventful childhood until the Occupation.

Norman Swallow: Then you came to England. I came to England.

Karel Reisz: What had happened was, my parents had sent my older brother Paul to a school, to a Quaker school in Reading, Leyton Park School, simply to be educated in England. And when the Occupation started my brother spoke to the school and asked whether they would take me on. I was 12 ½ then as a refugee. Because the British government was admitting children on condition there was a guarantor. And they did that. And I came to England in the beginning of June 1939 with a children's transporter, a Quaker's children transport. And went straight to the school. And was at that boarding school, the Quaker boarding school, Leyton Park for 4 ½ years.

Norman Swallow: Did your parents come over

Karel Reisz: No, my parents didn't survive the war.

Alan Lawson: When you left school, what did you do after that

Karel Reisz: Just before my 17th birthday I volunteered for the Czech airforce and at that time the Czech government was getting its subsidy from the British government depending on how many people it had in uniform, so they would take you if you were 12. Anyway I went on what was then called an RAF Short Course to Cambridge, 6 months short course where they taught you aeronautics and

meteorology and that kind of thing. And then I went into the Czech Branch of the RAF

Norman Swallow: Czech squadron

Karel Reisz: In fact there was not a separate training squadron, I was trained in an international, we had Dutch and we had Turks. The Turks came in right at the end of the war and in fact there were some Turks being trained with me before the Turks were in the war. And I got my wings 3 weeks before the end of the war so it was very neatly timed. I never saw combat. And I went back to Prague which I hadn't known because I had come from a provincial city, I was repatriated with the Czech forces. And we all immediately deserted, because everybody had been away from home for six years

Karel Reisz: Two weeks later they gave an amnesty and we all returned to barracks. And then my parents, I knew by then, I went to Poland to search for my parents but I discovered they had in fact not survived. And I really had nobody left there at all, because my brother decided to stay in England. So I deserted and went to Pilsen which was then occupied by the American forces. Prague was Russian but the Western part of Czechoslovakia was American.

I was still in my RAF uniform with Czechoslovakia on my shoulder and I hitch-hiked to Munich on a Dakota and I spend a night in a camp, an American airforce camp. And it was the first time I had peanut butter and honey. It was on the table in the px

Norman Swallow: You liked it

Karel Reisz: Yes. And at the px we saw Along Came Jones, it's a minor film with Loretta Young and Gary Cooper I think. And the next day I got another plane to England. And two days later I was that Emanuel College, Cambridge, and I said to my tutor, I'm back. And he said you better come and start straight away, because nobody much is demobilised yet but next year it is going to be hell, so we'd better get you in now. And I spend two, three years at Cambridge and got my degree

Norman Swallow: Studying chemistry

Karel Reisz Yes

Norman Swallow: Why

Karel Reisz: I don't know why. Yes, I do know why. My guardian, the man who had been my guardian during the war, a man I very greatly admired, was a chemist and so it was assumed in the family that the children would do as Papa did. And I had a scholarship. And it was the question of doing chemistry and going, or not going to university.

And at university I was very active in the Socialist Club and the very active playing rugger, and very active not working. And I joined the film society and my film mania, not a mania year, my film obsession really started there. And I came down in 1948-. Like everybody else, I couldn't get a job in the film industry. I became a supply teacher and taught at secondary modern and grammar schools for about three years.

Norman Swallow: At several, not just one

Karel Reisz: I was a supply teacher

Norman Swallow: A stand-in

Karel Reisz that's right. That's rights. And I taught physics and chemistry and maths. And then I started doing reviews for The Monthly Film Bulletin and things like that. And then as chance would have it I knew a lady who worked at the British Film Academy, a lady called **Kumari Ralph**, they it were looking for some body, they were planning a series of books on film technique. And the idea was there should be a book about camerawork, music and so on. And the dream was the books would be written by practitioners and that they would hire a kind of Boswell to do the work and I'd got the job of doing the editing one. Which was an extraordinary stroke of luck.

Norman Swallow: It was a great book if I may say so, 1953, published Focal Press.

Karel Reisz: That's right. It may be earlier than 1953. My committee was Thorold Dickinson, David Lean, Roy Boulting, Sid Cole and Jack Harris and Uncle Tom Cobley and all. And of course the idea of writing a book by committee is completely absurd.

Norman Swallow: Like making a film by committee.

Karel Reisz: And they never, they were very nice but of course they never turned up and who can blame them. But it was a gift from heaven for me because it meant that I could, I was paid to look at films on the Moviola, and break them down and describe the editing process and I made the book a kind practical, quite unpretentious analysis of actual edited sequences. So I had a period of 18 months or two years just have literally studying film. And it was the most fortunate circumstance.

Norman Swallow: The book is still around, and it was updated with Gavin Millar.

Karel Reisz: No, Gavin wasn't involved at all but 20 years later when the publisher wanted it brought up to date, Gavin was taken on. And he's written the last section on what had happened to editing since I'd written the book. And the book's great virtue is that it's the only book on this subject.. So all the students all over the world, it is the only.

At that time I met Lindsey Anderson who had with the Gavin Lambert started a magazine called Sequence at Oxford. And they brought it down with them and I started reviewing for it.

Norman Swallow : Was this around 1947

Karel Reisz: That sounds about right, I think it ended about 1951

Norman Swallow: Or 1952 Anyway we can look that up.

Norman Swallow: I think I looked it up yesterday

Karel Reisz: Then I got a job and at the princely sum of £3 a week as assistant curator or to the National Film Archive, National Library it was called then, to Ernest Lindgren. That was at the BFI. And I did that and for about six months or a year and then the Telekinema which was the Festival of Britain cinema which had been used curiously enough by the husband of Kumari Ralph, my friend, Jack Ralph was in charge of it; and they'd used it mainly to demonstrate 3 D. But it was there that was an auditorium which the British film Institute took over and turned into

the National Film Theatre and I moved over and became the first programme director of the National Film Theatre. And this was about the same time as we were writing, working on Sequence. But Sequence was a purely voluntary, labour of love

Norman Swallow: It is very important, Sequence. Could you tell us more about Sequence. Looking back on it, it influenced me a lot and a lot of people.

Karel Reisz: I can claim practically no credit for that, because the kind of stance that Sequence took which I can talk about in a minute was established by Lindsey Anderson and Gavin Lambert and to some less extent by Penelope Houston, and a man called Peter Ericson. I wonder where Peter Ericson is, he's moved out of movies altogether. The importance of Sequence was that it was written by people who liked the American cinema, in intelligent circles this was the time of CA Lejeune, where cultivated people only went to a French films, that kind of thing. And Sequence wrote about Preston Sturges and John Ford and Wellman and Wilder as well as about French and British films. I think Lindsay should talk about it really because it was Lindsay's Baby and I came in on it quite late. I had a very good time and it was a very important part of my film education.

Then I read an advertisement in, no, no, the British film Institute organised a committee called the British Film Experimental Production Fund committee and Tony Richardson and I submitted a script for a half-hour 16 mm documentary that. And we got an advance of £300 and we made a film called Momma Don't Allow which was a film about

Norman Swallow: 1955 according to my records.

Karel Reisz: It was an unpretentious documentary about an evening in a north London jazz club and it made a bit of a splash. And it made a splash because at that time, mainly through Lindsay's energies, and I was that the National Film Theatre so I had some influence there, we put on a series of programmes with the catchphrase Free Cinema. Really we were just friends. I think I'll leave it Lindsay to describe

Norman Swallow: What of the philosophy was

Karel Reisz: The philosophy was first of all the director should be in charge. And films should have some kind of connection with reality outside the studio. And it is very hard to remember now how rigid and class-bound and studio stuck the British film industry was at that time. So this group of films, and as films I don't want to deny them in any way, but they caused a stir far beyond their quality. What held at them together was, one of the things we said in the kind of statement, in the first programme was about the importance of the every day. And that ran counter very much to the traditions of British documentary. British documentary having started with Grierson as, *Drifters* was very much like a Free Cinema film in a sense. But the movement had very much changed into films with arguments, films of polemic, films of social reform, films that used the documentary material in the chain of an argument about housing or about whatever. And admirable thought they were, the films we were wanting to make were more based on Humphrey Jennings, Humphrey Jennings was the poet, the outsider in a way of the British documentary movement. And his great films, *Listen To Britain* and *Fires Were Started* were really the starting point of the Free Cinema thing, that is to say films that aimed at a kind of poetic response to reality, not a polemical one. And it so happened we had three films, one that that Lindsay had made, a sharp satirical disenchanting film called *O Dreamland* about a fairground in Wakefield was it, somewhere in the North. Tony and I had made *Momma Don't Allow*. Lorenz Mazes, an Italian student at the Slade had made a film called *Together* which was a film about the East End but really a story film about two deaf mutes distantly based on a Carson McCullers story and this film was an hour long and Lindsay was very active in helping her to finish it in the cutting room.

So we put these three films together and put out the Free Cinema programme with the manifesto. And as I said the whole thing caused a very big splash.

Just about that time I read an advertisement, I don't know where, that the Ford Motor Company wanted a films officer and I applied and I got the job. And the job was some body who would be in charge of their films about tractors and ball bearings and advertising films and so on. This was round about the time ITA started. I remember we had made a commercial, an absolutely dreadful commercial

Norman Swallow This was around 1955

Karel Reisz: Yes That was during my time there. We had a commercial on the first night that ITA opened comparing Ford cars to perfectly chiseled jewels I remember, an extremely embarrassing commercial. My deal with the Ford Motor Company was that I would do those, be the films officer on condition that once a year they gave us money to make a sponsored film, Ford Motor Company sponsored, but not in any way advertising. And the first series first film in that series that we made was Lindsay's film Every Day Except Christmas, a film about Covent Garden market which formed the basis of the second Free Cinema programme, I think. I've got it confused in my head now. And the year after I made the one myself, We Are The Lambeth Boys which was a kind of expanded version of Momma Don't Allow, an hour long documentary about a youth club in Lambeth. And the hutzbar I must have had to go to the Ford people and say I'll do these advertising films if you give me money for these completely, it's amazing when I think about it. In fact the Ford Motor Company did very well by these films because they got a lot of publicity and they got the reputation of being

Norman Swallow: They had a line at the end

Karel Reisz: They did, they had the Ford Motor Company presents. Like Shell, really, except that Shell made scientific films and ethnographical films. And we made these, I suppose, social documentaries. And those films continued to cause a bit of a splash.

We Are the Lambeth Boys actually went out, and this was a great achievement, went out as a second feature in commercial cinema's and this was the time when documentaries were absolutely anathema to the exhibitors

Norman Swallow: Do you remember what it was packaged with

Karel Reisz: No I don't, I don't remember. It got a lot of publicity because the industry was stuck in a kind of Pinewood rut and it was absolutely ready for somebody to just prick the balloon of ABC and Rank. And these films were the forerunners of the social films that followed, in fact made by the same people, or some of the same people.

Norman Swallow: This was the time I was working with Denis Mitchell, in close contact with you and Lindsay. The obvious question is did you ever think of moving into television. At that time, because we were doing the same kind of thing.

Karel Reisz: You have to think of our history. Our history was we were film lunatics. Our gods were Karl May and John Ford and Wyler and so on. We had our eyes on story films, so I think we were always wanting to go in that direction. Not simply by history

Norman Swallow: That's what you'd been thinking about from the beginning.

Karel Reisz: For instance, at that time Gavin Lambert and I wrote three feature film scripts, none of which ever got made, but our ambition was to make story films. We regarded the documentaries as stepping stones.

When we did meet you and Denis, really we had a feeling of kindred spirits. You were doing the same kind of thing for television. You were making the same kind of films against the current of documentary, Morning in the Streets and those films were not what the traditions of British filmmaking had led one. So you were working in parallel with us really.

Norman Swallow: And we weren't doing what television had done either.

Karel Reisz: Exactly. You stood to television how we stood vis-a-vis to Pinewood. That's absolutely right. Then a lot of things happened at once, the Royal Court opened and John Osborne and Wesker and Pinter, and Wally Simpson happened. And in the books, the regional working class novel became in and it was all in the air.

And that led directly to the early feature films that we made. I suppose the key film that started it was Room at the Top, which actually wasn't part of our group at all. Jack Clayton was an associate producer and he'd made one film, he had made a film based on a short story, what was it called The Bespoke Overcoat, a Wolf Mankovitz story. And as a result was given money to make Room at the Top, the import of which was just a completely different class stance from the traditional British film. Now I didn't know

Jack then, nor did Lindsay, and he was not a friend at all. He was somebody who worked traditionally through the film industry. And had been an associate producer on a lot of the John Huston films. There is no question that Room at the Top opened the door.

The second film in the group was a film adaptation of Look Back in Anger, Tony Richardson, who was then the co-director of the Royal Court Theatre with George Devine who had read and directed and put on Look Back in Anger which again was a tremendous succes de scandal, also it was a tremendously important even. He and John Osborne formed a company together called Woodfall Films in order to make Look Back in Anger into a movie. And they did it really, it was Warner's money I think. They met in America a fellow called Harry Saltzman who was not, who they thought was an important American producer. In fact Harry was a go getting, opportunistic, very energetic and charming fellow, and they formed a company and made it with movie stars. Because Claire Bloom and Burton were stars.

And at that time Tony who was a tremendously gifted impresario, tremendously energetic and courageous impresario, fearless with money and very confident of his own taste said to me if you've got anything come to me and we'll put it on for you. And I'd read this novel by Alan Sillitoe called Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. And took it to them and I remember the novel was owned by Jo Janni who had bought it for Jack Lee to direct. And they couldn't raise the money, it was too, it is hard to think about it now but it was thought to be a) too scandalous and b) unglam, it was not regarded as a subject worthy of film attention. And they were desperately disappointed they couldn't raise the money. So Tony and Harry Saltzman bought it from them. And let me direct it.

Norman Swallow: It is a very famous film if I dare say so.

Karel Reisz: It's a very, very simple film. It's a little working class fable. But what really projected it into, what caught the imagination was Albert, Albert Finney, who was a leading man of a kind British cinema never had, America had had let's say John Garfield, and France had had Gabin. What I'm talking about is a confident working class hero, masculine and sceptical and absolutely not a drawing room hero. And it caught fire.

Norman Swallow: Because Albert Finney comes from the North himself

Karel Reisz: He comes from Salford. But Albert was a trained actor, he was at RADA. He had a year at Birmingham Rep and played Macbeth, it wasn't as if one was discovering a primitive hick

And everybody knew. In fact I got the order slightly wrong, I think, because The Entertainer which was the second of the John Osborne things, Albert appeared in a very small role. So that was before Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. And The Entertainer was also tremendously with Olivier, and Joan Plowright and Alan Bates and everybody knew Albert was going to be a very big deal

Norman Swallow: Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. I know you were involved in the same genre, you produced with Lindsay This Sporting Life, which was about three years later, which was also about Northern working class which Lindsay directed and you produced. Who made it, which company

Karel Reisz: Then what happened was that everybody wanted to make these films, films with energetic working class heroes, it became the flavour of the month. And in fact Lindsay's memory is very much clearer than mine about this kind of thing. But what happened is that Joe Losey bought This Sporting Life

No, quite wrong Julian Wintle who was a producer at Beaconsfield, it was called Wintle and, there were two of them, Parkin, Parkin and Wintle bought the rights to This Sporting Life in competition against Richardson and in competition against

Norman Swallow: It was a Storey novel, another Yorkshire writer

Karel Reisz: Correct. Saturday Night wasn't Yorkshire, it was set in Nottingham, the Midlands.

Norman Swallow: But north of Watford

Karel Reisz: Exactly. And Stanley and Joe Losey wanted to make the film with Stanley Baker. And Wintle and Parkin

didn't want to make the film with Stanley Baker, they had made a film with Stanley Baker and they admired him and so on but they thought it was wrong. Stanley Baker was Welsh, they didn't want to do it. So they came to blows, well there was a parting of the ways and Wintle asked me to direct it. And I didn't want to direct it because I thought it was rather similar to Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, and in any case I knew Lindsay was really keen to direct. Lindsay by then had done quite a lot of work in the theatre, for instance, at the Royal Court and he'd put on a play called Billy Liar starring Albert. And I went to see Lindsay and I said listen, if I say to them I'll produce it and you'll direct it, do you want to. Lindsay said yes. So that's what we did.

I was in a rather blue funk at that time. I'd made this first film that had a much greater success than in a sense that it deserved because of its timing and its social stance. I was in a panic and I didn't know what to make, so the idea of producing for 6 months was a relief to me really. So we made that picture. Which is completely different from the others. The impulse of the Stan Barstow films and the Alan Sillitoe films is certainly social but Sporting Life is a more Lawrencian, DH Lawrence, more about the temperament of the people rather than their social position.

It was a very dark film, a very uncomfortable film. A tragedy really and was very well reviewed but the Rank Organisation were absolutely horrified when we delivered it. I remember there was a screening to which John Davis came, John Davis was then the Stalin of the Rank Organisation, and to our very good fortune brought his wife Dinah Sheridan to the screening, and it was a very cold hostile screening. But much to our good fortune, Dinah Sheridan was greatly moved by the film and when the lights came up she was seen to be in tears which sort of spiked John Davis' guns. And they very dutifully put it out without much energy or appetite and the film did ok but it was really a little bit too disenchanted, too serious, too just plain tragic for the big audience.

Norman Swallow: Who wrote the script

Karel Reisz: David Storey. Alan Sillitoe wrote the script of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. With Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, it was sort of blissful, youthful

ignorance. He had never written a script and I had never made a film and Albert had never made a film. Rachel had never, we all dived in, jumped in feet first. Sporting Life was quite a bit more professional, I would say, it was a little bit more expensive. And it was certainly technically much more in control. We had a cameraman called Denys Coop, it was very harsh black and white and stylised photography, sort of in the manner of Visconti films or something like that.

Saturday Night which has photographed by Freddie Francis who held my hand and dutifully during the making of it was much more naturalistic. Sporting Life was much more heightened and steamy, and by this time there were several films in this genre. And I'm not going to get the order of it quite right but there was A Kind Of Loving, The L-shaped Room, The Angry Silence. That dam which had held back that sort of working class energy of as a potential material films had well and truly been broken

Norman Swallow: And obviously it was the same people who had broken it in the theatre, as you said earlier, and literature and fiction. It was all part of the same social creative pattern in the 60s

Alan Lawson: Can we just go back a little to Saturday Night And Sunday Morning, this was the first time really you had had actors and actresses

Karel Reisz: Yes it was, yes it was. One marvels at one's impertinence. But there are things you can do the first time when you don't know the problems. And you know I thought I knew that material. I'd taught at a secondary modern school for two years and I'd made these two films, documentaries, I didn't feel I was stepping into unknown territory. And Albert's particular sensibility was such an impetus, he was extraordinarily charming and he had that kind of gift like a puppy. He is unable to do an ungraceful thing. It all just came together, very fortunately.

Norman Swallow: Human chemistry

Karel Reisz: Yes

Alan Lawson: That's interesting, because I'm sure a lot of people would have had the most awful butterflies

Karel Reisz: I had that all right

Norman Swallow: And it didn't appear on the screen, the butterflies

Karel Reisz: It was a very confident script, I have to say the film is very different from the novel. The novel is kind of Alan's, Alan Sillitoe's, cri de coeur about the time. And the central character is kind of, there but for the grace of God goes a revolutionary. The film was very much more sober than that. I think I saw the character as trapped by his world as much as, not so much a rebel as a victim, or both. So the tone of the film was substantially different from the novel. This Sporting Life I think the tone of the film was very, worked in parallel with the novel, it was a more felicitous, I'm talking about this very much with hindsight, when you're doing it you don't know what the hell you're doing, you just do it. But with hindsight I would say that that is the case.

And then of course Tony made another Alan Sillitoe, The Loneliness Of The Long-distance Runner and then John Schlesinger made the film of Billy Liar. So that film had started with a little Free Cinema sobriquet or whatever you call it, had become the norm, and in a very, very small number of the years

Norman Swallow John Schlesinger came in from television.

Karel Reisz: Yes that's right. He had done things for Monitor, Huw Weldon. One of the big pushes the Free Cinema group got was from doing a Monitor programme. We went on and were interviewed by Dimbleby and that was like receiving the Royal warrant.

Norman Swallow: Was it monitor or Panorama, he did Panorama, Dimbleby

Karel Reisz: You're right, it was Panorama

SIDE 2, TAPE 1

Norman Swallow: Chronologically I've got 1964, Night Must Fall.

Karel Reisz: That has a strange history.

Norman Swallow: You were co-producer, not director.

Karel Reisz: I was director, I directed that. It was a disaster. Albert and I formed a company and we wanted to make a film about Ned Kelly. Ned Kelly was an Australian bushranger, a rebel, very strange self-destructive, poetic, crazy man. And we went to Australia to prepare it. It was commissioned by Columbia, and David Storey wrote the script and it was a very, very ambitious, 2 ½ hour epic about this heroic figure, this very self-destructive heroic figure. And we came back with the locations all found and we presented the script to Columbia. And Mike Frankovich, who was then in charge of Columbia in England, said I've commissioned a western and you're giving me Macbeth. I'm not going to put money into this. And we lost a year really, and Columbia owned it and wouldn't let us try it else where. Their plan was to use the subject with a different writer and a different director. So we just lost it.

And MGM offered us a remake of Night Must Fall which was an Emyln Williams matinee thriller. And Albert and I said yes. And I don't know, four months later we were on the floor. And this dark character thriller which was really fairly well botched up and didn't work at all, had some nice stuff with Mona Washbourne in it, it had a good horror sequence in it. And it's a film which has a weird kind of cult clientele, but really what it was a matinee thriller which we tried to turn into a serious movie and the material was about a man who decapitated their victims and kept their heads in a shoe box. And that is something you can do as a thriller but to do it seriously was a misconceived notion. It didn't work out at all. Albert by then was a very big name. He had name Tom Jones, and he'd been in Luther on Broadway and here. However, nobody wanted the picture.

And then we sort of all just went our separate ways really. Tony continued to make films at the rate of knots, he made a lot of films. Lindsay became extremely active in the

theatre for a period of years. I don't think he made a film between Sporting Life and If..., I'm not sure, I don't think he did and that's quite a few years. But he was working regularly and in a very distinguished way. with David Storey in the theatre. He directed all those David Storey plays - The Farm and The Contractor and The Changing Room. The Changing Room was a sort of documentary Sporting Life. But he didn't only do David Storey plays. He did Max Frisch as well.

And Tony made a series of films, some in France with Jeanne Moreau. And then he made a film of, what is that Evelyn Waugh novel, The Loved One in Los Angeles. And then he did a thriller, a William Faulkner book with Yves Montand, what the hell was it called. Actually he was shooting that while we were on the floor with Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. And the group, although we've remained friends, off and on, we really separated, we went our different ways.

The vogue passed. That particular wave of energy, it would be interesting to think about this in social historical terms. These films were in some ways the result of the 1945 Education Act. That brought in a whole strata of actors and writers that would have been inconceivable before the war and these films of the late Fifties and early Sixties were the harvest of that social change. It would be very interesting to plot the fate of the Labour Party and this movement and

Norman Swallow: At the end of the Sixties it all seemed to change

Karel Reisz: Then Swinging London was a completely different wave of energy

Norman Swallow: Mind you, David Storey is still writing plays, Stan Barstow is still writing novels

Karel Reisz: Absolutely, and David has written some wonderful things; but the kind of central position that those works held at the time, it moved into the margin and most of us moved to do other things. So that's that chapter

Norman Swallow: The next one I've got is Morgan A Suitable Case For Treatment, still in the Sixties

Karel Reisz: And that had a very curious history. The history of Morgan is that Oscar Lewenstein and Tony Richardson who by then were running Woodfall wanted to make a trilogy film, a film of an three short stories. And it was to be, Tony Richardson was to do one, Lindsay was to do one, and I was to do one. Lindsay made his and it was called The White Bus, a Sheila Delaney story. Tony Richardson later made one, I think it was called Red and Blue, a film with Vanessa a dance film. And then my script, which was the Morgan script, which was supposed to be part of the trilogy, turned out to be 90 pages long and it was quite clear that we couldn't fit it in to the trilogy. So the decision was made to make it as a feature film. And then Peter Brook made a film with Zero Mostel, a comedy film with Zero Mostel which was the third part of the trilogy. And it didn't quite work out.

What happened at that time was that British Lion was up for sale. It was one of the cyclical crisis of British Lion and five groups bought British Lion, not with money but with reputation. The groups were the Boulting Brothers, Launder and Gilliat, an American film distributor whose name I don't remember but had shown a lot of the European films Jo Janni and the 5th group was us. That is to say Tony Richardson, myself and Oscar Lewenstein. And the agreement we had was that these were five autonomous groups, each one of which had access to one 5th of the resources. And the agreement was that if any of us wanted to propose a film we had to put it on the table and the other groups had the right but not the obligation to invest. This was the time the Baultings made not I'm Alright Jack, one of their big hits, but I forget what it was called. Launder and Gilliat made one of the St Trinian's films and we made Morgan. The irony of it was that we made about four films, all of which were extremely successful at the box-office but not on one occasion did any other group ever invest in the other people's.

It was a very curious thing, it was a hopeless idea really because to run a distribution company you need to people who are prepared to spend their energies on developing a programme. And we would have proposals like making a film about the Daleks and I would read it, and then the decision would have to be made do we want to invest our money. And my feeling was I have absolutely no opinion on this, none of us wanted to run a distribution company, we wanted money to make our own movies. So the paradox was although the

four films we made that year were all very successful, as a distribution company the thing couldn't work because there was nobody there to run it. I shall say for historical reasons that the money, and I'm tracking back now, the money that had been found for The Entertainer and Saturday Night and A Taste Of Honey, and so one had been put up by a company called Bryanston.

Now Bryanston was group under Mick Balcon, which was another consortium of film makers, none of whom ever made films for Bryanston, but Bryanston did put money into the Woodfall films. It was a very curious thing and then these films were then distributed, mechanically distributed through British Lion, which is how we got into the British Lion thing. There was a man called David Kingsley, the head of British Lion, a very effective, intelligent entrepreneur who remained with British Lion.

And that went on for about 18 months, we made our films and Morgan was actually very, very successful, particularly abroad. Nonetheless we never produced a programme. So we are all sort of drifted apart and I think the Boultings, I don't know, some body bought British Lion from these groups.

Morgan was a curious thing. It was a television play which David Mercer had written, and it had been put on by Sydney Newman, I think. And it was a 70 minute play about this crazy character who had been throw out of his house by his wife, who took a lover, and he lay siege to the house. The continuity was in two strands, it was his adventures, and his adventures with his mother. That was one strand and the other strand of continuity was the character sitting on his psychoanalysist's couch talking about the events.

And David and I got together and I said let's make a film about this character but let's drop the analysis, let's dramatise the things that emerge on the couch. And we spent about eight months and it's a very drastic re-write and the thing was very much a externalised into farcical events. I mean he's exploded at one point and sets a gorilla on fire and he gets chased through London in his gorilla suit and so. It was kind of free associating farce.

It was Vanessa's first film. I remember when we went to Bryanston, it is so amazing, we went to Bryanston and we said we want to make this film, not Bryanston, British

Lion, we put it on the table and said we wanted Vanessa and an unknown. And Vanessa was an unknown in the cinema, she had made one film as a little girl with her father. Everybody around the tables said yes we think this is OK but not if you have Vanessa because she is gawky and unattractive and so on. And Tony who would have none of that kind of thing, he had a very shrewd and direct sense of what worked and said we're making it with Vanessa and they caved in.

And that was very, very much against the current film. Which strangely enough again, the timing of it was very felicitous. And it became a kind of cult film, particularly in America and it was very, very successful

Norman Swallow: David Warner was in it, wasn't he a

Karen Reisz: That's right. He was also an unknown.

It was a very off beat weird role. And I went to the Arts and I saw a play by Henry Livings called Eh! in which David played the lead and we took him. And it was another of those movies where Vanessa hadn't made a film and David hadn't made a film and we just sort of jumped in. Black-and-white, Oh black and white used to be so nice. It's very hardy the film, it's continually shown in America now and there is a whole generation of the kind of pre hippie, he was a type of prototype hippie. It was before all that but he was taken on as that kind of. You see we're now into the Beatles era, we're now going into the Dick Lester films so that kind of free continuity was falling on receptive ground. And the reason the film worked was the farce was very, the audiences laughed to put it simply.

Norman Swallow: Black humour, is that the right phrase.

Karel Reisz: I suppose. Not black, I don't think it's a bitter film. I don't think it's got that kind of malice you associate with, I suppose the nearest thing would be the American screwball comedies. It's more than that, it's definitely not Kind Hearts and Coronets which was elegant and black and misanthropic and so on, and wonderful, but this had a different tone. It also had frank farce, people being exploded in their own beds and people dressing up in gorilla suits. In that sense I suppose, looking at it now it's of the same, we were breathing the same air as Dick

Lester was breathing in the Beatles pictures. Of course we didn't think so at the time.

Norman Swallow: That's looking back on it.

Karel Reisz: But that whole sense in the film of disenchantment with Marxism also touched a nerve, the Morgan character is a sort of, in a comic vein, a man for whom the god of communism has failed and he's left with nothing, and he's got this comic, rigidly the working class mother, Irene Handl, who was great. So it was very happy, felicitous, and also it was in the air. I mean in Rome and in Paris there were fan clubs for the film. And it had a huge circulation on the American college circuit. It's quite a crude little film actually. I saw it about 10 years ago. But it is sort of high spirited and free.

Norman Swallow: The next one I remember was Isadora, 1968

Karel Reisz: That was quite soon after Morgan. In fact the Hakim Brothers who are the great French producers, who had done all those Gabin films had had a project to make a film about Isadora Duncan and were never able to get it off the ground. And it was Vanessa's great success in Morgan and subsequently in Camelot which suddenly made it viable. The industry is so crazy. These decisions are made because an actor or an actress, suddenly everybody will give you money to make a film with x. and that was very much

Alan Lawson: It became marketable then

Karel Reisz: That's right. It is really more than marketable. There comes a moment where, at the moment in Hollywood if you wanted to make a film with Julia Roberts you could do the phone directory, everybody just wants to do that for this moment. And Vanessa had that moment and we made the film. And that was a very, very, unhappy experience really for me.

Norman Swallow: It wasn't a bad film as I remember it.

Karel Reisz: It was a bit of a mess, it always was. We made the attempt to do a film, I really didn't want to do a biographical film, a beginning to end story. I wanted to make a sort of film which free associates, floats about her life which is perceived through the old Isadora Duncan, she was 48 at the end of her life, she was drinking and fat and

outrageous and really over the hill. And we wanted to make if you pardon the pretentious, a kind of symphonic continuity of jumping from dance to reality to old age to youth and so on. And it was in retrospect an absolutely lunatic idea to think we could make a mass audience picture without in essence a story, which was a free associating continuity about the spirit of this artist.

A rather strange thing happened. We were shooting in **Popatia** in Yugoslavia, which stood in for Nice in the 20s and I was rather over budget and Universal for whom the film was being made said would I change the film and turn it into a road show picture. Well a road show picture was a picture, there was a fashion for what they called road show distribution which started with The Sound of Music. And the essence was it distributor rented or bought or controlled large movie houses, took them over and put on a show like a theatre. So they had a four wall deal, they took the theatre. There were films that were in two parts, there was an interval, in the interval there was a lot of selling of special goods and they were turned into events. It was a kind of attempt to change the pattern of distribution. And they had The Sound of Music, with which they did extremely well and then they had a film called Thoroughly Modern Millie, another film with Julie Andrews with which they did very well with. And suddenly roadshows were in and the Universal people said ok, you're over budget. If you make the film a little longer and turn it into a two part film with an interval, we will give you enough money to. So we did that. And the film ran about an hour 50 and there was an interval and there was a big climax at the end of the hour 50 and then there was an interval and then there was a second part which ran about 55 minutes.

By the time we'd delivered the film, road shows were out. And it was decided, they had a couple of failures, I think the Fosse film, a very nice film, Sweet Charity was roadshown and the road show system didn't work out and they found they had an enormous outlay and if they didn't have a smash hit with every road show picture, it was not a good way of distributing. So it was out. So I was faced with the problem of turning this movie which had been shaped, and taking a lot of footage out and turning it into a single film. And the film never recovered. I took about 20 minutes out and it was shapeless, it was much too long to run as a single film. And then they took more out and then there were different versions for every country and the whole

thing became a nightmare. It was never a film which was going to find a big audience but it could have been a good movie and it ended up being a kind of wreck. With some very beautiful things in it, I think, some of Vanessa's particularly playing the old parts of Isadora's life were very good and some of the dance sequences.

One of the other difficulties was that Vanessa was not a dancer and the dancing was as it were acted in the film and of course that is in the nature of things how it had to be done. But some of the dance critics, not all by any means, some of the dance critics were very for the film, but some of the dance critics turned against it. So it was a kind of unhappy botched thing. My first experience of working for a major, although the producer was Robert Hakim, we were delivering to. This was a time when Universal, MCA, had bought Universal, Universal previously having been a B picture company, that made Francis the Talking Mule and Ma And Pa Kettle and that kind of thing, MCA bought it. When Wasserman, MCA bought it, they wanted to turn it into an A picture studio and they sent a very nice intelligent sweet man called, I can't remember the name now, from the States to run the London office. And he - Jay Kanter - and Jay Kanter made a programme which was the Chaplin picture, A King in New York, Albert's film Charlie Bubbles, my film and Michael Cacoyannis' Greek film. And I believe, I'm not sure but I believe, Fahrenheit 495, the Truffaut film, I'm not sure about that, don't take my word for it.

Anyway they wanted us to make prestige films and none of these films worked, for one reason or another they were all, and it was a ludicrous situation that these films were delivered in America to the sales organisation, that just loathed them. They had been the Ma and Pa Kettle people, and they just didn't know what had hit them. And it was farcical. I don't say that any of them were great films, or would have broken records or anything, but it was a complete dislocation of the purpose of the films, the sales organisation to which they were delivered. So it was rather an unhappy time for me, because the film bombed.

Norman Swallow: You did make films in the States didn't you after that

Karel Reisz: I did.

Alan Lawson: Coming back to Isadora, when you say you had to cut it down and then Universal cut it down. Did they discuss that with you.

Karel Reisz: When one is in those messes there is no right or wrong. You've delivered a film which is, which they don't want, which the public don't want. There is a kind of panic because suddenly there are brilliant people who think let me take it into the cutting room and I can make it popular and it never works of course because you destroy what you had and you don't have something successful. So I made the mistake in the first place of colluding in making my own shorter version. And they then took more out and there were threats of lawsuits and all that but you can never do anything.

I did. I had actually technically, in my contract I had final cut on the picture. But that doesn't mean anything, because in law they own the film and if you sue them you have to prove loss of earnings or loss of reputation and your version of the film has never been shown so you can't prove it, besides which an individual can't take on. And anyway I sympathised with them, I'd delivered what they considered a turkey. So it was extremely unpleasant and the thing to do was to forget about it and make another picture.

Norman Swallow: Which you did. What I remember was French Lieutenant's Woman.

Karel Reisz: That was quite a lot later. The Gambler came next. I got an American agent and he sent me a outline by a young writer called James Toback which was a sort of 75 documentary about gambling, dramatised. A kind of documentary feature about Las Vegas and I lived the writing very much, I thought it was extremely talented and lively and obviously the man knew his stuff. And I asked him to come over and I said let's not make a film about gambling, let's make a film about a gambler. And we started from scratch and it's an original screenplay.

And I felt very, very comfortable with it because it's set in a middle class New York Jewish setting about a man who rebels against his middle class respectable Jewishness by these crazy, ironic means of ruining the family financially. And I went to the States and Paramount said yes, and we made it. It's rather a dark kind of

psychological thriller with James Caan who then had just come off the Godfather and was the cat's whiskers. And it's a film, I like it very much. But it is a very pessimistic film, it doesn't suggest that there's a cure, in fact when you make films about issues, the traditional way you cauterize them for the audience is that you regard the central character as a patient and in reel nine you have a scene which reveals that something in his youth caused this, something nasty happened in the woodshed and in reel ten you say he is now cured. Now that is absolutely not the way we set this film out. It is a film about the temperament of a self destructive spirit, a kind of hero of our time figure. And the film was well received but not commercially. I like it very much. I think it is a thoroughly nasty picture.

Norman Swallow: Looking back on it I remember admiring it but I haven't seen it since then and it was what, 1975. The next one I have listed is The French Lieutenant's Woman which was 1978.

Alan Lawson: Coming back to The Gambler, this is the first film you made in the States. How about that, working in the States

Karel Reisz: It was bliss. The Americans are quite different from us in a sense, there is no us and them feeling. They don't have any sense, Hollywood is traditionally the place of émigrés, Wilder, Lubitsch, Dieterle, Fritz Lang. So if you can deliver they go with you and the crews are extremely energetic and knowledgeable and this was a time when the younger American technicians very much admired European cinema and I found very congenial people to work with. And it was made in New York where I feel very much at home. And then we had a week in Vegas. I had a very easy baptism. It was a very happy experience. I've done four movies in America and I think most European directors find that, there is no, people take you for what you can deliver not for, so there is no tension. Also I like the story very much. It has got the shape of a thriller but actually it's a character study. It's a portrait film. This whole thing about the British cinema, I don't have to talk about

Norman Swallow: It's about you and your career

BREAK FOR LUNCH

Norman Swallow: We had finished The Gambler

Karel Reisz: Then I had a project to make a film of Man's Fate, the Malraux novel which I lost about a year on. I have never done a film which has anything to do with my home and my feelings about Communism and all that, and I thought the novel was just great. And there was a project with an American producer, and this was long after the Freddy Zinnemann version had been aborted and Freddy was off it by then and Harold Pinter was going to write the script and it was owned by Carlo Ponti who had produced Doctor Zhivago and explained to me the reason he bought Man's Fate was love stories set against a civil war background always make money. But it foundered because this was cultural revolution time and nobody would give us insurance, just nobody would give us the money. The Chinese government were actually very keen on the subject, it was perfect subject for them. One of the chief characters in it is supposed to be **Chow en Lai** and it's about the Russian betrayal of the Chinese Communists in Shanghai in the late 20s. That collapsed.

I then read a novel called Dog Soldiers by Robert Stone which is a thriller but a sort of psychological melodrama set at the time of Vietnam, a film made with Nick Nolte and Tuesday Weld. It's the story of two good men, one a soldier and one an intellectual both of whom return from Vietnam who as a kind of act of diabolic revenge bring a kilo of heroin with them. And it's a very dark story, a thriller in which the way the thing is set up you're asked to sympathise with the people who are actually carrying. And it was, I think it is a very good film. I think again it is rather a dark film. A film that suggested at the time that Vietnam malaise was at home rather than somewhere out in Asia with the nasty yellow people. So it was critically well received and commercially not. And it was released in America under the title of Who'll Stop the Rain because there was another film in production at the time called The Dogs of War and the distributor didn't want two films with the same. And the title did it a lot of harm I think.

Anyway that's become a sort of cult film. It came out much too early for the audiences to want to see a Vietnam film but it is a serious, it is perhaps my most complete pictures and I'm very proud of it.

After that I made a film in England, The French Lieutenant's Woman. I had talked with John Fowles very early on after he'd written it, in fact at Isadora time. At that time I really didn't want to do another huge film. And anyway the French Lieutenant's story has got great problems. It is a sort of experimental novel which is both a tale of Victorian life but also at the same time very consciously written from the modern point of view and the author continually jumps out and interprets what he has written in terms of Freud and Marx and Darwin and so on. And that sort of duality of the story, of both being a story and being a discussion of Victorian fiction, that is absolutely central to it. And so I didn't know quite how to do that. And then over a period of 10 years all kinds of directors. I mean John sold the option every year and Freddy Zinnemann was going to make it and Huston I think had it and then Peter Brook wanted it, anyway lots of people.

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SIDE 3, TAPE 2

Karel Reisz: And then when I came back from the States, Tom **Maschler** who was the head of Cape Publishing was a friend of John, John Fowles, said why don't you have another go at it. And I met with John and he gave me a year's free option to try and run with it and then I asked Harold Pinter to write the script and we evolved a manner of doing it, that is to say instead of having the modern component of the story be a narrator, we evolved a film within a film pattern and I thought we had to do that because the fact that the story is an artefact, that you're asked both to feel it and judge it all the time, which is the way it works in the novel, was absolutely central to it. So we evolved this manner of doing it.

And we made it in Lyme Regis which is where John Fowles lives and where the story is set, beginning on the Cob, that famous pier, stone pier. We were very lucky to get Meryl Streep, who was, when we hired her, her first film wasn't out yet, that was Kramer vs. Kramer. And we hired her and we suddenly found ourselves with one of these extremely fashionable stars on our hands, which of course was great. And the film did pretty well.

I remet with Freddie Francis on it. Freddie had shot my first two films but then went off to do his own films. But by the time we made The French Lieutenant's Woman he was back in camerawork. He had just done The Elephant Man. And that I must say was very nice for me, Freddie and I work well together, he is not only a very creative person but he is also very quick. He finds the process of filmmaking very enjoyable, there is no great agony for him. I tend to agonise on the floor a bit, and I need somebody who just gives me a good kick up the arse and says let's get on with it. And Freddie does that admirably. He doesn't take my gloom too seriously. I'm happy with the film. It found a surprisingly big audience all over the world really, partly because of the story and partly because of Meryl. It was also Jeremy Iron's first film and we shot it mostly on location and at Twickenham. What else should I say about it.

Norman Swallow: Whatever you wish. It was a famous film and a big success, critically and in terms of audiences

Karel Reisz: Yes. It continues to have a very active shelf life

Norman Swallow: I get the impression as someone who's seen it in the cinema, and you've just confirmed that, it obviously was made by a happy co-operative team

Karel Reisz: Yes.

Norman Swallow: Sometimes you get that impression from seeing a film don't you

Karel Reisz: I don't think there is any correlation between having a good time and whether it's good or not. You can have a wonderful time on a movie and it can turn out

great, and it can turn out the other way round. You can sweat your guts out and in the end you have nothing or it suddenly works. It's very peculiar, the step between the shooting and the finishing whether the thing comes together happily is very hard to foretell. You can make a film where the rushes look great and the damn thing, the cake just doesn't rise. And that's true of even very, very experience filmmakers, naming no names. That was a very happy circumstance. It was my last English film actually. Although it was made for United Artists, American money.

Norman Swallow: That was made in Lyme Regis, 1978 I think.

Karel Reisz: After the first two pictures I've never made a film with British money. It's always been an American major, always. *The Night Must Fall* was Paramount, no *Night Must Fall* was MGM; *The Gambler* was Paramount; *The French Lieutenant's Woman* was UA. *Isadora* was Universal. Never. It's, just to put it crudely. If you make films that take more than 10 weeks to shoot you can't make it with British money. It's really, that is a sort of rule of thumb. If you have a subject which takes 12 or 14 weeks you have to get American money and also you have to get a star. I've been extremely fortunate really that I've worked with a lot of leading players who have had a star position but they've all of them been actors. Vanessa, Meryl, Albert Finney, Jeremy Irons and Jessica Lange and Debra Winger.

There is a sort of snobbism among the Europeans about stars. It is a completely misplaced thing because many of the stars are of course wonderful actors. And you do surrender something when you work with them. You do have to welcome what you get to a certain extent. Of course you can control it, of course you can rehearse and so on, but if you make a film with movie stars you are buying a persona that has a life outside your film. Now the best situation is to get them when they're young, before it's too formed. Then you get both ends of it. You get the electricity but you don't get that kind of image consciousness that a lot of leading players, both male and female, however subconsciously. You often have them saying to you now this time I don't want to play a Jessica Lange role, I want to play this part. And they are stars precisely because there is something in them that communicates direct to the audience. And you best welcome it. That is something you destroy or undermine at your peril. That's the ones that are stars stars. And of course there is the character actor stars who work in a different way.

After *The French Lieutenant's Woman* I went to the States and I made a film called *Sweet Dreams*. And it's a film that came to me more or less fully formed. A producer had commissioned a script from a very, very good writer called Robert Getchell, who wrote *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*. A man who has a very, very felicitous colloquial touch about provincial life in America. A really good writer. And it came to me with Jessica already attached. And it's a quite conventional story. It's the biography of a country western singer called Patsy Kline. The story being the story of a very imperfect but rather lively small town marriage. And I liked the script and I also very, very much liked the songs. That is to say Patsy **Kline** died about 20 years ago in a plane crash, a full album of her songs was available and the producer bought that album and we used her

voice in the film with Jessica miming all the way through. And that was a tremendous plus

Norman Swallow: It worked didn't it

Karel Reisz: I think so. I think if you make a film about an artist, your problem very often is, your first problem was to persuade the public it really is an artist. That was one of the problems with Isadora, they simply didn't buy we were making a film about a great dancer. Now the Patsy Kline songs had a very strong signature of their own. She is to country western singing what Edith Piaf is to French singing. She has her own earthy very particular, very emotionally fulfilled tone. So what the audience was hearing was wonderful popular music. And the songs were used partly biographically but partly dramatically, that is to say the songs interrelated with what was happening in her marriage. And it was the first and only time that I've work in as it were the Hollywood system. That is to say I accepted an assignment which existed before I got to it. I didn't develop the subject. The producer had developed the script, and then we worked for two or three months on the script, but basically it existed before I got to it. And it was a very, it was an experience like I imagine working for the studio system was in the old days. That is to say you were servicing, you are part of a team in which you are the senior partner as a director but you're not the originator of it. And I found it very comforting and very comfortable. And I would certainly like to work like that again. I don't mean always, but I think that is a very, very honourable tradition of filmmaking and I was happy doing it.

Alan Lawson: The locale is mid western

Karel Reisz: No, south.

Alan Lawson: A foreign country for you surely

Karel Reisz: Yes, but you know every time you make a film you have to make a world. It is no different than making a film about Victorian England. You have to mug it up, you have to do your research and you have to use the setting and the people and the locations not in an illustrative but in a dramatically significant way. I mean that's a story that couldn't, the nature of that marriage and the whole story could not have been set anywhere else but the south and I think the setting and the story go very much hand in glove. There is no attempt at all to make a travelogue of Nashville out of it. It's there I hope in an effortless way. It's a period picture, a period that is to say about the early fifties which of course is period, the cars and the houses and everything.

But I felt very comfortable there because the script illustrated the setting and the characters completely, very organically. I've never been afraid of that. I do prepare very thoroughly. I spent 3 months in Nashville. I think that is very helpful. Because if you come to a location that you don't know, or that you aren't at ease with you have a tendency to display it, to show the production value. Whereas if you know the place, you try and express it rather than illustrate it. But I felt comfortable there.

Norman Swallow: It almost goes back to the 1960s when you get, it's the wrong word, but that kind of documentary background to feature films.

Karel Reisz: Yes

Norman Swallow: Same again. That is one of the great merits of the great film you and your colleagues made in the 60s

Karel Reisz: It is really just shooting away from the studio. My whole sense of studio shooting has changed over the years. In my first feature film which was Saturday Night and Sunday Morning we shot the interiors at Twickenham. And I thought at the time it was a dreadful compromise and so on. In fact it was the only thing one could do because small interiors, shooting small interiors, tiny working-class houses, in real location means that the location determines where the camera is, because by the time you've set up the camera, the lens is half way across the room. So it was a stupid kind of false professional pride that made me want to shoot it on location. And in fact I was very glad they didn't let me. After that it's been a matter of common sense. I think small interiors are just very, very much more controllable in the studio. There is also a great deal to be said for working decent hours. I read an interview with Ingmar Bergman about a year ago in the New York Times, it is before he had stopped making films and somebody said to him, you're in a unique position, you write your own scripts, you have no trouble about getting money, how do you choose your subjects now. And Bergman said there is only one absolutely rule now, I write and choose subjects that I can write and shoot in the studio between 9-5 o'clock in the afternoon. As you get older, you begin to sympathise with that. Because location shooting which you have to do, a whole picture of location shooting means that you are continually under the physical pressure of the long hours and the travelling and so on. In the studio you have the dignity of ordinary working hours and in the end it tells.

Alan Lawson: Everything is under control.

Karel Reisz: Those decisions make themselves now. If you were going to make The Good Earth now, you couldn't shoot it in the studio like they did then, you'd have to go to China and, and if you make Sweet Dreams you have to go to Nashville. Which is not to say that the interiors and the dance and halls are not best done

And a factor which is now extremely important is the extras. Because if you need atmospheric background forget the studio because it is almost impossible to a) cast the extras to be convincing and b) to behave naturally. So things like dance halls it's best to go to the place. As for my last movie that is ready to open in a few weeks' time and I'm not ready to talk about it yet. It is called Everybody Wins and it's based on an original script by Arthur Miller and it stars Nick Nolte and Debra Winger

Alan Lawson: Going back Karel, very early on you did talk about shooting black and white and shooting colour. Would you like to enlarge on that.

Karel Reisz: There are certain things about black-and-white that are wonderful. I mean the way you light a close shot in black and white, the kind of licence you have about dramatising the light in black-and-white, the licence is far greater than with colour. I saw last week, at a film school, I showed *The Small Back Room*, the Michael Powell film. And that was a film that was made in the late Forties – I was astonishing, this is a naturalistic modern subject. I was astonished by the artifice of the lighting, and the artifice was wonderful. And you completely accepted it, you accept the black and white is a stylisation of reality and therefore if you light a highlight over the eyes, and you put the rest of the face in darkness, there is nothing wrong with that. If you do that kind of stylisation in colour, you are consciously making a non naturalistic film, you are drawing attention to the fact that you tinkering with reality. So dramatically black and white is tremendously helpful. But we best not hanker for it because it's not an option any more. It simply isn't. It's just when one sees a black and white films, particularly one's own black and white films, one does remember the freedom one had. Which of course doesn't mean that colour gives you a lot of other things, it does. I think colour has the tendency to make the image more decorative than it should be, more something sweeter. The colours, however much you work at it, always, they don't correspondent to visual experience but they pretend to. Black and white doesn't pretend to

Alan Lawson: It's chocolate box really, isn't it.

Karel Reisz: However hard you work at it, there is always an element of that. So we had best not hanker for it, but I do look back on it with affection

Alan Lawson: Since you've started with seen enormous changes in equipment

Karel Reisz: Yes. Editing of course is a different world. I go back to hot acetone joins, where one had to scrape off the emulsion. And when you did your assembly it took half an hour for it to come back, and when it did heaven help you, if you wanted to change the cut, because you'd lost a frame and all that. On the floor the main thing is the lightness and mobility of the equipment and the speed of the film. And all those are pluses. And it would be very hard now not to work with them. At the same time making things easier doesn't necessarily make them better.

Norman Swallow: And sound also of course

Karel Reisz: I think sound is, I've got a very philistine attitude to sound. I really like to have location sound but if my judgment tells me that the comprehension is going, I will a post sync. I know people don't like it, don't like doing it. But I have almost never noticed the post sync in other people's films. I notice it in my own. I think a lot of bullshit is talked about how much you lose in post syncing. Quite the contrary you can sometimes improve the performance.

Alan Lawson: A lot is to do with the actor or the actress really, their ability

Karel Reisz: Exactly some good actors are no good at post synching and some bad actors are very good at it. It's a knack rather than an artistic skill.. But if you slog away at it and it is boring post synching, you do owe the audience the courtesy of being comprehensible. And you have to subject yourself to the question can they understand it very ruthlessly and if the answer is perhaps they don't, then you should post sync

Alan Lawson: What is your feeling about music, the use of music

Karel Reisz: I am very much for it. I don't know that I have any special theory. The thing about music is that it has a completely dual role / in films. And one role is the simple da da function, in that it orchestrates and highlights and prepares and so one. Let us say the Mickey Mouse function of music, and let nobody tell you it isn't damnably useful, it is. The other function is, if you get it right you have the audience receiving the feelings of a scene, or the feelings and attitudes of a film, with a different medium. That is to say the music very much colours, not only the drama but the taste of the scene. And it isn't always the best music that does that job most effectively. It is a very, very, delicate matter and it's a time in the film when you've been with the film a long time, you've seen it a great number of times and if the music is right, the film suddenly takes on another dimension. It leaps, it does a sort of wonderful jump forward. And when you have that feeling that it's doing that, then you're OK. When you don't, you mustn't talk yourself into accepting it. You must either change it or re-lay it. or recompose it or whatever. It is a by the seat of your pants exercise.

Norman Swallow: One thing we haven't mentioned, on this tape anyway is your connection with commercials. Earlier on you said you did some for Ford, apart from the fact that to be sponsored Momma Don't Allow, but you did make some Ford commercials you said in the 60s.

Karel Reisz: Actually, not very many because I was the films officer but I've worked several commercial companies. And in fact I was in partnership with Leon Clore for many years and we had a commercials company. I've made 200, 250 commercials in my time

Norman Swallow: Did you enjoy it

Karel Reisz: Loved it, loved it. I made my first commercial before I made my first professional film. It was very peculiar, there was a man at Ealing called Monja Danischewsky, a very, very nice man Danny who formed a commercials company in the basement of Film House in Wardour St. It was called **TVA** with a fellow called **Ronnie Pierce** I think, yes **Collins, Dickinson and Pierce** sorry no Ronnie Dickinson. And Danny had seen Momma Don't Allow, my 16 mm film and he assumed that I was a film director. I wasn't. And I didn't have a party, party card!, ACTT card or anything but I was taken on. And that was absolutely great. You just jumped in at the deep end and you produced a two commercials a day at that time and in one week you would be working with children and with dogs and with blue screen and special effects. So it's an absolutely wonderful way of learning your craft. Quite apart from which they were terrific fun to do.

And it's also very nice to be working on material for which you don't have any emotional commitment at all. And if the damn things don't work it isn't the end of the world. So I unapologetically made them, I haven't now done it for 10 years. No I've had a good time making commercials. It's best if you've got a reputation outside the commercials because of the struggles with the sponsors can be quite disagreeable.

Norman Swallow: You can do with a marquee name as they say in the States

Karel Reisz: Yes. I've a good time making them, I make no apologies. There was a history of advertising on BBC television about six months ago where they showed a lot of commercials from the Sixties and Seventies. And I saw about six of my old friends in there. I won't tell you which.

Norman Swallow: The other question I was going to ask you, the fact that with one tiny exception you haven't worked in television, television of drama I mean of course.

Karel Reisz: And I didn't make one 50 minute television film called *On the Highroad*, based on a **Chekhov** play, actually Chekhov's first play which is very rarely performed and that was made on 16 mm film and shot at Ealing, all on one set in the studio and I had a very good time. You know I haven't because one of the things is that you move in a certain world and the sort of projects that come to you, come from your own world. And I've never moved in those circles. Also I think if you make feature films, you are a little bit spoilt for budgets, just to put it quite crudely, if you make a film with Channel 4 money for a couple of million pounds, your schedule tends to be six or 7 weeks and I've tended to make films which was anything between 12 and 16. And it's different, what I do know is that if I were starting now I would certainly want to work for television for this really important reason, and that is television doesn't, isn't front office dependent. If you make the television film that is good and satisfying to yourself and the authorities, the viewership figures don't actually matter that much. Whereas in the cinema if you make two or three films they don't find an audience, the interference from the front office becomes very heavy. So that is a very, very big advantage.

Alan Lawson: It's partly a captive audience isn't it

Karel Reisz: Yes. It is also that the way television works, the people who give out the jobs are partly producers and partly sponsors. And they don't have that attitude that my job really begins when I deliver, when I have to sell it. When the film is delivered it is in an essence over. Now the disadvantage is that nobody can see it afterwards. So you pay your money and you take your pick. It certainly hasn't been a matter of design. I'd like to make smaller scale films in Europe now, I really would. And there is one thing that might actually work out

Alan Lawson: We haven't talked about your other activities like teaching

Karel Reisz: Well I was teacher for money before I got into films. I don't think there is anything very much to say about that. When I came down from university

Alan Lawson: The film schools

Karel Reisz: I haven't done very much of that, occasionally. I do enjoy it. I got a bit pissed off in the late Sixties and early Seventies when the film students were so political and feminist. And one went there to teach and you ended up having arguments about

Norman Swallow: Everything except films

Karel Reisz: Yes. That's right. I gave it up for a bit then. I do enjoy it.

I might do a bit more of it now actually. What I think is a very nice, very congenial activity is to uncle a project, when students are making a film, or young filmmakers, to be available.

I think one of the real shortages in the cinema is good producers. I think the way the industry is organised, the producers are so preoccupied with the issues of money raising and with marketing that the essential middle stage which is, not supervising exactly but being creatively receptive and involved in a film, that's the part that they fall down on

Alan Lawson:

Karel Reisz: But there has been one very good producer I've worked with, Irwin Winkler who produced *The Gambler* was a very good producer. And that's very, very valuable. That you feel that there is behind you an intelligent presence that is, doesn't want to take over but it draws your attention to the problems as they arise. Irwin is the sort of person who sees rushes with you and then it says quietly after lunch, are we supposed to like him when he says that. Or do we know by this time that this is so and so's uncle. Or in other words he acts as an intelligent audience intermediary. Now the people who on the floor are so much in the middle of it that they don't pick-up those problems either. An intelligent producer is tremendously useful at that point and tremendously useful during all the stages of the editing.

You don't necessarily have to be friends with the producer, the producer could and should be quite tough. But it is a delicate business because if you don't have any respect for the producer, then however good he is you don't listen. So it is a question of keeping back but preserving his own sense of how the audience will perceive it. And in that way working in America is very different from working here. The American attitude is the question that you're being asked all the time is will they understand it, will they be satisfied, will they like it. In other words the questions are all to do with communicating, are we actually communicating what we're trying to do.

In Europe we tend to think, and of course this is a generalisation, in Europe we tend to talk about is this what I want, is this expressing me, etc. Well, a bit of each is useful

Norman Swallow: An auteur

Karel Reisz: Yes the auteur stuff. But let's not for heaven's sake start talking about that. But the courtesy of being comprehensible is something that you owe to the audience.

But Norman Swallow: You're in the communications business

Karel Reisz: Yes

Alan Lawson: Looking back what has given you so far the most satisfaction

Karel Reisz: It's when you finish a film and it's sort of somewhere like what you hoped for. When an actor gives an performance that surprises you, that enriches it, that makes it better than you thought. When a sequence comes together elegantly and has a kind of inevitable swish and flow to it. There are a lot of kind of craftsmen satisfactions to film-making. There is also a lot of agony and sweat of course. The other thing which is extremely pleasurable is seeing your film with an audience when palpably the film is holding them or when they're laughing, those are very satisfying things

Alan Lawson: Which were the best films from that point of view as far as you're concerned

Karel Reisz: There have been several that have worked. They have been some that haven't worked at all. I remember when David Mercer who wrote Morgan, when we finished Morgan, about three months later he went to Cuba for some cultural congress. And he was introduced. And as he walked onto the platform the audience got up, some body had prepared it, and the audience got up and they all thumped their chests like the chief character in the film. And David said it was the most extraordinary feeling to have been in Twickenham cutting room one week fiddling with the film, and then three months later being in Havana having a big audience set alight by something that one, now that's one of the pleasures of filmmaking

Alan Lawson What has been the most disappointing moment

Karel Reisz: Lots. I regret I haven't made more. I've made very few films. I've several times abandoned projects because I could I felt I couldn't cast them and there have been two or three times when I couldn't get the money I suppose, or not the money on the terms I found acceptable. There is a film going around the West End at the moment that I didn't do, although I did the script, because I didn't feel the budget was big enough to do it justice. So some body else made it. And I do regret I haven't made more. I have never been, I have never felt that I was in a sort of rat-race at all. I'm perfectly happy not working. I'm not one of those people who has to be at the studio every day, not at all. But that has an upside and a downside, it means that your life is agreeable but it means you don't make as much as you should do.

Norman Swallow: Anything else

Karel Reisz: I think I've said quite enough, quite enough