

Jerwood/FVU Awards 2020: Hindsight

In Conversation: Guy Oliver and Rachel Cooke

12 November 2020

Transcript of sound recording. Access the sound recording, here:

<https://soundcloud.com/jerwood-arts/jerwoodfvu-awards-2020-guy-oliver-in-conversation-with-rachel-cooke-1>

MK: Hello, welcome and thank you for joining us for this in conversation event. I'm Mirren Kessling the Events and Engagement Manager at Jerwood Arts and I'm really pleased to be introducing our event speakers, artist Guy Oliver and writer and journalist Rachel Cooke. This online event has been programmed to coincide with our current exhibition Jerwood/FVU Awards 2020: Hindsight which is now available to experience online alongside further events, content, essays and interviews.... And of course the new moving-image commissions by Guy Oliver and Reman Sadani of course at www.jerwoodfvuawards.com. For those of you who aren't familiar with the Jerwood/FVU Awards, they are a major opportunity for early-career moving-image artists run in partnership by Jerwood Arts and FVU. The Awards support artists within the first five years of their practice through a focus on practical commissioning and developmental support. In partnership with Film and Video Umbrella we launched this initiative in 2012 in response to a need for significant major commissions for early-career moving-image artists, at a pivotal stage in their practice. Through its history the Awards have contributed to an ongoing dialogue around urgent or timely concerns within moving-image through the curatorial theme and commissioned works. This, and the element of risk in working with artists who are at an early stage in their practice, sets the Awards apart from other opportunities in the moving-image. Recent awardees include Webb-Ellis, Richard Whitby, Maeve Brennan and Imran Perretta. This year's artists were selected from over 220 proposals in a national call for entries. The selected artists each received an award of £25,000 which was used to provide an artist fee and a budget to create their proposed artworks alongside full production support from FVU over a 10-month period. The conversation you are about to hear was recorded at the start of November in 2020 and it lasts for approximately an hour, it's published online so that you are able to listen to it wherever you are and in your own time. We developed this event in collaboration with Guy Oliver and we hope that it gives you a chance to hear from him about the ideas and process behind his new commission *You Know Nothing of My Work* as well sharing insights and reflections from our special guest speaker Rachel Cooke. Guy Oliver's film, *You Know Nothing of My Work*, is a multi-chapter rumination on the cultural dilemma of the disgraced popular icon, the tension between a problematic past and a more enlightened present, and the role of the male voice in a post-Me Too era. The work, which is his biggest commission to date, develops Oliver's established practice of mixing pop culture references with self-deprecating character performances and complex social issues. Idiosyncratic in style and form, this moving-image work takes the unexpected form of a musical to unpick the notion of celebrity, toxic masculinity, and moral ambiguity. Oliver adopts various male archetypes as he probes what to do with the work of cultural icons such as Michael Jackson, Woody Allen, Kevin Spacey, and Bill Cosby. Stepping into the backdrop of familiar film and television sets, Oliver also looks specifically at British culture, particularly how to marry the importance of era-defining shows such as "Top of the Pops" with the knowledge of their systematic, institutional failure. By exploring this difficult subject through the medium of song and the device of rhyming couplets, Oliver blurs the comic and the tragic, questions his own stance on these issues, and allows the awkwardness of his position as a male artist to spill onto the screen. Collaborators on the project include contributions from Rebecca Lucy Taylor / Self Esteem and Kevin Peterson "T1J", with music by Suzy Davies featuring the The

Angels of Kaos choir. Before I hand over to Guy and Rachel, I thought I would just take a moment to introduce them both properly to you and I'll start with Rachel. Rachel Cooke is an award-winning journalist. She is a writer and columnist at the Observer and the television critic of the New Statesman. Her essays have been broadcast on Radio 3, most recently the five-part series The Odd Woman. Her book, Her Brilliant Career: Ten Extraordinary Women of the Fifties, is published by Virago. She is working on a new book, The Reckoning, which explores ideas around bad behaviour and good art. Guy Oliver lives and works in Margate. He graduated from the Royal College of Art (MA Painting) in 2015, and his interdisciplinary practice employs video as well as text, painting, collage and performance. Recent solo exhibitions include And You Thought I Was Bad?, Zabłudowicz Collection, London (2018), Live From San Quentin, Random Access Gallery, New York (2018) and Did You Think I'd Leave You Dying?, Chalton Gallery, London (2017). So with that, over to you Guy and Rachel...

RC: How did you start thinking about all of this or when did you? Why did you?

GO: I think there was, the beginning was probably the Jimmy Saville scandal, about how I just got this very strong sense of how the past had sort of like collided, like a ship adrift and sort like hit the present in a really kind of violent way that everyone had sort of slept walked through something and suddenly sort of awoke again and so because it's like my parents generation I there was obviously a lot of soul searching, collective soul searching, how could this happen, how could we not have noticed when it was so obvious um but I think not to excuse anything but I think it's about culture, it's about a pervading sense of what is acceptable at a certain time.

RC: Yes, absolutely.

GO: And how that changes over time, I became really fascinated by that sort disjunction in values and shift in values.

RC: Can you remember Jimmy... How old are you? Ah you're 34 aren't you?

GO: 38.

RC: 38. So can you remember the tail end of him I suppose?

GO: Sure, sure.

RC: Was Jim'll Fix It on?

GO: Jim'll Fix It was on when I was young. Umm but he was always like a slightly odd, creepy man it didn't, you know, he was kind of hard to love.

RC: Yeah I think part of the strange appeal of him when I was a child was that on the one hand he was sinister, sort of like the child catcher in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang or something, just creepy.

GO: He always had this white hair so he always looked old, even when he wasn't.

RC: Yeah, yeah but on the other hand he was selling something that you desperately wanted as a kid which was access to excitement and treats and dreams, so it's that very strange feeling of being attracted to something that you were also a bit disgusted by and yet you couldn't yet articulate that necessarily because why would you, you weren't going to say to your mum and dad he's creepy, you were more likely to just say, well can I write a letter because I really want to go on the TV show, I mean I did, so he was the start of it for you?

GO: Yeah I think so, well I'm fascinated by figures that hold a kind of hold a difficult position in contemporary culture, I was kind of interested for a while in Bernard Manning for the same sorts of reasons that on one level you could kind of admire him as a sort of technician, like Stephen Fry actually described him as the best teller of a joke he'd ever heard but um kind of squaring that

with his really vile you know character, an overt racist and bigot but the fact that he has this following as well, still I think people would claim to be the fans of his and how that kind of squares, I don't know, I'm always kind of interested in, there are, how to put it, well the fact that we have to live together in a sort of shared culture with people who you kind of fundamentally disagree with and I think this has obviously become more of an issue I think, more of a polarizing issue in the last five or so years that we're sort of finding it harder and harder to deal with that difference of opinion and I'm kind of just interested in those.

RC: It is really intriguing, but also I'm kind of struck by the fact because we were just talking about how you've just moved to Margate and about the seaside, and one thing that I will say is that certainly in my childhood, I'm what 13 years older than you so my childhood was kind of a seventies early eighties childhood, British culture then, much less so now, it's in its dying days now, but then it was really end of the pier, so those figures you just described people like Bernard Manning and Jimmy Saville, people who basically had basically come from a working men's club culture, they were not, they were much more in everyone's homes in a way that that kind of culture just isn't now, and you know comedy and everything just had this weird end of the pier feeling. I can sort of say all this because I'm from the North and my granny did used to take us to Pontins on holiday, it felt like holiday camp kind of atmosphere.

GO: That's my perception of seventies culture.

RC: Yeah, yeah and um and you know added to that it was a much more sexist, racist time and I think unimaginably to teenagers now, not to you, to teenagers now but I don't think they have any idea now just how aggressively sexist and racist it was then and so the change in a way has been quite rapid, it probably doesn't feel that way to some people but you know in terms of my lifetime.

GO: Yeah I think the difference in generations like I kind of grew up mainly in the nineties, and so the alternative comedy just blew the old cobwebs out, it cleared the dead wood of the old like comedy scene and the nineties was more optimistic and care-y wasn't it.

RC: Yes, yeah.

GO: There was a move to be nicer and more compassionate.

RC: Yeah and we were all campaigning for things like Nelson Mandela to be freed and the Berlin Wall came down and all of that and so I think that the change has been quite rapid and I think that has, that's part of the problem with what you described that people tend to forget that although societal attitudes might have changed on the surface there's still a lot of people around who belong to that old world either directly because of their age or like me tangentially through our childhoods and our parents and in my case my grandparents because my grandparents came from that working class world and I'm sort of experiencing that sort of generational disjunction that growing up in the nineties there was that sort of idea that censorship and being edgy was more kind of aligned with the left and censorship being right-wing affiliated.

RC: Yes, yes, that's changed.

GO: And there's this turning now that the left are more inclined to obviously not cause offence and rid the world of things that do cause offence, and so you do sort have feeling slightly out of step with the one below.

RC: Hmm yeah, so do you feel out of step? That's interesting.

GO: Hmm possibly, possibly. I think because my work's always had a bit of provocative, polemical kind of side to it I think I've been inspired by a lot of comedians like Chris Morris or somebody like that who um, was always kind of pushing the envelope and always kind of had a brand of comedy that was very tied to offence and taboo and things like that um so I don't know, perhaps.

A lot of people have said with this film I've made that I'm kind of going into a lot of areas that people are like not wanting to go into.

RC: So following from the initial thing about Jimmy Saville can you tell me a bit about how you decided on the film, because there are a lot of disgraced people that you've kind of folded into it, I mean did you think, right I'm going to research this because there's a lot of this about and I want to look at, tip this all out and look at whatever comes out, I just think it's really interesting, the thing that really struck me when I was watching it is that we don't care about Jimmy Saville in a way because he didn't make any art that we would want to keep and I think probably the same might be true of Gary Glitter but on the other hand I think Morrissey is in your film, and I can't give up Morrissey no matter what he does so that parts of it that people are going to have to make these kind of weird judgement calls.

GO: Yeah, it was something I was conscious of with Gary Glitter, no ones missed it that much like he has been largely erased but yeah it's the people we really care about the people who have really impacted our lives and our kind of cultural space and that's certainly happening more and more and I focus a lot on Woody Allen whose a sort of interesting case in lots of ways partly because I wanted to kind of invest something from me, I'm in it and it's very much how I'm trying to work these issues out. But yeah I think Woody Allen has been an influence on me as an artist, and so what does that mean then particularly if you are an artist, you take your kind of influences with you as part of your practice and how that kind of sits, but yeah, it's about having something at stake, the things like, you talk about Morrissey like they're within you, they're part of your history and that kind of resentment about feeling like we're supposed to give it up, we're supposed to reject it now because of the creator.

RC: I think Woody Allen's a really interesting case because you can disapprove of him and his private life but there's no, none of the legal, none of the most severe allegations have been proven and so he is really in this very very grey area and of course if you look back at Manhattan where he's running round with this very young, it's Mariel Hemingway isn't it? so obviously to our eyes now it's looks a bit, oh she's young, but he's just such an interesting case because like I say he hasn't been disgraced in a legal sense people might be disappointed with him and his choices but you know and the other thing I suppose is he's an example of this and Morrissey is an example of this, my instinct is to separate the maker from the work so I think that people put the best of themselves in their work and that's wonderful, it doesn't matter to me, I mean obviously if someone's a paedophile then I want them to go to prison, I want to make that clear but it doesn't matter to me if someone is a "bad person" in a way because I'm not looking into their soul or even into their head, I'm looking at what they've made is beautiful and affecting and changes me then that's enough for me. And I feel and you can tell me what you think about this, I feel that art, I feel that all of us have got secrets and things that we are not proud of, no one is wholly good so I don't understand this expectation that seems to be growing that artists should be wholly good, they're just like you and I, if we were in a room and if an audience is listening to us now in person and we've asked everyone in the room "put your hand up if you've done something in the last year, even the last six months that you're ashamed of?" I reckon everyone would put their hand up, even if it was just something really small you know, like they didn't pick up some litter that they saw or it might be something big, they might be having affairs, they might have terrible secret impulses that we don't know about, they might be looking at kinky porn or you know whatever and I feel that that's being human, and art is supposed to reflect our humanity and tell us about ourselves, so if it's going worth anything at all why shouldn't art be first of all difficult and sometimes offensive but also it's made by flawed people.

GO: Yeah it's curious that we kind of want to put this onus on artists and even like sports figures that um, it's a strange thing, it's a kind of human default that people want to do that, want to feel connected to a person whose work you admire, it is maybe a kind of, we have to re-address that,

how much does that matter? I mean yeah what you were referring to about that we are all compromised ourselves and it's a strange thing to kind of want to sort of point fingers and want to kind chastise people and I want to make that point in the film that connecting it, that's why I'm in it connecting the whole problem to myself you know, and that it's about kind of assessing modern morality in general.

RC: What I loved about your film, there's loads of things I loved about it but one of the things I loved most is that in it you're in a kind of state of confusion you don't know what you think and I think part of the problem with our present culture is that there's a lot of certainty around and people expect everything to be very kind of black or white and um it's not always that simple, and.

GO: I don't have a definitive solution to this.

RC: No.

GO: And I think each case is different and I mean Woody Allen's fascinating because he is in his work, so I think I'd be lying if I said I can separate the art from the artist in that case and he is the author, he is very present in all of his work even when he's not actually there.

RC: He's kind god in that world isn't he.

GO: Yeah, yeah he never deviates too far from his New York world.

RC: I know, I know even when they are in London they are basically in New York aren't they.

GO: And that's a kind of interesting part of his films, re-watching them, what is disturbing at times is whether there's this weird meta-narrative, why is he writing himself having these inappropriate relationships and things. And it's something that often a lot of these figures often do, like Louis CK would joke about the things that he was actually doing in secret and in a way like Saville again like, it was kind of his cover.

RC: Yes, being with children all the time.

GO: Yeah yeah that sort of double bluff thing and um in which film is it, I think it's Stardust Memories where there's his girlfriend I think is it Charlotte Rampling, um one of his girlfriends in the film they come back from a dinner party and are having this big argument because she's accusing him of flirting with her 13-year-old cousin I think and it sort of doesn't need to be there and he's like, ooh you're imagining it, you're being hysterical, and all of this you know Woody Allen kind of typical responses but it's like it's confusing and it's like well are you playing games, or are you trying to absolve yourself somehow, are you working something out? And there's another, I wish I could remember her name, there's a journalist who talks about, there's an article about about Woody Allen and kind of lumping Roman Polanski in it as well, there a line in it when she says, China Town and Annie Hall are gifts to the world and I'm not giving them back, and it doesn't belong to Woody Allen anymore and that's the interesting thing about art that once it's out there it kind of forges a relationship with the viewer that the maker isn't fully in control of and that's a complex sort of concept that we're not always, her argument was that we have the power as viewers and in a way we may be handing too much credence to the maker.

RC: That's interesting all of that because when I was at university in like the end of the eighties so I was doing an English degree and that was like the heyday of literary theory and we were basically taught that the biography of an artist was not relevant, so you just looked at the text and obviously, there are obvious flaws with that, but in another way it was really bracing because as you've just said the power lies with you to deconstruct the poem or whatever that person has made, but also of course biography is so misleading, in the case of the people we've just been talking about obviously the biography is very important now in the case of someone like Jimmy

Saville but you know in another way if we're thinking about more minor crimes about someone that cheats on their wife say the biographer comes along and writes all that, but it's only one version of the truth you know we don't know, if you're talking about a historical figure we don't know absolutely what happened or why it happened and we also don't know necessarily how it connects to the work they've made, it might do, it might not because we don't know, I don't know how your life connects to your work I'm sure it does in lots of ways but in other ways it may not at all.

GO: Yeah I mean that's a fascinating thing, like why we obsess about the lives of artists and things I mean I used to work at the National Gallery and you know the investment into kind of knowing about their lives, what they made and what is attributed to them and what isn't is amazing, you can see why it is so important, that's why my motivation for making this film was that it's a massive issue, those figures are, they loom over us all the time, I think actually the National Portrait Gallery's exhibition of Micheal Jackson and related artworks which happened the year before Leaving Neverland came out, it just occurred to me that god if that had come out the year before or just as they were planning the exhibition, it would have been a catastrophe for them um so I just thought the whole kind of cultural landscape or the kind of structure of our cultural world in this country is sort of built on these totemic figures.

RC: It is yeah.

GO: I don't know if that's wrong or right if we put all the onus of this fascination with the lives of artists.

RC: But that is how it works definitely.

RC: And then if you fold into that kind of fandom and you fold into that the influence of the internet and how close you can get to the stars in a weird slightly artificial way but nevertheless all of these things just like muddy the water don't they so much.

GO: Yeah and this idea particularly of after there's a whole swathe of people being outed in a way like Kevin Spacey and...

RC: Yes, Yes.

GO: And these kind of figures just kept coming like R. Kelly and Micheal Jackson around the same time um and you kind of get this idea of things falling apart, the structure that we've built, whether that might be a good thing, perhaps that's what needs to happen and the idea of the canon of the people that we admire in film or music um and particularly in the last six months there's this whole kind of you know movement of looking at the past differently particularly because of Black Live Matter and the idea of tearing down the statues of the people who have always been there in stone and these streets being named after them and things like this feeling at the moment of...

RC: Yeah everything at the moment is up for grabs isn't it.

GO: Yeah, yeah.

RC: I mean I think when #MeToo started I was very kind of thrilled by it and excited at last, you know, at last sexual harassment is going to be out in the open in a way that I'd sort of campaigned for years for it to be and but then it just seemed to take on a life of its own it was like a snowball because I remember looking at my computer one day and one of the newspapers, I think it's an American paper had got a list of all the men in senior roles in public life who at that point had accusations against them and it was like scroll down and I thought well this is incredible but it was interesting to me because my exhilaration turned quite quickly to anxiety because I thought, well I want these people to be punished if they've done things wrong but on

the other hand I don't want a kind of McCarthy-ite you know, I'm trying to avoid using the word witch hunt but you know what I mean.

GO: What , purge?

RC: Yeah, because I want it to be careful and proportionate because I think that that's the only way you can make the world better really by keeping your realm of justice and I know what you mean about it feels like things toppling and it is interesting, but anyway your film. So there's some things I want to know about it so first of all, it's like a kind of musical.

GO: Yes.

RC: And I thought that was just so fascinating your decision to do that, the tone if you're not listening to the words but you're just looking at your face and listening to the tunes is jolly, so I wanted to know about that because it's daring! I liked it.

GO: I'm trying to think more about how it evolved, one of the key inspirations was the R. Kelly opera, operetta that he made called Trapped in the Closet.

RC: Right.

GO: Do you know about it?

RC: I don't know about it.

GO: It's a quite unique thing for a comedic narrative um it's like a pop video but it's with an evolving storyline and everything is done in this kind of rhyming scheme, it's kind of like the same tune over and over again um but he's kind of doing all the voices of everyone and it's kind of ingenious and totally nutty.

RC: Yes it sounds mad.

GO: It's not really like anything else.

RC: And what's the storyline?

GO: it basically starts with him having an affair and he's hiding in the closet from the husband coming back and then this mad narrative just kind of unfolds, just double crossing and...

RC: Ok so you were kind of like, using that in a way.

GO: Partly riffing on that yeah, yeah um I just thought about a few musical figures being kind of inspiration for I don't know, looking at a lot of these disgraced figures and I was trying to work with a musician, he's not a disgraced figure at all but he's this singer called Jeffrey Lewis whose um a New York based singer songwriter and he kind of has this particular kind of rhyming, this particular kind of comedic kind of song writing form that's always been a big inspiration to me and I've always sort of tied him to a kind of lineage to Woody Allen kind of slightly sort of loser, beta male um persona and I was trying to actually work with him on this project because I had this idea that we're both kind of children of Woody Allen in a way.

RC: Yeah, yeah I see what you mean.

GO: But I think I used him as an inspiration I think, as a way of using song and kind of humorous song as a kind of legitimate art form I suppose to explore something quite in depth and yeah there's an inappropriateness to it I think I'm always interested in comedy as a form to really unpick things hopefully be the surprise that you can actually get through comedy can actually get to the heart of something.

RC: do you think that that inappropriateness sort of um in terms of the people watching the film, it sort of disarms them? And in a way I don't think the word relaxes them would be the right word but sort of opens them up, they sort of have to kind of respond, it's so disarming that I think it like gives them a way into something that otherwise they might want to avoid almost.

GO: Yeah sort of, the pleasing feedback I've had is that someone will find something funny and then the question should I be finding that funny, yeah and it kind of, that's the sort of ambiguity through all of that, the ambiguousness of the subject I think I'm trying to sort of implicate the viewer I suppose or trigger questions within them so yeah in a way comedy can do that.

RC: So you wrote all the lyrics and someone else wrote the music is that right?

GO: Yeah, Suzy Davies who I was working with really closely.

RC: And so the lyrics because I thought they were so um you know like the concision of these really complex ideas in these witty little kind of ditties I thought it was incredible how you did that how long did that take you to write all those?

GO: It was quite a quick period of work, well not quick but it was quite intensive, so we were trying to get that written as quickly as possible and then yeah because that obviously had to come first in about a nine month period for the whole project but we shot it last November nearly a year ago so yeah from the summer I don't know it was a couple months really.

RC: I think it's amazing how you've done that, I was really in awe of it.

GO: Well thank you.

RC: Really kind of controversial, difficult things, awkward territory you know and the scene when that woman is in the audience and she kind of berates you, I was so fascinated by that because you could sort of imagine someone in the audience of the film standing up and saying, I'm not having this, because your kind of making light of these terrible things and I thought that was your way of kind of dealing with that before it happened and that's just a master stroke.

GO: Yeah it's kind of within the film itself, I'm sort of deconstructing the viewers reactions to it and things like that.

RC: Yeah.

GO: Yeah I think it was important because I've done it in these different chapters, I think there's six chapters in all and each one has a different perspective or different tone and yeah that comes later and it's important as well to get a female perspective because it wasn't my intention when I started, it was more about a general idea of disgrace but almost all of the figures that it talks about it does relate to..

RC: Yeah they're all men aren't they.

GO: Yeah and it's sort of sexual misconduct related issues in pretty much all of it and so that's where the difficulty is that me as a man talking about these people is not the same as if I was female inevitably and yeah that's seen as the sort of pivotal scene I think for the film to create a sense of balance.

RC: Yeah I mean have you ever seen any verbatim theatre like London Road or?

GO: Yes, yeah Suzy my collaborator put me onto that, I've seen the film version.

RC: It really reminded me, it was sort of like your film was like Lilly Allen does London Road, if I had to sell it to someone I'd say that and I thought that that was you know, really exciting.

GO: Yeah and someone else mentioned Victoria Wood and her sort of comedy.

RC: Yes, yeah, exactly. There was quite a lot of flip me over backwards on your hostess trolley type stuff going on.

GO: Yeah I think she's great, she's a kind of great British artist and talked about and characterised as being uniquely British um and someone was talking about how those kind of songs and this kind of end of the pier comedy that you were referring to earlier and it allows you to slip very naughty things in almost without you noticing or um.

RC: Yeah and you can put, do really quite gross double entendres in but it's all just under the guise of this is just a big cucumber or whatever, so it is really effective. The first scene of the film is in a charity shop, and I love that it's like a graveyard of pop culture you know, but disgraced pop culture. I mean I thought, it's so often that you're in a charity shop and it's like the people that run charity shops are obviously just not as judgemental as the rest of the world because it's all there and you're just minding your own business and you just think oh.

GO: Yeah it was based on the actual experience of going to a charity shop and finding this same Lost Prophets cd, yeah the film starts with my character.

RC: So that really happened?

GO: Yeah I would find these and so Lost Prophets was this you know metal band, yeah the singer was a really horrible paedophile basically and it all came out, the totally horrific story about him.

RC: And he's now in prison, isn't he.

GO: In prison for a long time, yes, um but this idea of things slipping through the net, this idea of kind of that was a key trigger in my mind about the idea of trying to erase things and not being able to or they fall through the net and that a charity shop is this sort of space where things kind of end up by accident.

RC: But then when you're the customer in a charity shop and let's say you're going to buy something particularly gross I mean on the one hand you're doing a good deed because you're putting money in the charities pot but on the other hand you know is it acceptable to go, oh yes I'd love to have this Jimmy Saville annual thanks, yeah here's a pound. I mean it's so interesting how you're in the film that scene just encapsulates all the things that might be running through someone's head as they're in there you know and I could smell that charity shop when I was watching it.

GO: I mean yeah most of the humour comes from the anxiety, this anxiety that we all feel about a situation like that and the anxiety of trying to be a good person.

RC: Yeah, yeah.

GO: And sort of new morality we're trying to adjust to even being more conscious, conscientious, it's hard we often feel compromised and like we're not as good as we should be.

RC: What about the fact that you're in that, so you're an artist but in that work you're a performer, and I don't know does that come naturally to you or not? I mean you look like you're enjoying it well enough but I don't know you very well.

GO: Yeah I'm not naturally extrovert and I've always, although I am doing or I was doing lots of live works I've always wanted to, I love moving-image working with moving-image, so I've always wanted that control of it being for camera but yeah there's probably a frustrated actor in me somewhere.

RC: The reason why I'm asking you about performing is because that is another kind of meta thing that's going on in your film because most of the people that are in the film who are disgraced were performers and so of course if you're really fully involved in the piece you watch it and you think oh what does Guy have to hide, do you see what I mean? You're playing with that idea, I think there's one scene isn't there where your wearing like a tux, are you wearing a tux or?

GO: Err yeah like a tweed jacket.

RC: Yeah you look very kind of smart and nice and like someone that you could take home to meet your mother but of course because of what the film is about, I was just interested in that. I'm not accusing you by the way of having done anything horrible.

GO: Well particularly the last scene which was inspired by this particular monologue, I'm kind of riffing on this strange Kevin Spacey video that he released.

RC: Yes I remember.

GO: Yes it's the very odd video called Let me be Frank.

RC: Where he pretended to be his character from House of Cards didn't he?

GO: Yeah so when the whole scandal came out, he released himself this video where he's in character of well the character he plays in House of Cards and it's the strangest thing in the world because what his intention was is very hard to unpick because his character in the programme is very sort of sinister and malevolent.

RC: Yeah awful.

GO: And why he would be that guy to try and sort of like try and I don't clear his name or win people over and there's a lot of kind of strange meta things going on.

RC: So that was in your mind in the scene where there's a big table and yeah it's like a sort of seventies dinner party it looks like.

GO: Yeah but I'm the only person there, it's about, I suppose partly about the awkwardness of an authored work like that and I partly take after the exchange with Rebecca the performer in the lecture theatre, I'm kind of taking it back to me the male author again like there's this sort of meta narrative about authorship and kind of having the last word and wanting to create a certain uncertainty in the viewer about where I'm coming from.

RC: Yeah exactly well I think that really works.

GO: Well it's a bit of a dangerous game but I just wanted to say that point that, none of us are perfect.

RC: and who are we.

GO: And it sounds like, I'm apologizing for everyone in the film which I'm not and I think um yeah it's about morality, ultimately it's about trying to work out what it is to be moral.

RC: Did you worry about getting it made? I mean obviously you got an award from the Jerwood but I wondered if prior to that you thought this might be a difficult project to sell in terms of getting funding and so on, because that's another thing that I'm very aware of that um you know there are certain topics that are deemed to be a bit off limits, certainly in the world of newspapers and publishing and so I'm wondered if you thought, you know this might not you know...

GO: Yeah I mean well credit to Jerwood and Film and Video Umbrella for having the faith in me, and um they were on board the whole time and it wasn't like they left me alone, I mean it's a tricky thing to talk about but like I suppose I refer to it in the film, me as a straight white man, perhaps, like it was already awkward like that I'm not supposedly the most appropriate person to be talking about it and that's part of the anxiety that I talk about within the film but yeah.

RC: I know what you mean, I mean there's certainly been a lot of talk in the last 18 months about who has the right to tell certain stories but in the case of this, I think, speaking as a woman I would say that it's really good to have a man investigating this um, you know that's in a way what you want.

GO: Well it was about real conversations and um...

RC: Yeah and well you know I think a woman would bring something different to a project like this but the point is there's no point as it were preaching to the converted you want to, I just think there's a bit more useful friction of someone like you talking about this and worrying about it and...

GO: Yeah, that anxiety is all there, that's what I'm parodying I suppose

RC: Yeah and also how you know how you conduct yourselves, and how men and by men I mean how men conduct themselves in the world I mean in a way, nothing changes for women hopefully the world gets easier you know, you don't have men grabbing your bum all the time if you're a bar maid or whatever, but nothing changes in the way that we behave necessarily what we want ideally is for men to change their behaviour so I think it's really good that you've done it and have you, tell me about some of the responses you've had it to it, because I think mine is probably, I mean I absolutely loved it and admired it but I think I'm probably your ideal, for this project I'm like your ideal um I thought it was like you'd almost written it for me it was like oh at last so I'd wondered what other reactions you'd had especially from people a bit younger than me maybe?

GO: Yeah no one's been outraged that I know about that's actually seen the film I mean it's an interesting thing like my experience of actually watching it for the first time in about six months because it's important to say we finished this project six months ago or more, it was supposed to open in April but so that was very strange to kind of sit on it whilst the world was changing quite rapidly as well.

RC: Yeah.

GO: But yeah there was a bit of a shock watching it afresh, I found it quite obnoxious, certain parts of it I forgot how uncomfortable it was, or it felt more uncomfortable than I realised, I think particularly that second chapter where I'm talking a lot about the BBC there's a sort of lecturing tone to it and I wanted to sort of channel like those BBC broadcasters kind of figure um but yeah it was a bit of a shock and yeah my partner Lindsey got really anxious seeing it again.

RC: Did she?

GO: Yeah and was worried for me and um about how it would be received and um because it's interesting because a lot of it came from conversations with Lindsey and I think she contributed a lot actually, a lot of the ideas about how to structure it but yeah hers was probably the worst reaction in terms of how worried she was but yeah I think seeing the film as a whole, I think if you walk out halfway through you probably would get a different sense of it than seeing it as a whole, but yeah the reactions been good so far.

RC: And do you, I mean, in a way, this might be a really sort of dumb naff question to ask you but do you, when you make a piece like that what would like people to take from it, I mean are you

wanting to change minds or are you just wanting to provoke? Or what is your, what do you hope people would feel as they watched that film?

GO: I guess I'd like them to kind of accept a certain amount of ambiguity or kind of moral confusion I supposed I think it's not that I can be definitive about anything really but like it's ok to be really confused, especially at the moment where I think we're all, we do feel ambivalent about things or just slightly bewildered by things, I know that sounds kind of glib but I suppose yeah I'm just interested in that kind of polarized way in which we conduct ourselves, particularly on social media and I don't think it's helpful to be that kind of binary and absolute about things, I don't know about what's right and what's wrong necessarily so I think I'm just interested in exploring that kind of confusion.

RC: And do you have any sense of where all this is going? Especially in terms of visual art um I mean do you worry about things like censorship. I mean for instance, two years ago there was a big Picasso show at Tate Modern and I was really fascinated by the way that the focus was so much on the way that Picasso had treated the women in his life and um to the point where you almost forgot there were any paintings in the show.

GO: Being adult is to sort of like hold conceptual complexity.

RC: Absolutely, yeah and somethings can be two things at once, and also the way that something makes you feel, it may be as it were the fault of the art but it may equally be something in you and you need to have a think about what's going on in you just as a much I think, when you're shocked or offended by something I think it's useful as well as saying woah, that's shocking or offending or you can sort of think well why does it make me feel that, am I carrying some kind of internalised shame about something or you know what's going on in me. Where do you think this project will take you like, next? Do you want to go, is this going to lead you to somewhere that's connect to this or are you just, is this it? You've had your say.

GO: Probably on this specific subject, um I'm going to move away from these monstrous men for a while, but yeah it's questions like that, I'm just kind of obsessed with popular culture generally and I'm always sort of unpicking things or making connections with things and with my own life and my own memory of culture as well, it's usually about my relationship to time and culture.

RC: So do you know what you're going to work on next?

GO: Um yeah I think so, I'm going to kind of work on a project that's far more personal but that connects to culture in a more tangential way, I was going to sort of focus on health problems I had and my brothers had as teenagers but in the narrative of things that were happening in the world at that time like my brother got hit by a car in 1997 and Princess Diana died two days later, so I remember him being in hospital um so things like that.

RC: Striking.

GO: Yeah I'm definitely having a Princess Diana phase at the moment.

RC: You know the new series of The Crown's about the start with Princess Diana, I've just seen it because that's what I've just reviewed and you should watch it, it's interesting.

GO: I hope it's better than the film version with...

RC: Well that's what I've said in my review is that any screen version of Diana has always been a disaster until now.

GO: Is it good?

RC: Well the girl that they've cast as the sort of 19-year-old Diana, there's just something about her that's very, you know, she's very like Diana and the writing is attentive to small things, it's very interesting, I think you'd get a lot out of it and also the costumes are just, I'd forgotten how people dressed then and it's just so weird but yeah I mean, she's a good subject for you I think.

GO: Yeah well there's this weird parallel that I'm the same age as Prince William and I'm conscious of that and that's the kind of other connecting thing.

RC: In this new series of The Crown, I didn't know this but you know as soon as the engagement to Charles is announced she's taken to Buckingham Palace sort of for her own protection but she's 19, he immediately goes to Australia and so she's just on her own in this mausoleum, no one talks to her and she just roller-skates round listening to her Walkman and it's just really bizarre and poignant and it's just so empty it you just have this feeling of terrible emptiness and everyone around her is sort of half dead and she's the only person fully alive but you know that that's not going to last, it's just really interesting. And in terms of your own relationship to, because you were speaking about Woody Allen when we first started talking, where has this left you this project in terms of where you can bear on the part of the work that you love and the lives of you know the person involved, have you been able to work out, I don't know if you're a Morrissey fan but for instance do you still listen to Hatful of Hollow or whatever? I mean I'm just interested to know where you've, where this has brought you really.

GO: Um it tarnishes things, I can't not know what I know now.

RC: You can't unsee can you.

GO: No, and I think it does, it does affect the work like I was re-watching Husbands and Wives.

RC: Oh I love that film.

GO: Yeah I used to think it was a masterpiece, and it's still is great, one of the best depictions of sort of, it's a very sort of mature depiction of a break up or marriage but yeah the background into the film is so sort of screwed up when you think that him and Mia Farrow were breaking up at that time and still within the film he's put in the sub plot of him having an affair with Juliette Lewis and she's like 18 or something, he can't kind of resist, like he never feels embarrassed by writing these parts and it's...

RC: I haven't seen it since it came out I must see that again.

GO: Yeah it's worth watching again, especially with hindsight but yeah it does.

RC: So it is diminished.

GO: It has a detrimental effect.

RC: Yeah.

GO: I think, you can't fully trust, there's a certain amount of trust that's lost.

RC: But on the other hand you wouldn't want for those films to be kind of like erased if that were possible?

GO: No I don't think that achieves anything, as I say I think we're adult enough to be able to see these things and um that's the strange thing, growing up in the nineties where the films were still banned like the The Exorcist was still banned until...

RC: It's weird to think that.

GO: I know, I know and it's this weird thing where the BBFC were allowed to watch these things and decide on our behalf what we could or couldn't take you know um but yeah, there's very little need I think to stop other people consuming things. Netflix had a big purge of Little Britain and things like that.

RC: Yes they did, yeah.

GO: And Bo Selecta and those comedy things, and I understand the sort of idea of like zero tolerance but then when it becomes about access and deciding on other people's behalf what is viewable then that's problematic.

RC: Yeah and you always have to think about where that might lead because once you start doing that you can quite rapidly you know extend it, it becomes the norm, we'll get rid of that, we'll get rid of that and that's what I always worry about. One of the things that I said on the debate that I was doing last night about all of this, is that I like the idea of augmenting the canon, new voices, new work and I'm much less keen on taking things out. In extremis you have to do it, in general I just think if there's something people would object to the best way of counteracting that is to have new stories, new narratives you know and then it's power is lost anyway because it's in this great mass of good newness, I don't like the idea of removing things, I find that distressing.

GO: Yeah things do fall out of favour and they get, you know someone like Paul de la Roche the painter was hugely successful for a long time after his death but it's like, nobody cares about him now.

RC: No.

GO: And sort of like bands from the sixties and seventies that were big at the time that just don't stand the test of time and you know that's what it is, a test of time and I think things will fall away if they don't speak to us or our current value system.

RC: Yeah and I think also like context is so important I don't know if you remember but like two maybe three years ago the artist Sonia Boyce did this project in Manchester and she took down this Victorian painting Hylas and the Nymphs it's a pre-Raphaelite painting and it was part of an art project so fine, but she took it down and she spoke a lot about the male gaze because the nymphs were all naked and buxom and but of course if you know the story the nymphs have got the power because Hylas is about to be bewitched by them and drowned and there was a big outcry and eventually put it back on the wall but I thought to myself, um yeah there's a lot of breasts in that picture but it's not enough to just say well that's the male gaze also on that particular matter, I sort of think breasts are nice and you know and if you are my age and you belong to a kind of seventies world of feminism which is to encourage people to think that breasts are nice and there's no shame involved in them so to then, you know, even if your impulse is supposedly feminist, so, I don't like the male gaze so down that comes and you know you're still taking down women's bodies and I'm not into that. So you know I think context is so important you know. And you don't need any context with Gary Glitter or the Lost Prophets but you maybe do need context with some other things you know um, Morrissey's an interesting case because he's right-wing nut case now but he wasn't when he wrote those songs.

GO: Yeah I was talking to the actor Russell Tovey about, he saw the film and he liked it and he was sort of having those sorts of dilemma's about can you like Michael Jackson's music, like the Jackson 5 era because it was before he committed any crimes probably. Yes and you get into that sort of level of er anxiety and sort of like justification or whatever.

RC: I'm very interested in that because love the Jackson 5 and I have them on my Spotify when I go running and what I feel about that case in particular, two things, the first is that in a weird way and people might not like to hear this but some of those very sweet Jackson 5 songs when he's a

little boy and he's got big hair, they're even better now because there's so much innocence there and it's heart-breaking because you know what happened and it's, to me, there's something touching there because you think there's something touching there because you think god where did it all go wrong, why did it go wrong and we all know that abusers were often abused.

GO: Yeah.

RC: Michael Jackson had an absolutely horrific childhood, it's not to say that you know to excuse him but I'm interested in that and when I listen to those Jackson 5 songs I often think about that, about his dad you know bullying him and about the amount of self-loathing about the way he changed the way he looked you know and that was all about internalised racism and it's all sort of incredibly sad and you know.

GO: Yeah he was once an innocent.

RC: Yeah he was a boy.

GO: A vulnerable boy.

RC: And something terrible went wrong and I think that's worth bearing in mind, but I'm glad that Russell Tovey liked your film because I like it and I think it's a really good piece of work so congratulations.

GO: Thank you very much.