

The Actor: Marton Csokas

Marton Csokas speaks with Cathy Hunt about *The Pillowman* .

Interview was conducted over two separate days, Tuesday 20th & Wednesday 28th May, 2008

Tuesday 20 May

So you're playing Tupolski, who's described as "a high-ranking police officer in a totalitarian dictatorship". First of all, what's it like being the 'good cop'?

Well, that comes from one line in the text and I think, I mean to be a high-ranking police officer in a totalitarian dictatorship, there's no way you can be good in the first place. You can't be good in that instance. So, that comes from the method of interrogation – two cops, usually there's one who appears to befriend the prisoner, and Ariel, the other detective, played by Dan Wyllie is, he wants more, at least it seems, it's all a bit of an act, anyway because they want to get a confession from Katurian the writer, whom they believe is more than likely guilty of the crimes committed on these children. His stories relate very strongly to the murders. So the two detectives both want to solve the crime. They have different ways of doing it, and that's part of their tactic as well. So you have somebody in there, Ariel's more of a physical threat and Tupolski is like a rat in the worst sense of rats or a snake in the stereotypical sense whereby you never can trust him and Tupolski, for all that he may appear quite good to begin with - and I don't know whether I'm going to play it like that – but based on that line, it represents more of a mask.

He's a good cop in the sense that he's wearing a mask but in a totalitarian dictatorship, really an authority like that doesn't have the individual's best interests at heart which is what the play is about, in part. Although they say that there's nothing wrong with writing the stories that he's written; they also kill him at the end on a very strange logic and an unethical logic whereby they said – you lied to us but the lie was of no consequence. But because you lied to us, then we have to kill you; which is a ridiculous and stupid logic - it's a logic that is seen in any totalitarian dictatorship. Stalin was known for it; and it's called Stalinism whether it involves Stalin or not – when your rights are taken away from you and if you drop a pen on the ground then somebody in a position of authority can, say, can kill you.

Yeah, because the action's a pretext for the murder or the execution..

Or - because it annoyed them. There's a story of crumbs falling on Stalin's coat because somebody was eating a bread roll or whatever and they got killed for it. It's ludicrous, it's inhumane -

So it's a demonstration of the extent of power..?

A demonstration of power in order to maintain the status quo, in order to maintain that dictatorship, so getting back to your question – he's a good cop in the sense that he's got a mask on in order to enforce the totalitarian regime's authority. *He* is more than likely just a cog in the wheel, and then we see, the authority that he's given, which is probably not very much but he does have enough authority to execute a writer, an artist or an individual in society who expresses themselves; because he's getting in the way. I mean a dictatorship wouldn't like the fact that children are being murdered and abused and what have you. It's not good; it makes it look like society is not functional -

Isn't pure?

and pure, Aryan and all those sorts of things – like the Nazis. So they have to eradicate the so-called degenerates. There are so many examples of this and there are examples in the Second World War with the German expressionist painters and how they wanted to ban all that, and they burned all the paintings and they burned the books.

decadence of *Cabaret* and stuff like that..

And then in the more present day you have that with a kind of shift towards anti-Muslim feelings based upon the right wing regime of Bush and Blair and Howard, so it's not like its set in the past, really - there are echoes of it all around us. The fact that people can be held in prison in Australia for far too long without trial, without being investigated, because they were on a boat, and they were fleeing a worse, in some instances, a worse regime in some cases, and they come here and they're shoved in a holding pen and all kinds of terrible things happen because they are given no rights and human rights are very important, and again that's what this play is also about.

So, I'm digressing big-time but the totalitarian regime, I think, ultimately, represents the suppression or repression of an individual's expression and if we go to Katurian, who's had a tough life to say the least, whereby his parents have been abusive to his brother and to him, as I recall, given that this is a kind of fairytale by the way, it's not a documentary; so he murders his parents. Now, is the writer saying that the regime that some people live in, to a lesser or greater degree, takes away our human rights and freedom of choice? - is that equivalent to the domestic unit of mother and father and then how does that relate to society?

And so he; as an individual, is oppressed, repressed, abused by authority, his parents in that case. And what he does to then to make himself whole and healthy (unlike his brother Michal) is; he's able to express it, he's able to create, able to engage in the creative act and write stories that enable him to live a whole life - a pure life, irrespective of the fact that he's brought in to the interrogation room, which is another matter altogether but I think that's a very positive aspect of the piece - that he finds a way in which to deal with his disturbed childhood..

To be an individual, to express himself, to individuate himself from his family environment from the troubles that he's seen; which is what we all do, really - in life we all do it, we all have the possibility of doing it, and he does it through his writing, he does it through self-expression and of course there are a million ways to do that. You can express yourself by jumping out of a plane with a parachute on your back, or not - by singing, by writing, by painting, by reading, by any number of things. He does it as a writer.

So he takes his experiences - which cripple Michal and I'm speaking metaphorically here - obviously some people are born sick and through no fault of their own; but in this story Michal becomes retarded because of the extent of the abuse of his parents, and behaves.. and I think he's the product of a society that doesn't look after him, that abuses him to the point that he has no conscience, he's lost all his instincts, or most of them and he's lost his ability to understand when you could hurt someone and when you don't.

Or consequence?

And the consequence of your actions - I want to avoid saying right and wrong, so, the consequences of your actions. And there we are - that's the end of that thought.

Fantastic.

So as Tupolski, just getting back to your performance, you have to sort of, enter into quite a dark place, I mean especially if you have to shoot Katurian in the head by the end. So, I'm interested in - as an actor, how do you manage to get there - through the rehearsal process?

Through the rehearsal process, well, well the story that comes to mind that is a classic in drama school really. Probably most people have killed an ant, shall we say: -

Or a cockroach

Or a cockroach, and whether or not you have a problem with doing that. Or you've been around when a relative has died, or a pet might have died or you hear people talking about death or you've been to a funeral of a friend and you add those experiences up; coupled with when I've done something that I wished I hadn't done and I felt guilty about it. I like to explore that territory and any other number of other experiences. Also, what it's like to love

somebody, to spend time with somebody and then to consider shooting them; you have to be in a particular state of mind to do that and what is the consequence of that, what does Tupolski go home to, after he's done that – how does he deal with killing somebody?

I worked for a while on a pig farm - when I was very young actually, it was school holidays, I was ten years old and we went, I went, my brother and I went and we used to work very, very hard, actually. We used to clean the pens out, it was a very basic farm but quite, however many pigs, I don't know - a hundred pigs or something, shovel the shit out of their pens, broom them, hose them down, and they were all various different ages of pigs, take in the food; and I was ten years old and so it was quite hard work, and some of these pigs they were almost taller, I was ten and they were -

Like boars?

Yes, and in a pen and they all wanted the food and the biggest pigs - I was always quite concerned about going in, because they wanted that food, anyway.

Yeah

And then, one day; without warning there was a culling, a killing of thirteen pigs. And that was a whole experience. Ok, we'll leave it at there.

But I thought to myself then, how can, that was my first experience of it – how can this man, irrespective of his personality, kill these pigs? What he did was have this big, enormous pig in the yard, that was called Percy and he used to give him all kinds of scraps – delicacies for a pig, what have you, and go and talk to him, and rub behind his ear and what have you, which I presume enabled him to be able to kill these pigs for food. He didn't do it...

So he personalised one to avoid depersonalising all the others

Yes, and he wasn't being cruel to these animals, depending on what you think about animals and food and what have you. That was his psychological way of dealing with things.

So I've also thought about that, I thought what does Tupolski have like that? Now in the play it's suggested that he's lost a son which is partly what fuels his vehemence and blind hatred, his personal hatred as well as the regime's position, of this writer. Because he's lost a son, he says, accidentally, in a fishing accident and then we have Katurian - at least he thinks, at least that's what they're investigating - Katurian is maiming and killing children who are innocent and who are precious and what have you. So that fuels his loss. And what he does, rather than stroke the little pig behind the ear - like the pig farmer - he works at his desk telling himself that his detective work saves children, or saves people from harm. And that's his respite from killing because he believes he's doing the right thing.

Now my opinion is that he is not doing the right thing but I'm telling that story but Tupolski believes that to keep his job in a totalitarian regime they need to find someone to be responsible for these murders because it will make their regime look efficient and effective and safe.

Interview continued on Wednesday 28 May

We were talking about your process as an actor. As Tupolski you have to go through, you have to go to quite a dark place; in that you end up shooting Katurian in the head. And as an actor, how do you get to that place?

Well, you layer and structure from a very broad place. The play itself is worth looking at, to say the least; in its entirety. So, first impressions are very important. You read the story, you read the play. In my case I had the good fortune of seeing it beforehand about a year or so ago, not knowing that I was going to be in it.

Who did you see?

I saw a production in New York.

Oh so you saw Jeff Goldblum?

Yeah I did.

Wow.

Which I liked very much - but for me, in my taste - I loved it but I thought that something was missing and I hadn't read it. And I thought; oh but isn't it great that a play like that made it onto Broadway, which is mainstream, without a doubt. And then when I got asked to do it I was very excited, and I read it, and I saw things in it that made sense of the bit that was missing, that I thought was missing; which was a gravitas rooted in the violence of the piece and predominantly born of the totalitarian dictatorship.

Getting back to your question, for me that was very important and as we've already discussed - there are hints of totalitarianism, or certainly of dictatorship, in many aspects of society, Australian society as well as Burma and Zimbabwe and America and what have you, and England. Ah, so, bearing that in mind; I analyse the text, I look at what subjects are brought up, how they affect the characters, how they affect the run of the story, the rhythm of the story; so I look at it in its broadness, I look at all the characters and then one day get to Tupolski himself and what he represents. Well, he's a part of that totalitarian dictatorship, he's a high-ranking police officer and a detective and that in the dictatorship and he's got a writer who represents art in an interrogation room. So he's going to be doing his job, and within the text it's suggested how he goes about doing that, there's a lot of clues in there. So you basically trawl through all the information that we're lucky to have in the form of the text, and those are very important. How he perceives his life. You've got the story of the Chinese man and the little deaf boy. That says a lot about, and he says that it says a lot about - his life

Yeah.

Admittedly, he's in an interrogation room, so how much is truthful and how much is a lie? But at that point they're just waiting for the last few things to come in before they execute Katurian; it seems to me that they always intended to execute him and they wanted to find him guilty whether he was or not although they believe that because of these murders, and that they're so similar, they're carried out in such a similar way to Katurian's stories, that he's looking pretty guilty. Then, by the end of it, when we discover that he's not actually guilty, that his brother is (well, they don't even know that) that he's not guilty of the crimes, they execute him on an absurd moralistic mistake: - You didn't confess truthfully, you lied to us, but you didn't kill the children and you said that you did so we have to kill you because you lied to us.

Now, whatever that takes for somebody to kill another human being based upon a lie - which we all have done, lied, but it's not worth, in my opinion, being executed for - so what makes a human being? what makes Tupolski able to do that? That dictatorship must be very, very heavy, it must be very, very forceful and if he didn't, if Tupolski didn't kill this person, he wouldn't be doing his job. And I can imagine that *he* then would be killed. So Tupolski's a cog in a big machine, and getting into the more personal areas, he constantly talks about how he doesn't want to let his true emotions come out at work, he doesn't want to let his true emotions come out at work. Well, that's a double-edged sword, because if he doesn't let his true emotions come out at work he's able to kill the person in cold blood - but then what he deals with when he goes home is a whole other matter, and so I suppose I sift through all that kind of thing to explore what it would be and think about what it would be to do that; that's what I do.

Yeah, thank you.

So, just thinking about that story, of the little deaf boy on the long railroad tracks in China - that seems like a point in the play where Tupolski reveals something about himself. He reveals himself to be a writer, of sorts.

Well, yeah, a wishful thinking, wanna-be writer. Yeah he reveals himself, but he also reveals himself through anecdote; but yes, I think that's very much how he sees himself in the world, and a psychologist might argue that for all, that's what he's holding on to, as we all do, I suppose; but if he was a little more introspective, arguably; then maybe he would see that his lack of affinity with his fellowmen, might well be a lack of - of empathy, a lack of love, kindness, compassion, all those kinds of things. But in order for him to be in this job and to be in the world that we're let in to, he has to see himself as this old wise Chinese man who's got it all sorted out and doesn't need to go beyond his calculations, his detective work - he's made his job; his life and that's how he can actually can kill the men.

Yeah, well I'm wondering if Tupolski's story is saying that a writer is similar to Tupolski's own conception of the Chinese man, as in - is a writer just another detached observer, is it basically a kind of corrupt position to start with?

As a writer? Yeah, well that's interesting. Well, McDonagh seems to – there's a lot of things in the script that suggest there's self-loathing from McDonagh - born of; what's said about writers, and what's said about Katurian - there is a degree of self-loathing, for sure.

But I think for me, in the larger picture of the story, as I was saying the other day, that it's more of a healthy occupation than an unhealthy one, because it allows the person to make sense of the world and Tupolski probably has a great deal of self-loathing, as does Katurian, as Martin McDonagh might well have - but we all have traits of that I'm sure, at one point or other in our lives. So, I would agree with you but I would also say that the writer seems to have - within the whole human experience, and within this play - has the ability to be cathartic and to get rid of a lot of those things in the creative process so he doesn't have to then go around killing people.

Yeah, and it's Michal who can't write stories; that loves them, who ends up committing the murders, and it's Tupolski who you can see as a failed writer.

Yeah, I suppose, yeah I don't know whether I'd take it that far, I mean he believes that his story is better than all of Katurian's stories but I think that's more to do with ego and more to do with him letting his guard down in an interrogation situation because - but I don't know whether he would necessarily – I think he's got an over-inflated ego, I'm not sure whether he would see himself as a, although...

Well, no, I'm just thinking, I started thinking that you can see Tupolski definitely reveals himself to be a reader, a reader of Katurian...like when it's decided that he's going to execute Katurian he starts telling him what he thought of some of his stories and from that point of view I started thinking of him as a writer of stories as well, but the question is, I guess, whether it's better to put the darkness in the work or in, in your life, so...

Well, for me...

And what you're saying is that it's better to put it in the work.

Well, yeah, to that extent; yeah, where your actions would influence, would take another person's life

Indeed.

I don't know if its darkness to that extent, but yes, absolutely. But what definition of darkness might be, or the shadow side of oneself - I think we should not repress that in life. For example, on a simplistic level if you have an argument with somebody - that is a very healthy thing. Some people don't like that, some people think you should always maintain this level of calm and quietude and good will towards all human beings but this is...for example if

a tree grows on the side of a cliff with the rain and the wind and the storms and what have you, that tree becomes so much stronger because of...

because of the trouble?

...because of the so-called darkness, the so-called shadows, the so-called trouble, the conflict and it assures its place on the side of a cliff, and if it wasn't to - I mean, the analogy can only be taken so far - but if it didn't have those things and didn't battle against those storms..

If it was in a greenhouse?

Yeah, from the greenhouse you put it on the cliff and boom, it would be obliterated straight away. I think it would have no real sense of what life is like - again the analogy only goes so far. But I think that shadow side is absolutely essential and should be expressed, in arguments - not for the sake of arguing but to some kind of end, and you can still love someone and argue with them or you can still write a deep dark crazy story and love life - and love life all the more because of its twists and turns and seemingly perverse and violent aspects. We're very primal, you know. It wasn't so long ago that we were running around killing animals for food under the sky, and all that that brought. We're very young and those things still drive us in the Darwinian sense of evolution, still drive us and we have to respect them and when they take another human being's life I think we're more civilised than that now thankfully - well the world exhibits that to be other than - but personally I think we're a little more civilised.

What you've just said leads me into a few other thoughts. One is that your portrayal of Tupolski is incredibly quietly spoken and thinking about that idea of repression, or of the value of having an argument, I mean, how do you channel the kind of menace that you do?

Well from his point of view - ah if I might be allowed to say that, he's doing his job: - what he sees is somebody in front of him, Katurian, who's committed, potentially, committed these murders and he also, so it's as simple as that. He might appear menacing but in actual fact he's looking at somebody, potentially, who has chopped toes off children and jammed razor blades down their throat, and killed innocent children. So, within that context, and within wanting to find out in the interrogation room with all those techniques and skills that they have, because it is their profession..

asinine nonsense?

..and the asinine nonsense, then that's what he's aiming for. So he has to be astute and clear and precise in that methodology and if that comes across as menace, well then so be it. Yeah, he's not looking at the far wall and the cracks in the far wall and how maybe that should be repaired or plastered, he's there for a specific reason, and he's not going to be happy unless he finds out all the aspects of it.

I guess what I find chilling is that sense that he's just doing his job, what you were saying earlier about being a cog in a large machine; if he really views the fact that he has to kill Katurian before he goes home that night, that's probably the most chilling thing of all, to see another human being as not really, yeah, not really of much more significance than a job to be ticked off before 6pm.

Well in a totalitarian state an individual is not, is nothing compared to the machine you know, and what that would.., and in the newspapers - if we're to believe all that - in the newspapers there is a murderer, a child-killer, somebody who abuses children, running round in society, in the community. That doesn't look good, that's not a healthy state. So, in a way, it's fortuitous I suppose, they're turning, the spin-doctors I suppose of this totalitarian regime would be; that's an opportunity for us to show that we are a healthy, moral, pure, Aryan type state. Let's get rid of it

Let's make sure we have nice roads.

Yeah, if you look at Bill Henson's work now, and how that's being approached, that is a, that's a kind of version of this (depending on what you think of his work) but let's get rid of it rather than, yeah, so anyway, that's a slight digression - but let's get rid of an individual who is not serving our society well, then we can show it to the people, look we've gotten rid of him and this person was a free-thinker and an artist, and as it happens he didn't kill anybody (well, apart from his parents) but he didn't do all the things they're saying he did. So, he represents an opportunity for the state to set an example even though, as we know, if you've seen the play; he's innocent of those child murders. But it's complicated - it's not black and white.

It is, it's very complicated so - just we were talking before about darkness and one of, a writer called Bruno Bettelheim wrote this kind of definition of what an unsafe story is, he said that: - "safe stories mention neither death or aging, the limits to our existence nor the wish for eternal life, but the fairytale confronts the child squarely with basic human predicaments."

That's very interesting.

Yeah, I'm thinking about *Pillowman* as an unsafe kind of story, that actually gives us more real access to life because it includes those things that are left out of safe stories - the reference to death, aging or, also pain, and the propensity of human beings to inflict pain on each other and that is a real dangerous part of life.

So I'm thinking about *Pillowman* and all those aspects and how, yeah, it starts with a writer whose stories are suspected of causing murders and he's being interrogated by a pair of cops, one of whom you are playing and those cops use violence in defence of morality. But the other thing about the play is that it's incredibly funny, so one thing I'm interested in is how you manage to walk that line between comedy and the darkness, or the cruelty in the play?

Sorry, that's quite a complicated question.

No, no. Well, I suppose the initial quote that you used; the unsafe, that's what makes it funny. Laughter comes from age and death, those two things, I suppose, to some people - to most - they're certainly things we wrestle with and if you're deeply afraid of that, if you're deeply afraid of losing what we think is our conscious, well, cause, as you know, there's all kinds of theories as to what happens after you die, there's all kinds of theories as to what happens while we're living, which is more interesting to me, for obvious reasons, and the wish for an afterlife and the reality of death - that then begs for a release, and the fact that we are then able to laugh about it in the face of fear, I think that's where the comedy comes from

From the tension?

Yeah, from the tension, and from an understanding and an acceptance of the fact that that is our fate, no matter what you believe, if you go to heaven after you die, if you believe that; if nothing happens after you die, nonetheless we have the gift of life

We still have to go through death?

Yeah, we have the gift of life now and you know that that will happen and to the best of my knowledge, no one can be, no is dead certain of what will happen when we do expire.

No. Or of when.

Or of when, yeah, yes, that's true, so if you or I die tomorrow - and no one can predict that, well, most people can't - then a great deal of comedy will come from our, from the human condition. And then when it's compressed into this story I think the comedy does come from that, and the absurdity of life. Because the more seriously we take it - and sometimes it is worth taking seriously - but the more seriously we take it the more humorous it can become.

And then you have the laughter of liberation which enables us to enjoy and see life in its humour, which is an absurdist viewpoint.

And even if something epic is going on, the little things still matter, like Tupolski is always saying, “you look stupid, stop doing that”. You can have some dignity even if you are going to die or, yeah...

That’s really interesting, what you were just saying, because it makes me think about suffering and about whether or not it’s worth trying to avoid suffering. The children in the play that listen to the Pillowman decide to avoid the horror of their future lives by committing suicide. But there’s a really interesting shift in the play...

But that story is also a way of rationalising death for those who are still alive to cope.

The parents?

To cope with the deaths of the children.

That it was better?

– that it was the child’s choice,

yeah, and that they went before worse happened.

Yeah, yeah. Isn’t that a way to soothe the suffering of those who are still alive?

Yeah - like a bedtime story for the bereaved?

Yeah, for me that’s what that’s about. But it’s nice, it’s very romantic to think that the consciousness of a child is developed enough to see in that life is somehow, some kind of greater order or innate wisdom within the individual no matter how young or old that they are - to avoid the suffering.

But I think that that interpretation is really problematised by the fact that when the Pillowman takes his own advice, and goes back and talks to his own younger self and removes himself from the picture, then suffering ensues to all the other people that he didn’t go and warn. So one of the questions, I think, that Martin McDonagh is bringing up, is whether it’s better to suffer if you can do something with it?

There’s a really interesting shift where Katurian; somewhere during the play; I can’t exactly put my finger on when it happens, he decides he is going to die and he accepts that and he decides that he wants to save his stories instead of himself. So, I’m just thinking, yeah, I mean what do you think about that?

I think it’s true and I think it ties into what we were talking about before, of finding a way through the suffering of; whether of the sexual abuse of parents, of society, of whatever - whatever an individual’s experience is in their life. Yeah, and the tree on the side of the cliff. The suffering; that’s what shapes you and forms you and rather than – I mean, and far be it from me to tell anyone - I can’t tell anybody, nobody can tell another person how to live their life, so suicide is, in my world, is a viable choice; it’s a choice, it’s a choice. But for some people it’s necessary because they obviously felt life was not worth living and whatever came their way was too much and so why not end it if it’s become so great?

I think though; that if you can find things to help you, that then are also indicative or symbols, and aspects of death - like little deaths - suffering is a kind of a death, and then from there you have transformation. Those old sayings about how – and it does – when a seed falls into the ground, it has to, it dies and then regenerates and comes through and then that transformation is born. We all do - we all go to dust and then rot, and from there, life comes. That’s a cycle inherent in nature. And psychologically, suffering is a kind of death and a kind of wrestling with

decay of sorts, and from there we become stronger and joy can come, wisdom can come, understanding and the great perception of our life so yes, I agree with you ultimately. Does that answer your question?

Yes I think so, I mean, I'm really heading towards asking you whether you think a play like this one nourishes us better than something else that had a more sunny disposition or didn't include all those references to darkness?

Well for me it does yeah, because there's so much, we're asked, we're bombarded with quick-fix easy remedies. If you buy this you will feel happy; if you drive this car you will have a better life

Let's resolve the problem of child pornography by banning a photographer, that kind of thing?

Yeah, that kind of thing; short fix..

Remove the cause rather than understand something

Exactly, exactly. Yeah, well, you've said it, very succinctly.

So, just on a lighter note - you've done several plays for Company B, this is your fourth production here; what do you like about working with a theatre company like Company B and what keeps bringing you back?

Ah - well the plays – Virginia Woolf is a great piece of writing, this is a great piece of writing. *Peribanez* was a great piece of writing in a much more broad way, and then the next stage of it is, oh well *Twelfth Night*, obviously is a great piece of writing, and then what is done with the work. I particularly liked, in *Peribanez*; I loved the physical expressionism that came with that, I don't know whether you saw that and whether it's relevant to be talking about that.

No, I didn't see it - but a lot of the students saw Virginia Woolf.

Yeah, so what I loved about Virginia Woolf was what we did with it. We took it away from a traditional production and I've seen a few productions of that. The writing will always win, well, most of the time. But to me there's no point in just replicating a piece that's already been done – there's the bookshelves, there's the cardigan and we have a replication of 1960's, late 50's early 60's Boston in America. And there's no reason why it shouldn't be done like that if it's done well, but we're in 2008 now and things have changed. Some things haven't changed but some things have. And, whether it was done in the 1960's or whether it is done now, what is very interesting is to find out the bones of the piece, to find out what the piece is fundamentally about. And then, you can - the exposition can be very, very different.

And just like an artist, painter say, is - if you have a landscape scene with a river and some trees, somebody's going to paint that in a representational fashion and some artists are going to do it in an abstracted way and they will do it for the sake of colour, or they will comment on the environment or they will use it to pursue the aspect of technique and technique alone and they will make it into a hyper photo-realism but what, ultimately - what are they saying, that individual; what are they saying about what they see in front of them? Are they painting it with an existential angst: why am I here in that landscape? (for example).

So, then you take that idea and put it into a play and you draw all those concepts out of the play, you can explore - sculpture, physicality, music, light, the human condition, design and draw out the themes that were inherent in Virginia Woolf. So to me, that's what I love most of all and we can always do more of that; but ultimately the writing's very important. And of course, theatre, it's not just writing, otherwise we'd have radio plays or something like that. It's light, movement, the exploration of ideas and how those are expressed, so that's my idea...

Yeah, and obviously the experience differs a lot from film.

Fundamentally it shouldn't, but yes it does but yeah, there's not a lot of rehearsal..

..and the sense that you get live it again and again

Yeah, well you get to explore it more and more and you get to live it again and again and it becomes expansive and oftentimes, these times especially, not always but most of the time, the writer has had a gestation period which is long, and considered and richer and then we come into rehearsals and we have more time to rehearse and then there's the live –

the unpredictability?

Of that ritual and its interchange which is very primal and I think..

risky?

Risky, and at its best quite life-changing, I think in my experience. I'll go away with it as something that is artificial, it is an illusion but it's an illusion that's occurring right there and then and there's an exchange between the audience and the actors and the design of it, the story that we're telling in its entirety; that is tangible and literally affects you molecularly; which film does too but not necessarily in the same way.

You don't have as much control as an actor?

Well, I suppose, that's one aspect of it.

Well in the sense that you could be doing a lot of stuff but the shot may not be on you or may not be...

Yeah, within editing and where the focus is put in the story, yeah that's true, yes that's important. Yes but if the story is told well, that's okay - it depends. Comparison's not always a good thing.

No no, I was just interested.

Aha.

Yeah, well I think we probably don't have much time, but thank you so much.

It's a pleasure.