My Dinner with Andre

By Wallace Shawn
The life of a playwright is tough.
It's not easy,
as some people seem to think.
You work hard writing plays,
and nobody puts them on.
You take up other lines of work
to try to make a living...
I became an actor...
...and people don't hire you.
So you just spend your days
doing the errands of your trade.
Today I'd had to be up

by 10.:
...to make some
important phone calls.
Then I'd gone to the stationery store
to buy envelopes. Then to the Xerox shop.
There were dozens of things to do.

By 5.:
to the post office...
...and mailed off
several copies of my plays...
...meanwhile checking constantly
with my answering service...
...to see if my agent
had called with any acting work.
In the morning, the mailbox
had just been stuffed with bills.
What was I supposed to do?
How was I supposed to pay them?
After all, I was already doing my best.
I've lived in this city all my life.
I grew up on the Upper East Side...
...and when I was 10 years old
I was rich, I was an aristocrat...
...riding around in taxis,
surrounded by comfort...
...and all I thought about
was art and music.
Now I'm 36,
and all I think about is money.
It was now 7.: 
...and I would have liked nothing better than 
to go home and have my girlfriend Debby...
...cook me a nice, delicious dinner.
But for the last several years
our financial circumstances...
...have forced Debby to work
three nights a week as a waitress.
After all, somebody had to
bring in a little money.
So I was on my own.
But the worst thing of all was that I'd been
trapped by an odd series of circumstances...
...into agreeing to have dinner
with a man I'd been avoiding literally for years.
His name was Andr Gregory.
At one time he'd been
a very close friend of mine...
...as well as my most valued colleague
in the theater.
In fact, he was the man
who had first discovered me...
...and put one of my plays
on the professional stage.
When I'd known Andr, he'd been at the height
of his career as a theater director.
The amazing work he did with his company,
the Manhattan Project...
...had just stunned audiences
throughout the world.
But then something
had happened to Andr.
He dropped out of the theater.
He sort of disappeared.
For months at a time, his family seemed
only to know that he was traveling...
...in some odd place like Tibet...
...which was really weird
because he loved his wife and children.
He never used to like
to leave home at all.
Or else you'd hear that someone had met him
at a party and he'd been telling people...
...that he talked with trees
or something like that.
Obviously, something terrible
had happened to Andr.
The whole idea of meeting him
made me very nervous.
I mean, I really wasn't up
for that sort of thing.
I had problems of my own.
I mean, I couldn't help Andr.
Was I supposed to be a doctor, or what?
- Hello.
- Hello.
- Here you go.
- Thank you.
- Yes, sir.
- Ah, sir, my name is Wallace Shawn.
I'm expected at the table
of Andr Gregory.
That table will be a moment, sir.
If you like,
you may have a drink at the bar.
- Good evening, sir.
- Uh, could I have a club soda, please?
I'm sorry, sir.
We only serve Source de Pavilion.
Oh, that'd be fine, thank you.
When I'd called Andr, and he'd suggested
that we meet in this particular restaurant...
I'd been rather surprised, because
Andr's taste used to be very ascetic...
...even though people have always known
that he had some money somewhere.
I mean, how the hell else could he have
been flying off to Asia and so on...
...and still have been supporting his family?
The reason I was meeting Andr was that
an acquaintance of mine, George Grassfield...
...had called me
and just insisted that I had to see him.
Apparently, George had been walking his dog
in an odd section of town the night before...
...and he'd suddenly come upon Andr...
...leaning against a crumbling old building
and sobbing.
Andr had explained to George
that he'd just been watching...
...the Ingmar Bergman movie
Autumn Sonata...
...about 25 blocks away...
...and he'd been seized
by a fit of ungovernable crying...
...when the character played
by Ingrid Bergman had said...
"I could always live in my art,
but never in my life."
Wallyl...
- Wow.
- My God.
I remember, when I first
started working with Andr's company...
I couldn't get over the way the actors
would hug when they greeted each other.
"Wow. Now I'm really in the theater,"
I thought.
Well, you look terrific.
Well, I feel terrible.
Good evening, sir.
Nice to see you again.
Thank you. Good evening.
Ah, I think I'll have a spritzer, if I could.
- Yes, sir.
- Thank you.
I was feeling incredibly nervous.
I wasn't sure I could stick through
an entire meal with him.
Great.
So we talked about this and that.
He told me a few things
about Jerzy Grotowski...
...the great Polish theater director...
...who was a friend and almost like
a kind of a guru of Andr's.
He'd also dropped out of the theater.
Grotowski was a pretty
unusual character himself.
At one time, he'd been quite fat, then he'd
lost an incredible amount of weight...
...and become very thin
and grown a beard.
- Your table is ready, if you feel like sitting down.
- Oh.
- Oh.
- Yes. Thank you.
I was beginning to realize
that the only way to make this evening bearable...
...would be to ask Andr
a few questions.
Asking questions always relaxes me.
In fact, I sometimes think
that my secret profession...
...is that I'm a private investigator,
a detective.
I always enjoy finding out about people.
Even if they're in absolute agony,
I always find it very... interesting.
- By the way, is he still thin?
- What?
Grotowski. Is he still thin?
Oh. Absolutely.
Oh, waiter?
Uh, I think we can do without this.
- Yes, sir.
- Thank you.
What about this one?
Seven swimming shrimp.
- Ready for your order?
- Ah, yes.
Uh, the Galuska...
How... How do you prepare that?
Andr seemed
to know an awful lot about the menu.
- Dumpling with raisins, blanched almonds.
- I didn't understand a word of it.
- Very good, I think.
- Hmm.
No, I... I think I'll have
the Cailles aux Raisin, the quail.
- Very good.
- Oh, quails! I'll have that as well.
- Two. -
Great. - Great!
And then I think, to begin with,
the Terrine de Poissons.
- Yes.
- What is that?
Uh, it's a sort of pte...
light, made of fish.
- Does it have bones in it?
- No bones.
Perfectly safe.
Well, um...What is
the, um, Bramborov Polyka?
It's a potato soup.
It's quite delicious.
Oh, well, that's great.
I'll have that.
- Thank you very kindly.
- Thank you very much.
Well.
When was the last time
that we saw each other?
So we talked for a while
about my writing and my acting...
...and about my girlfriend, Debby.
And we talked about his wife, Chiquita,
and his two children, Nicolas and Marina.
And I'd stayed back in New York.
Finally, I got around to asking him
what he'd been up to in the last few years.
Oh, God. I'm just dying to hear it.
- Really?
- Really.
At first, he seemed
a little reluctant to go into it...
...so I just kept asking,
and finally he started to answer.
...conference
on paratheatrical work then.
And, uh, this must have been
about five years ago...
...and, uh, Grotowski and I were walking
along Fifth Avenue and we were talking.
You see, he'd invited me to come
to teach that summer in Poland.
You know, to teach a workshop
to actors and directors and whatever.
And I had told him that I didn't want to come, because, really, I had nothing left to teach. I had nothing left to say. I didn't know anything. I couldn't teach anything. Exercises meant nothing to me anymore. Working on scenes from plays seemed ridiculous. I - I didn't know what to do. I mean, I just couldn't do it. So he said, "Why don't you tell me anything you'd like to have if you did a workshop for me. No matter how outrageous. And maybe I can give it to you." So I said, "Well, if you could give me... "40 Jewish women who speak neither English nor French... "either women who've been in the theater for a long time and want to leave it... "but don't know why... "or young women who love the theater, but have never seen a theater they could love. "And if these women could play the trumpet or the harp... ...and if I could work in a forest, I'd come." A week later, or two weeks later, he called me from Poland. And he said, "Well, 40 Jewish women... that's a little hard to find." But he said, "I do have 40 women. They all pretty much fit the definition." And he said, "I also have some very interesting men... "but you don't have to work with them. "These are all people who have in common the fact that they're questioning the theater. "They don't all play the trumpet or the harp, but they all play a musical instrument. And none of them speak English." And he'd found me a forest, Wally. And the only inhabitants of this forest were some wild boar and a hermit. So that was an offer I couldn't refuse.
I had to go.
So, I went to Poland, and it was this wonderful group of young men and women.
And the forest he had found us
was absolutely magical.
You know, it was a huge forest.
I mean, the trees were so large...
...that four or five people linking their arms
couldn't get their arms around the trees.
So we were camped out beside
the ruins of this tiny little castle...
...and we would eat around this great stone slab
that served as a sort of a table.
And our schedule was that usually
we'd start work around sunset...
...and then generally we'd work

until about 6:
And then, because the Poles
love to sing and dance...
...we'd sing and dance until about
And then we'd have our food, which
was generally bread, jam, cheese and tea.
And then we'd sleep
from around noon to sunset.
Now, technically, of course...
Technically, the situation
is a very interesting one...
...because if you find yourself in a forest
with a group of 40 people...
...who don't speak your language,
then all your moorings are gone.
What do you mean exactly?
Well, what we'd do
is just sit there and wait...
...for someone to have
an impulse to do something.
Now, in a way that's... That's something
like a theatrical improvisation.
I mean, you know, if you were a director
working on a play by Chekhov...
...you might have the actors playing
the mother, the son and the uncle...
...all sit around in a room and do
a made-up scene that isn't in the play.
For instance, you might say to them...
"All right. Let's say that it's a rainy
Sunday afternoon on Sorin's estate...
...and you're all trapped
in the drawing room together."
And then everyone would improvise...
...saying and doing what their character
might say and do in that circumstance.
Except that in this type of improvisation...
the kind we did in Poland...
...the theme is oneself.
So, you follow
the same law of improvisation...
...which is that you do whatever your impulse,
as the character, tells you to do...
...but in this case,
you are the character.
So there's no imaginary situation
to hide behind...
...and there's no other person
to hide behind.
What you're doing, in fact,
is you're asking those same questions...
...that Stanislavsky said the actor should
constantly ask himself as a character:
Who am I? Why am I here?
Where do I come from,
and where am I going?
But instead of applying them to a role,
you apply them to yourself.
- Hmm.
- Or, to look at it a little differently...
...in a way, it's like going
right back to childhood...
...where a group of children simply come
into a room or are brought into a room...
...without toys... And begin to play.
Grown-ups were learning
how to play again.
So, you would, uh,
all sit together somewhere...
...and, uh, you would play in some way.
- But what would you actually do?
- Well, I could give you a good example. You see, we worked, uh, together for a week in the city...
  ...before we went off to our forest. And of course, Grotowski was there in the city too. I heard that every night, he conducted something called a beehive. I loved the sound of this beehive...
  ...so a night or two before we were supposed to go off to the country...
  I grabbed him by the collar, and I said, "Listen, about this beehive. " You know, I'd kind of like to participate in one. Just instinctively I feel it would be something interesting. " And he said, " Well, certainly. In fact, why don't you, with your group... ...lead the beehive instead of participating in one?"
  You know, I... I got very nervous, you know, and I said, " Well, what is a beehive?" He said, " Well, a beehive is...

  ...at 8:
  come into a room. " I said, " Yes?" He said, "Yes, and whatever happens is a beehive. " I said, " Yes, but what am I supposed to do?"
  He said, " That's up to you. " I said, " No, no. I really don't want to do this. I'll just participate. " And he said, "No, no. You lead the beehive. "
  Well, I was terrified, Wally. I mean, in a way, I felt on stage. I did it anyway. God. Well, tell me about it. You see, there was this song...
  I have a tape of it. I can play it for you one day. And it's just unbelievably beautiful. You see, one of the women in our group knew a few fragments of this song of Saint Francis...
...and it's a song in which you thank God for your eyes...
...and you thank God for your heart,
and you thank God for your friends...
...and you thank God for your life.
And it, uh... It repeats itself over and over again.
And this became our theme song.
I really must play this thing for you one day...
...because you just can't believe that a group of people who don't know how to sing...
...could create something so beautiful.
So, I decided that when the people arrived for the beehive...
...that our group would already be there singing this very beautiful song...
...and that we would simply sing it over and over again.
One of the people decided to bring her very large teddy bear, you know.
Well, she's a little afraid of this event.
And somebody wanted to bring a... A sheet.
And somebody else wanted to bring a large bowl of water...
...in case people got hot or thirsty.
And somebody suggested that we have candles...
...that there be no artificial light, but candlelight.
And I remember watching people preparing for this evening.
Of course, there was no makeup, and there were no costumes...
...but it was exactly the way that people prepare for a performance.
You know, people sort of taking off their jewelry and their watches...
...and stowing it away and making sure it's all secure.
And then slowly people arrived, the way they would arrive at the theater...
...in ones and twos and 10s and 15s
and what have you.
And we were just sitting there,
and we were singing this very beautiful song.
And people started to sit with us
and started to learn the song.
Now, there is, of course,
as in any performance or improvisation...
...instinct for when things
are gonna get boring.
So, at a certain point... It may have taken
an hour to get there, an hour and a half...
I suddenly grabbed this teddy bear
and threw it in the air...
...at which 140 or 130 people
suddenly exploded.
You know, it was like
a... A Jackson Pollack painting, you know.
Human beings exploded out of this tight
little circle that was singing the song.
And before I knew it,
there were two circles, dancing, you know...
...one dancing clockwise,
the other dancing counterclockwise...
...with this rhythm
mostly from the waist down.
In other words, like an American Indian dance,
with this thumping, persistent rhythm.
Now, you could easily see,
'cause we're talking about group trance...
...where the line between something like this
and something like Hitler's Nuremberg rallies...
...is, in a way, a very thin line.
Anyway, after about an hour
of this wild, hypnotic dancing...
Grotowski and I found ourselves sitting opposite
each other in the middle of this whole thing.
And we threw the teddy bear
back and forth.
You know, on one level,
you could say this is childish.
And I gave the teddy bear suck,
suddenly, at my breast.
And then I threw the teddy bear to him,
and he gave it suck at his breast.
And then the teddy bear
was thrown up into the air again...
...at which there was another explosion
of form into... Something.
And these...What was it like?
You know, this is the...
There's something like a kaleidoscope,
like a human kaleidoscope.
The evening was made up
of shiftings of the kaleidoscope.
Now, the only other things
that I remember...
...other than constantly trying
to guide this thing...
...which was always involved with either
movement, rhythm, repetition or song...
Or chanting, because,
uh, two people in my group...
...had brought musical instruments,
a flute and a drum...
...which, of course,
are sacred instruments...
...was that sometimes the room
would break up...
...into six or seven different things
going on at once.
You know, six or seven
different improvisations...
...all of which seemed, in some way,
related to each other.
It was... It was like
a magnificent cobweb.
And at one point, I noticed that Grotowski
was at the center of one group...
...huddled around a bunch of candles
that they'd gathered together.
And like a little child
fascinated by fire...
I saw that he had his hand right in the flame
and was holding it there.
And as I approached his group,
I wondered if I could do it.
I put my left hand in the flame and I found
I could hold it there for as long as I liked...
...and there was no burn
and no pain.
But when I tried to put my right hand in the
flame, I couldn't hold it there for a second.
So Grotowski said, "If it burns,
try to change some little thing in yourself."
And I tried to do that.
Didn't work.
Then I remember a very, very beautiful
procession with the sheet...
...and there was somebody
being carried below the sheet.
You know, the sheet was like
some great biblical canopy.
And the entire group was weaving
around the room and chanting.
And then at one point,
people were dancing...
...and I was dancing with a girl...
...and suddenly our hands began
vibrating near each other...
...like this...vibrating, vibrating.
And we went down to our knees,
and suddenly I was sobbing in her arms...
...and she was sort of cradling me in her arms,
and then she started to cry too.
And then we... Then we just
hugged each other for a moment.
And, uh, then we joined the dance again.
And then at a certain point,
hours later...
...we returned to the singing
of the song of Saint Francis...
...and that was the end of the beehive.
And then, again, when it was over, it was
just like the theater after a performance.
You know, people sort of put on
their earrings and their wristwatches...
...and we went off
to the railroad station...
...to drink a lot of beer
and have a good dinner.
Oh, and there was one girl,
who wasn't in our group...
...but who just wouldn't leave, so we took her along with us.

Huh.

God. Well, tell me some of the other things you did with your group.

Well... Oh, I remember once when we were in the city...

...we tried doing an improvisation...you know, the kind that I used to do in New York. Uh, everybody was supposed to be on an airplane...

...and they've all learned from the pilot there's something wrong with the motor.

But what was unusual about this improvisation...

...was that two people who participated in it... Fell in love. They've, in fact, married.

And when we were...

Yeah, out of fear...

...of being on this plane, they fell in love...

...thinking they were going to die at any moment.

And when we went to the forest, these two disappeared...

...because they understood the... The experiment so well...

...that they realized that to go off together in the forest was much more important...

...than any kind of experiment the group could do as a whole.

So, uh, about halfway through the week...

...we stumbled into a clearing in the forest...

...and the two of them were fast asleep in each other's arms.

It was around dawn, and we put flowers on them...

...to let them know we'd been there, and then we crept away.

And then on the last day of our stay in the forest, these two showed up...
...and they shook me by my hands, and they thanked me very much... for the wonderful work they'd been able to do, you see. They understood what it was about. I mean, that, of course, poses the question of what was it about. But it has... has something to do with living. And then on the final day of our stay in the forest... the whole group did something so wonderful for me, Wally. They arranged a christening... a baptism... For me. And they filled the castle with flowers. And it was just a miracle of light... because they had literally set up hundreds of candles and torches. I mean, no church could have looked more beautiful. There was a simple ceremony, and one of them played the role of my godmother... and another played the role of my godfather. And I was given a new name. They called me Yendrush. And some of the people took it completely seriously... and some of them found it funny. But, uh, I really felt that I had a new name. And then we had an enormous feast, with blueberries picked from the field... and chocolate someone had gone a great distance to buy... and raspberry soup and rabbit stew. And we sang Polish songs and Greek songs... and everybody danced for the rest of the night. - Hmm. - Oh, I have a picture. See, this was... Let's see.
Oh, yeah.
This was me in the forest. See?
- God!
- That's what I felt like.
- That's the state I was in.
- God.
Yeah. I remember George, uh, told me
he'd seen you around that time.
He said you looked like
you'd come back from a war.
Yeah, I remember meeting him. He, uh...
He asked me a lot of friendly questions.
I think I called you up, too,
that summer, didn't I?
Huh.
I think I was out of town.
Yeah, well, most people I met thought
there was something wrong with me.
They didn't say that, but I could tell that
that was what they thought.
But...
...you see, what I think
I experienced... was...
...for the first time in my life...
...to know what it means
to be truly alive.
Now, that's very frightening...
...because with that comes
an immediate awareness of death...
'cause they go hand in hand.
You know, the kind of impulse that led to
Walt Whitman, that led to Leaves of Grass.
That feeling of being connected
to everything...
...means to also be connected to death.
And that's pretty scary.
But I really felt as if I were floating
above the ground, not walking.
You know, and I could do things
like go out to the highway...
...and watch the lights go from red to green
and think, "How wonderful."
And then one day, in the early fall...
I was out in the country,
walking in a field...
...and I suddenly heard a voice
say, "Little Prince."

Of course, The Little Prince
was a book that I always thought of...
...as disgusting, childish treacle.

But still, I thought, "Well, you know,
if a voice comes to me in a field"...
This was the first voice I had ever heard.

Maybe I should go and read the book.

Now, that same morning
I'd got a letter...
...from a young woman
who'd been in my group in Poland.

And in her letter she'd written,
"You have dominated me."

You know,
she spoke very awkward English.

So she'd gone to the dictionary,
and she'd crossed out the word "dominated"...
...and she'd said,
"No. The correct word is 'tamed."

And then when I went to town
and bought the book and started to read it...

I saw that "taming" was the most
important word in the whole book.

By the end of the book, I was in tears,
I was so moved by the story.

And then I went and tried to write
an answer to her letter...
'cause she'd written me a very long letter.

But I just couldn't find the right words,
so finally I took my hand...

I put it on a piece of paper,
I outlined it with a pen...
...and I wrote in the center something
like, "Your heart is in my hand."
Something like that.

Then I went over
to my brother's house to swim...
'cause he lives nearby in the country
and he has a pool.

And he wasn't home.

I went into his library...
...and he had bought at an auction
the collected issues of Minotaure.
You know, the surrealist magazine? Oh, it's a great,
great surrealist magazine of the '20s and '30s.
And I never...You know,
I consider myself a bit of a surrealist.
I had never, ever seen
a copy of Minotaure.
And here they all were,
bound, year after year.
So, at random,
I picked one out, I opened it up...
...and there was a full-page reproduction
of the letter " A"
...from Tenniel's Alice In Wonderland.
And I thought, that...Well, you know,
it's been a day of coincidences...
...but that's not unusual that the surrealists
would have been interested in Alice...
...and I did a play of Alice.
So at random,
I opened to another page...
...and there were four handprints.
One was Andr Breton,
another was Andr Derain...
...the third was Andr...
I've got it written down somewhere.
It's not Malraux. It's, like, someone...
Another of the surrealists.
All A's, and the fourth
was Antoine de Saint-Exupry...
...who wrote The Little Prince.
And they'd shown these handprints
to some kind of expert...
...without saying
whose hands they belonged to.
And under Exupry's,
it said that he was an artist...
...with very powerful eyes...
...who was a tamer of wild animals.
I thought,
"This is incredible, you know."
And I looked back to see
when the issue came out.
It came out on the newsstands
May 12, 1934...
...and I was born during the day
of May 11, 1934.
So, well, that's what started me on, uh,
Saint-Exupry and The Little Prince.
Now, of course today...
...today I think there's a very fascistic thing
under The Little Prince.
You know, I...
Well, no, I think there's a kind of...
I think a kind of S.S. Totalitarian
sentimentality in there somewhere.
You know, there's something, you know...
that...
...that love of, um...
Well, that masculine love
of a certain kind of oily muscle.
You know what I mean?
I mean, I can't quite put my finger on it.
But I can just imagine
some beautiful S.S. Man...
...loving The Little Prince.
Now, I don't know why, but there's
something wrong with it. It stinks.
Well, didn't George tell me that you were gonna
do a play that was based on The Little Prince?
Hmm. Well, what happened, Wally...
...was that fall I was in New York...
...and I met this young Japanese
Buddhist priest named Kozan...
...and I thought he was Puck
from the Midsummer Night's Dream.
You know,
he had this beautiful, delicate smile.
I thought he was the Little Prince.
So, naturally, I decided
to go off to the Sahara desert...
...to work on The Little Prince
with two actors and this Japanese monk.
You did?
Well, I mean, I was still in a very
peculiar state at that time, Wally.
You know, I would... I would look
in the rearview mirror of my car...
...and see little birds
flying out of my mouth.
And I remember always being
exhausted in that period.
I always felt weak. You know, I really
didn't know what was going on with me.
I would just sit out there all alone
in the country for days...
...and do nothing but write in my diary.
- And I was always thinking about death.
- Huh.
But you went to the Sahara.
Oh, yes, we went off into the desert...
...and we rode through the desert
on camels.
And we rode and we rode.
And then at night we would walk out
under that enormous sky...
...and look at the stars.
I just kept thinking about the same things
that I was always thinking about at home...
...particularly about Chiquita.
In fact, I thought about
just about nothing but my marriage.
And then I remember
one incredibly dark night...
...being at an oasis, and there were
palm trees moving in the wind...
...and I could hear Kozan singing
far away in that beautiful bass voice.
And I tried to follow his voice
along the sand.
You see, I thought he had
something to teach me, Wally.
And sometimes
I would meditate with him.
Sometimes I'd go off
and meditate by myself.
You know,
I would see images of Chiquita.
Once I actually saw her growing old...
...and her hair turning gray
in front of my eyes.
And I would just wail and yell my lungs out out there on the dunes.
Anyway,
the desert was pretty horrible.
It was pretty cold.
We were searching for something, but we couldn't tell if we were finding anything.
You know that once Kozan and I...
...we were sitting on a dune, and we just ate sand.
No, we weren't trying to be funny.
I started, then he started.
We just ate sand and threw up.
That's how desperate we were.
In other words, we didn't know why we were there. We didn't know what we were looking for.
The entire thing seemed completely absurd, arid and empty.
It was like, uh... like a last chance or something.
Huh.
So what happened then?
Well, in those days...
I went completely on impulse.
So on impulse I brought Kozan back to stay with us in New York...
...after we got back from the Sahara, and he stayed for six months.
- And he really sort of took over the whole family, in a way.
- What do you mean?
Well, there was certainly a center missing in the house at the time.
There certainly wasn't a father, 'cause I was always thinking...
...about going off to Tibet or doing God knows what.
And so he taught the whole family to meditate...
...and he told them all about Asia and the East and his monastery and everything.
He really captivated everybody with an incredible bag of tricks.
He had literally developed himself, Wally...
so that he could push on his fingers and rise off out of his chair.
I mean, he could literally go like this...
You know, push on his fingers and go into like a headstand...
...and just hold himself there with two fingers.
Or if Chiquita would suddenly get a little tension in her neck...
...well, he'd immediately have her down on the floor, he'd be walking up and down on her back...
...doing these unbelievable massages, you know.
And the children found him amazing.
I mean, you know, we'd visit friends who had children...
...and immediately he'd be playing with these children...
...in a way that, you know, we just can't do.
I mean, those children...
just giggles, giggles, giggles...
...about what this Japanese monk was doing in these holy robes.
I mean, he was an acrobat, a ventriloquist...
...a magician, everything.
You know, the amazing thing was that...
I don't think he had any interest in children whatsoever.
None at all.
I don't think he liked them.
I mean, you know, when he stayed with us...
...in the first week, really, the kids were just googly-eyed over him.
But then a couple of weeks later, Chiquita and I could be out...
...and Marina could have flu or a temperature of 104...
...and he wouldn't even go in and say hello to her.
But he was taking over more and more.
I mean, his own habits
had completely changed. You know, he started wearing these elegant Gucci shoes under his white monk's robes. He was eating huge amounts of food. I mean, he ate twice as much as Nicolas ate, you know? This tiny little Buddhist when I first met him, you know... ...was eating a little bowl of milk... hot milk with rice... ...was now eating huge beef. It was just very strange. You know, and we had tried working together, but really our work consisted mostly... ...of my trying to do these incredibly painful prostrations that they do in the monastery. You know, so really we hadn't been working very much. Anyway, we were out in the country, and we all went to Christmas mass together. You know, he was all dressed up in his Buddhist finery. And it was one of those... One of those awful, dreary Catholic churches on Long Island... ...where the priest talks about communism and birth control. And as I was sitting there in mass, I was wondering, "What in the world is going on?" I mean, here I am. I'm a grown man... ...and there's this strange person living in the house, and I'm not working... You know, I was doing nothing but scribbling a little poetry in my diary. And I can't get a job teaching anymore, and I don't know what I want to do. When all of a sudden a huge creature appeared, looking at the congregation. It was about, I'd say, 6'8"... something like that, you know... ...and it was... it was half bull, half man... ...and its skin was blue. It had violets growing out of its eyelids and poppies growing out of its toenails.
And it just stood there
for the whole mass.
I mean, I could not make
that creature disappear.
You know, I thought, "Oh, well. You know,
I'm just seeing this 'cause I'm bored."
You know, close my...
I could not make that creature go away.
Okay. Now, I didn't talk with people about it,
because they'd think I was weird...
...but I felt that this creature
was somehow coming to comfort me...
...that somehow
he was appearing to say...
"Well, you may feel low and you might
not be able to create a play right now...
"but look at what can come to you
on Christmas Eve. Hang on, old friend.
"I may seem weird to you,
but on these weird voyages...
"weird creatures appear.
It's part of the journey.
You're okay. Hang in there."
By the way, uh, did you ever see...
...that play, uh, The Violets are Blue?
No.
Oh, when you mentioned the violets,
it-it reminded me of that.
It-It was about, um, people...
...being, uh, strangled
on a... On a submarine.
Hmm.
Well, so that was...
that was Christmas.
What happened after that?
- Do you really want to hear about all this?
- Yeah.
Well, around that time...
I was beginning to think about going to India.
And Kozan suddenly left one day.
I was beginning to get into a lot
of very strange ideas around that time.
Now, for example, I'd developed this...
Well, I got this idea which I...
Now, it was very appealing to me at the time, you know... which was that I would have a flag, a large flag... and that wherever I worked, this flag would fly.

Or if we were outside, say, with a group, that the flag could be the thing we lay on at night... and that somehow, between working on this flag and lying on this flag... this flag flying over us... that the flag would pick up vibrations of a kind... that would still be in the flag when I brought it home.

So I went down to meet this flag maker that I'd heard about. And you know, there was this very straightforward-looking guy. You know, very sweet, really healthy-looking and everything. Nice big, blond.

And he had a beautiful, clean loft down in the village with lovely, happy flags. And I was all into The Little Prince, and I talked to him about The Little Prince... these adventures and everything, how I needed the flag and what the flag should be.

He seemed to really connect with it. So, two weeks later, I came back. He showed me a flag that I thought was very odd, you know... 'cause I had, you know... well, you know...

I had expected something gentle and lyrical. There was something about this that was so powerful... it was almost overwhelming. And it did include the Tibetan swastika.

He put a swastika in your flag? No, it was the Tibetan swastika, not the Nazi swastika. It's one of the most ancient Tibetan symbols.
And it was just strange, you know?
But I brought it home,
because my idea with this flag...
...was that before I left...
you know, before I left for India...
I wanted several people who were close to me
to have this flag in the room for the night...
...to sleep with it, you know, and then
in the morning to sew something into the flag.
So I took the flag into Marina, and I said,
"Hey, look at this. What do you think of this?"
And she said, "What is that? That's awful."
I said, "It's a flag."
And she said, "I don't like it."
I said, "I kind of thought you might like
to spend the night with it, you know."
But she really thought
the flag was awful.
So then Chiquita threw this party
for me before I left for India...
...and the apartment
was filled with guests.
And at one point Chiquita said,
"The flag, the flag. Where's the flag?"
And I said, "Oh, yeah. The flag."
And I go and get the flag, and I open it up.
Chiquita goes absolutely white
and runs out of the room and vomits.
So the party just comes to a halt
and breaks up.
And then the next day
I gave it to this young woman...
...who'd been in my group in Poland,
who was now in New York.
I didn't tell her anything
about any of this.

At 5:
she called me up and she said...
"I gotta come and see you right away."
I thought, "Oh, God."
She came up, and she said, "I saw things..."
I saw things around this flag.
"Now, I know you're stubborn, and I know
you want to take this thing with you...
"but if you'd follow my advice,
you'd put it in a hole in the ground...
...and burn it and cover it with earth,
cause the devil's in it."
I never took the flag with me.
In fact, I gave it to her, and, uh,
she... She had a ceremony with it...
...six months later, in France,
with some friends...
...in which, uh, they did burn it.

God.
That's really, really amazing.
So, did you ever go to India?
Oh, yes, I... I went to India
in the spring, Wally...
...and I came back home
feeling all wrong.
I mean, you know, I'd been to India,
and I'd just felt like a tourist.
I'd found nothing.
So I was... I was spending, uh, the summer
on Long Island with my family...
...and I heard about this community
in Scotland called Findhorn...
...where people sang and talked
and meditated with plants.
And it was founded by several rather
middle-class English and Scottish eccentrics.
Some of them intellectuals,
and some of them not.
And I'd heard that they'd
grown things in soil...
...that supposedly nothing can grow in,
'cause it's almost beach soil...
...and that they'd built... Not built... They'd
grown the largest cauliflowers in the world...
...and there are sort of cabbages.
And they've grown trees
that can't grow in the British Isles.
So I went there.
I mean, it is an amazing place, Wally.
I mean, if there are insects
bothering the plants...
...they will talk with the insects
and, you know, make an agreement...
...by which they'll set aside a special patch
of vegetables just for the insects...
...and then the insects
will leave the main part alone.
- Huh.
- Things like that.
And everything they do
you know, you make sure that Helen is as clean
they do beautifully.
I mean, the buildings just shine.
And I mean, for instance, the icebox,
the stove, the car... They all have names.
And since you wouldn't treat Helen,
the icebox...
...with any less respect
than you would Margaret, your wife...
...you know, you make sure that Helen is as clean
as Margaret, or treated with equal respect.
And when I was there, Wally,
I remember being in the woods...
...and I would look at a leaf,
and I would actually see that thing...
...that is alive in that leaf.
And then I remember just running
through the woods as fast as I could...
...with this incredible laugh
coming out of me...
...and really being in that state, you know,
where laughter and tears seem to merge.
I mean, it absolutely blasted me open.
When I came out of Findhorn,
I was hallucinating nonstop.
I was seeing clouds as creatures.
The people on the airplane
all had animals' faces.
I mean, I was on a trip. It was like being
in a William Blake world suddenly.
Things were exploding.
So immediately I went to Belgrade,
'cause I wanted to talk to Grotowski.
Grotowski and I got together
at midnight in my hotel room...
...and we drank instant coffee
out of the top of my shaving cream...
...and we talked from midnight

until 11:
- God. What did he say?
- Nothing!
I talked. He didn't say a word.
And...And then I guess really...
...the last big experience of this kind
took place that fall.
It was out at Montauk on Long Island...
...and there were only about nine
of us involved, mostly men.
And we borrowed Dick Avedon's property
out at Montauk.
And the country out there
is like Heathcliff country.
It's absolutely wild.
What we wanted to do was
we wanted to take, you know...
We wanted to take All Souls' Eve,
Halloween...
...and use it as a point of departure
for something.
So each one of us prepared
some sort of event for the others...
...somehow in the spirit
of All Souls' Eve.
But the biggest event
was three of the people...
...kept disappearing
in the middle of the night each night...
...and we knew they were
preparing something big...
...but we didn't know what.
And midnight on Halloween,
under a dark moon, above these cliffs...
...we were all told to gather at the topmost cliff
and that we would be taken somewhere.
And we did.
And we waited, and it was very, very cold.
And then the three of them... Helen, Bill
and Fred... Showed up wearing white.
You know, something they'd made out
of sheets... Looked a little spooky, not funny.
And they took us into the basement of this house
that had burned down on the property.
And in this ruined basement, they had set up
a table with benches they'd made.
And on this table they had laid out paper,
pencils, wine and glasses.
And we were all asked to sit at the table
and to make out our last will and testament.
You know, to think about and write down
whatever our last words were to the world...
...or to somebody we were very close to.
And that's quite a task.
I must have been there for about
an hour and a half or so, maybe two.
And then one at a time they would ask
one of us to come with them...
...and I was one of the last.
And they came for me,
and they put a blindfold on me...
...and they ran me through these fields...
two people.
And they'd found a kind of potting shed...
you know, a kind of shed, on the grounds...
...a little tiny room
that had once had tools in it.
And they took me down the steps,
into this basement...
...and the room was just filled
with harsh white light.
Then they told me to get undressed
and give them all my valuables.
Then they put me on a table,
and they sponged me down.
Well, you know, I just started flashing
on-on-on death camps and secret police.
I don't know what happened to the other people,
but I just started to cry uncontrollably.
Uh, then-they got me to my feet
and they took photographs of me, naked.
And then naked, again blindfolded,
I was run through these forests...
...and we came to a kind of tent made of sheets,
with sheets on the ground.
And there were all these naked bodies...
...huddling together
for warmth against the cold.
Must have been left there
for about an hour.
And then again, one by one,
one at a time, we were led out.
The blindfold was put on...
...and I felt myself being lowered
onto something like a stretcher.
And the stretcher was carried a long way,
very slowly, through these forests...
...and then I felt myself
being lowered into the ground.
They had, in fact, dug six graves...
...eight feet deep.
And then I felt these pieces of wood
being put on me.
And I cannot tell you, Wally,
what I was going through.
And then the stretcher was lowered
into the grave...
...and then this wood was put on me...
...and then my valuables were put on me,
in my hands.
And they'd taken, you know,
a kind of sheet or canvas...
...and they'd stretched about this much
above my head...
...and then they shoveled dirt
into the grave...
...so that I really had the feeling
of being buried alive.
And after being in the grave
for about half an hour...
I mean, I didn't know how long
I'd be in there...
I was resurrected,
lifted out of the grave...
...blindfold taken off,
and run through these fields.
And we came to a great circle of fire,
with music and hot wine...
...and everyone danced until dawn.
And then at dawn...
...to the best of our ability,
we filled up the graves...
...and went back to New York.
And that was really the last big event.
I mean, that was the end.
I mean, you know, I began to realize...
I just didn't want to do these things anymore, you know?
I felt sort of becalmed, you know,
like that chapter in Moby Dick...
...where the wind goes out of the sails.
And then last winter, without, uh,
thinking about it very much...
I went to see this agent I know to tell him
I was interested in directing plays again.
Actually,
he seemed a little surprised...
...to see that Rip Van Winkle
was still alive.
Mmm.
God.
I didn't know they were so small.
Well, you know, frankly...
I'm sort of repelled by the whole story,
if you really want to know.
- What?
- Ah, you know...
Who did I think I was, you know?
I mean, that's the story of some kind
of spoiled princess, you know.
Who did I think I was,
the Shah of Iran?
You know, I really wonder if people such
as myself are really not Albert Speer, Wally.
- You know, Hitler's architect, Albert Speer?
- What?
No, I've been thinking a lot about him recently
because, uh, I think I am Speer.
And I think it's time that I was caught
and tried the way he was.
What are you talking about?
Well, you know, he was a very cultivated man,
an architect, an artist, you know...
...so he thought the ordinary rules of life didn't apply to him either.
I mean, I really feel that everything I've done...
...is horrific, just horrific.
My God. But why?
You see...You see, I've seen a lot of death in the last few years, Wally...
...and there's one thing that's for sure about death...
You do it alone, you see.
That seems quite certain, you see.
That I've seen. That the people around your bed mean nothing.
Your reviews mean nothing.
Whatever it is, you do it alone.
And so the question is, when I get on my deathbed, what kind of a person am I gonna be?
And I'm just very dubious about the kind of person who would have lived his life...
...those last few years the way I did.
Why should you feel that way?
You see, I've had a very rough time in the last few months, Wally.
Three different people in my family were in the hospital at the same time.
Then my mother died.
Then Marina had something wrong with her back, and we were terribly worried about her.
You know, so... So, I mean, I'm feeling very raw right now.
I mean, uh... I mean, I can't sleep, my nerves are shot.
I mean, I'm affected by everything.
You know, last week I had this really nice director from Norway over for dinner...
...and he's someone I've known for years and years...
...and he's somebody that I think I'm quite fond of.
And I was sitting there just thinking that he was a pompous, defensive...
...conservative stuffed shirt who was only interested in the theater.
He was talking and talking. His mother had been a famous Norwegian comedienne. I realized he had said "I remember my mother" at least 400 times during the evening. And he was telling story after story about his mother.

You know, I'd heard these stories. He was drinking this whole bottle of bourbon very quietly. His laugh was so horrible. You know, I could hear his laugh... the pain in that laugh, the hollowness. You know, what being that woman's son had done to him.

You know, so at a certain point I just had to ask him to leave... Nicely, you know. I told him I had to get up early the next morning, 'cause it was so horrible. It was just as if he had died in my living room.

You know, then I went into the bathroom and cried 'cause I felt I'd lost a friend. And then after he'd gone, I turned the television on... ...and there was this guy who had just won the something-something. Some sports event... Some kind of a great big check and some kind of huge silver bottle. And he, you know... He couldn't stuff the check in the bottle... ...and he put the bottle in front of his nose and pretended it was his face. He wasn't really listening to the guy who was interviewing him... ...but he was smiling malevolently at his friends, and I looked at that guy and I thought... "What a horrible, empty, manipulative rat."

Then I thought, "That guy is me."

Then last night actually, you know, it was our 20th wedding anniversary... ...and I took Chiquita to see this show about Billie Holiday.

I looked at these show business people who
know nothing about Billie Holiday, nothing.
You see, they were really kind of,
in a way, intellectual creeps.
And I suddenly had this feeling. I mean, you know I
was just sitting there, crying through most of the show.
And I suddenly had this feeling
I was just as creepy as they were...
...and that my whole life
had been a sham...
...and I didn't have the guts
to be Billie Holiday either.
I mean, I really feel
that I'm just washed up, wiped out.
I feel I've just squandered my life.
Andr, now, how can you say
something like that?
I mean...
Well, you know, I may be in
a very emotional state right now, Wally...
...but since I've come back home I've just
been finding the world we're living in...
...more and more upsetting.
I mean, last week I went down
to the Public Theater one afternoon.
You know, when I walked in,
I said hello to everybody...
'cause I know them all, and they all know me,
they're always very friendly.
You know that seven or eight people
told me how wonderful I looked?
And then one person... One... A woman
who runs the casting office, said...
"Gee, you look horrible.
Is something wrong?"
Now, she...You know, we started talking.
Of course, I started telling her things.
And she suddenly burst into tears
because an aunt of hers who's 80...
...whom she's very fond of, went into
the hospital for a cataract, which was solved.
But the nurse was so sloppy,
she didn't put the bed rails up...
...and so the aunt fell out of bed
and is now a complete cripple.
So you know, we were talking about hospitals.
Now, you know, this woman, because of who she is...
You know, 'cause this had happened to her very, very recently.
- She could see me with complete clarity.
- Uh-huh.
She didn't know anything about what I'd been going through.
But the other people, what they saw was this tan, or this shirt...
...or the fact that the shirt goes well with the tan.
So they said, "Gee, you look wonderful."
Now, they're living in an insane dreamworld.
They're not looking.
That seems very strange to me.
Right, because they just didn't see anything, somehow...
...except, uh, the few little things that they wanted to see.
Yeah, you know, it's like what happened just before my mother died.
You know, we'd gone to the hospital to see my mother...
...and I went in to see her...
...and I saw this woman who looked as bad as any survivor of Auschwitz or Dachau.
And I was out in the hall sort of comforting my father...
...when a doctor who was a specialist in a problem she had with her arm...
...went into her room and came out just beaming.
And he said, "Boy, don't we have a lot of reason to feel great? Isn't it wonderful how she's coming along?"
Now, all he saw was the arm.
That's all he saw.
Now, here's another person who's existing in a dream.
Who, on top of that, is a kind of butcher...
...who's committing a kind of familial murder...
...because when he comes out of that room, he psychically kills us...
...by taking us into a dream world...
...where we become confused and frightened...
'cause the moment before, we saw somebody who already looked dead...
...and now here comes a specialist who tells us they're in wonderful shape.
I mean, they were literally driving my father crazy.
I mean, you know, here's an 82-year-old man who's very emotional...
...and you know, and if you go in one moment, and you see the person's dying...
...and you don't want them to die, and then a doctor comes out five minutes later...
...and tells you they're in wonderful shape...
I mean, you know, you can go crazy.
- Yeah. I know what you mean.
- I mean, the doctor didn't see my mother.
The people at the Public Theater didn't see me.
I mean, we're just walking around in some kind of fog.
I think we're all in a trance.
We're walking around like zombies.
I don't... I don't think we're even aware of ourselves or our own reaction to things.
We...We're just going around all day like unconscious machines...
...and meanwhile there's all of this rage and worry and uneasiness...
...just building up and building up inside us.
That's right. It just builds up, uh...
...and then it just leaps out inappropriately.
I mean, I remember when I was, uh, acting in this play...
...based on The Master and Margarita
by Bulgakov.
And I was playing the part of the cat.
But they had trouble, uh,
making up my cat suit...
...so I didn't get it delivered to me
till the night of the first performance.
Particularly the head... I mean,
I'd never even had a chance to try it on.
And about four of my fellow actors
actually came up to me...
...and they said these things
which I just couldn't help thinking...
...were attempts to destroy me.
You know, one of them said, uh,
"Oh, well, now that head...
"will totally change your hearing
in the performance.
"You may hear everything
completely differently...
"and it may be very upsetting.
"Now, I was once in a performance
where I was wearing earmuffs...
...and I couldn't hear anything
anybody said."
And then another one said, "Oh, you know,
whenever I wear even a hat on stage...
I tend to faint."
I mean, those remarks
were just full of hostility...
...because, I mean, if I'd listened to those people,
I would have gone out there on stage...
...and I wouldn't have been able to hear anything,
and I would have fainted.
But the hostility
was completely inappropriate...
...because, in fact,
those people liked me.
I mean, that hostility was just
some feeling that was, you know...
...left over from
some previous experience.
Because somehow
in our social existence today...
...we're only allowed to
express our feelings, uh...
...weirdly and indirectly.
If you express them directly,
everybody goes crazy.
Well, did you express your feelings
about what those people said to you?
No. I mean, I didn't even know
what I felt till I thought about it later.
And I mean, at the most, you know,
in a situation like that, uh...
...even if I had known what I felt...
I might say something,
if I'm really annoyed...
...like, uh, " Oh, yeah.
Well, that's just fascinating...
...and, uh, I probably will
faint tonight, just as you did. "
I do just the same thing myself.
We can't be direct, so we end up
saying the weirdest things.
I mean, I remember a night. It was
a couple of weeks after my mother died.
And I was in pretty bad shape.
And I had dinner with three
relatively close friends...
...two of whom had
known my mother quite well...
...and all three of whom
had known me for years.
You know that we went through that
entire evening without my being able to...
...for a moment,
get anywhere near what...
Not that I wanted to sit
and have this dreary evening...
...in which I was talking about all this pain
that I was going through and everything.
Really, not at all.
But the fact that nobody could say...
"Gee, what a shame about your mother"
or " How are you feeling?"
It was just as if nothing had happened.
They were all making these jokes and laughing.
I got quite crazy, as a matter of fact.
One of these people mentioned
a certain man whom I don't like very much...
...and I started screeching about how
he had just been found in the Bronx River...
...and his penis had dropped off from gonorrhea,
and all kinds of insane things.
And later, when I got home, I realized I'd just
been desperate to break through this ice.
Yeah.
I mean, do you realize, Wally, if you brought
that situation into a Tibetan home...
That'd be just so far out. I mean,
they wouldn't be able to understand it.
That would be simply...
simply so weird, Wally.
If four Tibetans came together,
and tragedy had just struck one of the ones...
...and they spent the whole evening going...
I mean, you know,
Tibetans would have looked at that...
...and would have thought that was
the most unimaginable behavior.
- But for us, that's common behavior.
- Mm-hmm.
I mean, really, the... The Africans would have
probably put their spears into all four of us...
'cause it would have driven them crazy.
They would have thought we were
dangerous animals or something like that.
- Right.
- I mean, that's absolutely abnormal behavior.
Is everything all right, gentlemen?
- Great.
- Yeah.
But those are
typical evenings for us.
I mean, we go to dinners and parties
like that all the time.
These evenings are really
like sort of sickly dreams...
...because people are talking in symbols.
Everyone is sort of floating through
this fog of symbols and unconscious feelings.
No one says what they're really thinking about. Then people will start making these jokes that are really some sort of secret code. Right. Well, what often happens in some of these evenings... ...is that these really crazy little fantasies will just start being played with, you know... ...and everyone will be talking at once and sort of saying...

"Hey, wouldn't it be great if Frank Sinatra and Mrs. Nixon and blah-blah-blah... ...were in such and such a situation?"

You know, always with famous people, and always sort of grotesque. Or people will be talking about some horrible thing... ...like... Like, uh, the death of that girl in the car with Ted Kennedy... ...and they'll just be roaring with laughter.

I mean, it's really amazing. It's just unbelievable. That's the only way anything is expressed, through these completely insane jokes. I mean, I think that's why I never understand what's going on at a party. I'm always completely confused. You know, uh, Debby once said, after one of these New York evenings... ...she thought she'd traveled a greater distance... ...just by journeying from her origins in the suburbs of Chicago... ...to that New York evening... ...than her grandmother had traveled in, uh, making her way... ...from the steppes of Russia to the suburbs of Chicago. I think that's right. You know, it may... it may be, Wally, that one of the reasons... ...that we don't know what's going on...
...is that when we're there at a party, we're all too busy performing.

Uh-huh.

That was one of the reasons that, uh, Grotowski gave up the theater. He just felt that people in their lives now were performing so well...

...that performance in the theater was sort of superfluous...

...and, in a way, obscene.

Huh.

Isn't it amazing how often a doctor...

...will live up to our expectation of how a doctor should look?

When you see a terrorist on television, he looks just like a terrorist.

I mean, we live in a world in which fathers...

...or single people, or artists...

...are all trying to live up to someone's fantasy...

...of how a father, or a single person, or an artist should look and behave.

They all act as if they know exactly how they ought to conduct themselves...

...at every single moment...

...and they all seem totally self-confident.

Of course, privately people are very mixed up about themselves.

Yeah.

They don't know what they should be doing with their lives.

- They're reading all these self-help books.

- Oh, God!

I mean, those books are just so touching, because they show...

...how desperately curious we all are to know how all the others of us...

...are really getting on in life...

...even though, by performing these roles all the time...

...we're just hiding the reality of ourselves from everybody else.
I mean, we live in such ludicrous ignorance of each other. We usually don't know the things we'd like to know... even about our supposedly closest friends. I mean... I mean, you know... suppose you're going through some kind of hell in your own life. Well, you would love to know if your friends have experienced similar things. But we just don't dare to ask each other. No. It would be like asking your friend to drop his role. I mean, we just put no value at all on perceiving reality. I mean, on the contrary, this incredible emphasis that we all place now... on our so-called careers... automatically makes perceiving reality a very low priority... because if your life is organized around trying to be successful in a career... well, it just doesn't matter what you perceive or what you experience. You can really sort of shut your mind off for years ahead, in a way. You can sort of turn on the automatic pilot. You know, just the way your mother's doctor had on his automatic pilot... when he went in and he looked at the arm... and he totally failed to perceive anything else. That's right. Our... Our minds are just focused on these goals and plans... which in themselves are not reality. No. Goals and plans are not... I mean, they're... They're fantasy. They're part of a dream life. I mean, you know, it always just does seem so ridiculous, somehow...
that everybody has to have his little... His little goal in life. I mean, it's so absurd, in a way, when you consider that it doesn't matter which one it is. Right. And because people's concentration is on their goals... they just live each moment by habit. Really, like the Norwegian telling the same stories over and over again.
- Mm-hmm.
- Life becomes habitual. And it is today. I mean, very few things happen now like that moment... ...when Marlon Brando sent the Indian woman to accept the Oscar... ...and everything went haywire. Things just very rarely go haywire now. And if you're just operating by habit... ...then you're not really living. I mean, you know, in Sanskrit, the root of the verb "to be"... ...is the same as "to grow" or "to make grow." Huh.
- Do you know about Roc?
- Hmm?
Oh, well. Roc was a wonderful man. He was one of the founders of Findhorn... ...and he was one of Scotland's...well, he was Scotland's greatest mathematician... ...and he was one of the century's great mathematicians. And he prided himself on the fact that he had no fantasy life, no dream life... ...nothing to stand between him and the direct perception of mathematics. And one day when he was in his mid-50s,
he was walking in the gardens of Edinburgh...
...and he saw a faun.
The faun was very surprised because fauns have always been able to see people...
...but you know,
very few people ever see them.
You know, uh,
those little imaginary creatures.
- Not a deer.
- Oh.
- You call them fauns, don't you?
- I thought a fawn was a baby deer.
Yeah, well, there's a deer that's called a fawn, but these are like those little imagi...
- Oh! The kind that Debussy...
- Yes. Right.
Well, so he got to know the faun, and he got to know other fauns...
...and a series of conversations began...
...and more and more fauns would come out every afternoon to meet him.
And he'd have talks with the fauns.
Then one day, after a while, when, you know, they'd really gotten to know him...
...they asked him if he would like to meet Pan...
...because Pan would like to meet him.
And of course,
Pan was afraid of terrifying him...
...because he knew of the Christian misconception...
...which portrayed Pan as an evil creature, which he's not.
But Roc said he would love to meet Pan, and so they met...
...and Pan indirectly sent him on his way on a journey...
...in which he met the other people who began Findhorn.
But Roc used to practice certain exercises...
...like, uh, for instance, if he were right-handed...
...all today he would do everything
with his left hand.
All day... Eating, writing, everything... Opening doors...
in order to break the habits of living.
Because the great danger,
he felt, for him...
...was to fall into a trance,
out of habit.
He had a whole series of very simple exercises that he had invented...
...just to keep seeing, feeling, remembering.
Because you have to learn now.
It didn't used to be necessary,
but today you have to learn something...
...like, uh, are you really hungry...
...or are you just stuffing your face...
Because that's what you do,
out of habit?
I mean, you can afford to do it,
so you do it...
...whether you're hungry or not.
You know, if you go to the Buddhist Meditation Center...
...they make you taste each bite of your food...
...so it takes two hours...
it's horrible... To eat your lunch.
But you're conscious of the taste of your food.
If you're just eating out of habit,
then you don't taste the food...
...and you're not conscious of the reality of what's happening to you.
You enter the dream world again.
Now, do you think maybe we live in this dream world...
...because we do so many things every day that affect us in ways...
...that somehow we're just not aware of?
I mean, you know, I was thinking, um, last Christmas...
Debby and I were given
an electric blanket.
I can tell you that it is just
such a marvelous advance...
...over our old way of life, and it is just great.
But, uh, it is quite different
from not having an electric blanket...
...and I sometimes sort of wonder,
well, what is it doing to me?
I mean, I sort of feel, uh,
I'm not sleeping quite in the same way.
No, you wouldn't be.
I mean, uh, and my dreams
are sort of different...
...and I feel a little bit different
when I get up in the morning.
I wouldn't put an electric blanket on
for anything.
First, I'd be worried I might get electrocuted.
No, I don't trust technology.
But I mean, the main thing, Wally,
is that I think that that kind of comfort...
...just separates you from reality
in a very direct way.
- You mean...
- I mean, if you don't have that electric blanket...
...and your apartment is cold
and you need to put on another blanket...
...or go into the closet and pile up coats
on top of the blankets you have...
...well, then you know it's cold.
And that sets up a link of things.
You have compassion for the per...
Well, is the person next to you cold?
Are there other people in the world
who are cold?
What a cold night!
I like the cold.
My God, I never realized.
I don't want a blanket. It's fun being cold.
I can snuggle up against you even more
because it's cold.
All sorts of things occur to you.
Turn on that electric blanket,
and it's like taking a tranquilizer...
...or it's like being lobotomized by watching television. I think you enter the dream world again. I mean, what does it do to us, Wally, living in an environment... ...where something as massive as the seasons, or winter, or cold... ...don't in any way affect us? I mean, we're animals, after all. I mean, what does that mean? I think that means that instead of living under the sun... ...and the moon and the sky and the stars... ...we're living in a fantasy world of our own making. Yeah, but I mean, I would never give up my electric blanket, Andr. I mean, because New York is cold in the winter. I mean, our apartment is cold. It's a difficult environment. I mean, our lives are tough enough as it is. I'm not looking for ways to get rid of the few things that provide relief and comfort. I mean, on the contrary, I'm looking for more comfort... ...because, uh, the world is very abrasive. I mean, uh, I'm trying to protect myself... ...because, really, there are these abrasive beatings to be avoided everywhere you look. But, Wally, don't you... Don't you see that comfort can be dangerous? I mean, you like to be comfortable, and I like to be comfortable too... ...but comfort can lull you into a dangerous tranquillity. I mean, my mother knew a woman, Lady Hatfield... ...who was one of the richest women in the world...
...and she died of starvation
because all she would eat was chicken.
I mean, she just liked chicken, Wally,
and that was all she would eat.
And actually her body was starving,
but she didn't know it...
'cause she was quite happy eating her chicken,
and so she finally died.
See, I honestly believe
that we're all like Lady Hatfield now.
We're having a lovely, comfortable time
with our electric blankets and our chicken...
...and meanwhile we're starving because
we're so cut off from contact with reality...
...that we're not getting any real sustenance,
'cause we don't see the world.
We don't see ourselves.
We don't see how our actions
affect other people.
Have you read Martin Buber's book
On Hasidism?
- No.
- Well, here's a view of life.
I mean, he talks about the belief
of the Hasidic Jews...
...that there are spirits chained
in everything.
There are spirits chained in you.
There are spirits chained in me.
Well, there are spirits chained
in this table.
And that prayer is the action of liberating
these enchained embryo-like spirits...
...and that every action of ours in life...
...whether it's, uh,
doing business, or making love...
...or having dinner together,
or whatever...
...that every action of ours
should be a prayer...
...a sacrament in the world.
Now, do you think we're living like that?
Why do you think
we're not living like that?
I think it's because if we allowed ourselves to see what we do every day...
...we might just find it too nauseating.
I mean, the way we treat other people.
You know, every day, several times a day,
I walk into my apartment building.
The doorman calls me Mr. Gregory,
and I call him Jimmy.
Already, what's the difference between that...
...and the Southern plantation owner who's got slaves?
You see, I think that an act of murder is committed in that moment...
...when I walk into that building.
Because here's a dignified, intelligent man...a man of my own age...
...and when I call him Jimmy,
then he becomes a child, and I'm an adult...
...because I can buy my way into the building.
Right. That's right.
I mean, my God,
when I was a Latin teacher...
I mean, people used to treat me...
I mean, uh, you know,
if I would go to a party...
...of professional or literary people...
I mean, I was just treated, uh,
in the nicest sense of the word...
...uh, like a dog.
I mean, in other words,
there was no question...
...of my being able to participate on an equal basis in a conversation with people.
I mean, you know, I'd occasionally have conversations with people...
...but then, uh,
when they asked what I did...
...which would always happen after about five minutes...
...uh, you know, their faces...
Even if they were enjoying the conversation, or they were flirting with me, or whatever it was...
...their faces would just have that expression just like the portcullis crashing down. You know, those medieval gates. They would just walk away. I mean, I literally lived like a dog. And I mean, uh, when Debby was working as a secretary, you know... if she would tell people what she did, they would just go insane. I mean, it would be just as if she'd said, uh... "Oh, well, I've been serving a life sentence recently, uh, for child murdering. " I mean, my God, you know, when you talk about our attitudes toward other people... I mean, I think of myself... as just a very decent, good person, you know... just because I think I'm reasonably friendly... to most of the people I happen to meet every day. I mean, I really think of myself quite smugly. I just think I'm a perfectly nice guy, uh, you know... so long as I think of the world as consisting of, you know... just the small circle of the people that I know as friends... or the few people that we know in this little world of our little hobbies... the theater or whatever it is. And I'm really quite self-satisfied. I'm just quite happy with myself. I just have no complaint about myself. I mean, you know, let's face it. I mean, there's a whole enormous world out there that I just don't ever think about. I certainly don't take responsibility for how I've lived in that world. I mean, you know, if I were actually to sort of confront the fact... that I'm sort of sharing this stage...
...with this starving person in Africa somewhere...
...well, I wouldn't feel so great about myself.
So naturally I just... I just blot all those people right out of my perception.
So, of course...
of course, I'm ignoring...
...a whole section of the real world.
But frankly, you know...
...when I write a play, in a way, one of the things I guess I think I'm trying to do...
...is I'm trying to bring myself up against some little bits of reality...
...and I'm trying to share that, uh, with an audience.
I mean... I mean, of course we all know, uh...
...the theater is, uh, in terrible shape today.
I mean, uh... I mean, at least a few years ago people who really cared about the theater...
...used to say, "The theater is dead."
And now everybody's redefined the theater in such a trivial way...
...that, I mean... I mean, God...
I know people who are involved with the theater who go to see things now that...
I mean, a few years ago these same people...
...would have just been embarrassed to have even seen some of these plays.
I mean, they would have just shrunk, you know, just in horror...
...at the superficiality of these things.
But now they say, "Oh, that was pretty good."
It's just incredible.
And I really just find that attitude unbearable...
...because I really do think the theater can do something very important.
I mean, I do think the theater can help bring people in contact with reality.
Now, now, you may not feel that at all. You may just find that totally absurd. Yeah, but, Wally, don't you see the dilemma? You're not taking into account the period we're living in. I mean, of course that's what the theater should do. I mean, I've always felt that. You know, when I was a young director, and I directed the Bacchae at Yale... ...my impulse, when Pentheus has been killed by his mother and the Furies... ...and they pull the tree back, and they tie him to the tree... ...and fling him into the air, and he flies through space and he's killed... ...and they rip him to shreds and I guess cut off his head... ...my impulse was that the thing to do was to get a head from the New Haven morgue... ...and pass it around the audience. Now, I wanted Agawe to bring on a real head... ...and that this head should be passed around the audience... ...so that somehow people realized that this stuff was real, see? That it was real stuff. Now, the actress playing Agawe absolutely refused to do it. You know, Gordon Craig used to talk about... ...why is there gold or silver in the churches or something... The great cathedrals... ...when actors could be wearing gold and silver? And I mean, people who saw Eleonora Duse in the last couple of years of her life, Wally... ...people said that is was like seeing light on stage, or mist... ...or the essence of something. I mean, then when you think about Bertolt Brecht...
He somehow created a theater
in which people could observe...
...that was vastly entertaining
and exciting...
...but in which the excitement
didn't overwhelm you.
He somehow allowed you the distance
between the play and yourself...
...that, in fact, two human beings need
in order to live together.
You know, the question is whether
the theater now can do for an audience...
...what Brecht tried to do
or what Craig or Duse tried to do.
Can it do it now?
'Cause, you see, I think that
people today are so deeply asleep...
...that unless, you know, you're putting on
those sort of superficial plays...
...that just help your audience
to sleep more comfortably...
...it's very hard to know
what to do in the theater.
Because, you see, I think that if you
put on serious, contemporary plays...
...by writers like yourself...
...you may only be helping to deaden
the audience in a different way.
What do you mean?
Well, I mean, Wally...
...how does it affect an audience
to put on one of these plays...
...in which you show that people
are totally isolated now...
...and they can't reach each other,
and their lives are desperate?
Or how does it affect them to see a play
that shows that our world...
...is full of nothing but shocking
sexual events, and terror, and violence?
Does that help to wake up
a sleeping audience?
See, I don't think so,
'cause I think it's very likely...
...that the picture of the world that you're showing them in a play like that...
...is exactly the picture of the world they have already.
I mean, you know, they know their own lives and relationships...
...are difficult and painful.
And if they watch the evening news on television...
...well, there what they see is a terrifying, chaotic universe...
...full of rapes and murders and hands cut off by subway cars...
...and children pushing their parents out of windows.
So the play tells them that their impression of the world is correct...
...and that there's absolutely no way out.
There's nothing they can do.
And they end up feeling passive and impotent.
I mean, look... Look, at something like that christening...
...that my group arranged for me in the forest in Poland.
Well, there was an example of something that really had all the elements of theater.
It was worked on carefully.
It was thought about carefully.
It was done with exquisite taste and magic.
And they, in fact, created something...
...which, in this case, was, in a way, just for an audience of one...just for me.
But they created something that had ritual, love, surprise...
...denouement,
beginning, a middle and end...
...and was an incredibly beautiful piece of theater.
And the impact that it had on its audience... On me...
...was somehow a totally positive one. It didn't deaden me.
It brought me to life.
Yeah, but I mean, are you saying
that it's impossible...
I mean, uh... I mean...
I mean, uh, isn't it a little upsetting...
...to come to the conclusion that there's
no way to wake people up anymore...
...except to involve them in some kind
of a strange, uh, christening in Poland...
...or some kind of a strange experience
on top of Mount Everest?
I mean, uh, because, uh,
you know that the awful thing is...
...if you really say that it's-it's necessary...
...to, uh, take everybody to, uh, Everest...
...it's really tough, because everybody
can't be taken to Everest.
I mean, there must have been periods in history
when it would have been possible...
...to, uh, save the patient
through less drastic measures.
I mean, there must have been periods
when in order to give people...
...a strong or meaningful experience...
...you wouldn't actually have to
take them to Everest.
But you do now.
In some way or other, you do now.
You know, there was a time when you
could have just, for instance, written...
I don't know,
uh, Sense and Sensibility by Jane Austen.
And I'm sure the people who read it had
a pretty strong experience. I'm sure they did.
I mean, all right, now you're saying
that people today wouldn't get it.
Maybe that's true. But I mean, isn't there
any kind of writing or any kind of a play...
I mean, isn't it still legitimate
for writers...
...to try to portray reality
so that people can see it?
I mean, really, tell me, why do we
require a trip to Mount Everest...
...in order to be able to perceive
one moment of reality?
I mean... I mean, is Mount Everest
more real than New York?
I mean, isn't New York real?
I mean, you see, I think if you
could become fully aware...
...of what existed in the cigar store
next door to this restaurant...
I think it would just
blow your brains out.
I mean... I mean, isn't there
just as much reality to be perceived...
...in a cigar store
as there is on Mount Everest?
I mean, what do you think?
I think that not only is there nothing
more real about Mount Everest...
I think there's nothing that different,
in a certain way.
I mean, because reality
is uniform, in a way...
...so that if your...
if your perceptions are...
I mean, if your own mechanism
is operating correctly...
...it would become irrelevant to go
to Mount Everest, and sort of absurd...
...because, I mean... it just...
I mean, of course, on some level, I mean...
...obviously it's very different
from a cigar store on 7th Avenue.
- But I mean...
- Well, I agree with you, Wally.
But the problem is that people
can't see the cigar store now.
I mean, things don't affect people
the way they used to.
I mean, it may very well be
that 10 years from now...
...people will pay $10,000 in cash
to be castrated...
...just in order to be affected by something.
Well, why... why do you think that is?
I mean, why is that?
I mean, is it just because people
are lazy today, or they're bored?
I mean, are we just
like bored, spoiled children...
...who've just been lying
in the bathtub all day...
...just playing with their plastic duck...
...and now they're just thinking,
"Well, what can I do?"
Okay. Yes. We're bored.
We're all bored now.
But has it every occurred to you, Wally,
that the process...
...that creates this boredom
that we see in the world now...
...may very well be a self-perpetuating,
unconscious form of brainwashing...
...created by a world totalitarian government
based on money...
...and that all of this is much more dangerous
than one thinks...
...and it's not just a question
of individual survival, Wally...
...but that somebody who's bored
is asleep...
...and somebody who's asleep
will not say no?
See, I keep meeting these people...
I mean, uh, just a few days ago...
I met this man whom I greatly admire.
He's a Swedish physicist.
Gustav Bjrnstrand.
And he told me that he
no longer watches television...
...he doesn't read newspapers,
and he doesn't read magazines.
He's completely
cut them out of his life...
...because he really does feel that we're living
in some kind of Orwellian nightmare now...
...and that everything that you hear now
contributes to turning you into a robot.
And when I was at Findhorn, I met
this extraordinary English tree expert... 
...who had devoted his life 
to saving trees. 
Just got back from Washington, 
lobbying to save the redwoods. 
He's 84 years old, 
and he always travels with a backpack... 
'cause he never knows 
where he's gonna be tomorrow. 
And when I met him at Findhorn, 
he said to me, " Where are you from?" 
Yes, that's a very interesting place. 
Do you know a lot of New Yorkers who keep talking 
about the fact that they want to leave, but never do?" 
And I said, " Oh, yes. " And he said, 
"Why do you think they don't leave?"
I gave him different banal theories. 
He said, " Oh, I don't think it's that way at all. " 
He said, " I think that New York is the new 
model for the new concentration camp... 
"where the camp has been built 
by the inmates themselves... 
"and the inmates are the guards, and they 
have this pride in this thing they've built. 
"They've built their own prison. 
"And so they exist 
in a state of schizophrenia... 
"where they are both guards 
and prisoners. 
"And as a result, they no longer have... 
having been lobotomized... 
"the capacity to leave 
the prison they've made... 
...or to even see it as a prison. " 
And then he went into his pocket, 
and he took out a seed for a tree... 
...and he said, " This is a pine tree. " 
He put it in my hand and he said, 
"Escape before it's too late. " 
See, actually, 
for two or three years now... 
Chiquita and I have had this very unpleasant 
feeling that we really should get out.
We really feel like Jews in Germany in the late '30s.
Get out of here.
Of course, the problem is where to go.
'Cause it seems quite obvious that the whole world is going in the same direction.
See, I think it's quite possible that the 1960s...
...represented the last burst of the human being before he was extinguished...
...and that this is the beginning of the rest of the future, now...
...and that from now on there'll simply be all these robots walking around...
...feeling nothing, thinking nothing.
And there'll be nobody left almost to remind them...
...that there once was a species called a human being...
...with feelings and thoughts...
...and that history and memory are right now being erased...
...and soon nobody will really remember...
...that life existed on the planet.
Now, of course, Björnstrand feels that there's really almost no hope...
...and that we're probably going back to a very savage...
...lawless, terrifying period.
Findhorn people see it a little differently. They're feeling that there'll be these pockets of light...
...springing up in different parts of the world...
...and that these will be, in a way, invisible planets on this planet...
...and that as we, or the world, grow colder...
...we can take invisible space journeys to these different planets...
...refuel for what it is we need to do
on the planet itself...
...and come back.
And it's their feeling that there have to be centers now...
...where people can come and reconstruct a new future for the world.
And when I was talking to, uh, Gustav Bjrnstrand...
...he was saying that actually these centers are growing up everywhere now...
...and that what they're trying to do, which is what Findhorn was trying to do...
...and, in a way, what I was trying to do...
I mean, these things can't be given names...
...but in a way, these are all attempts at creating a new kind of school...
...or a new kind of monastery.
And Bjrnstrand talks about the concept of" reserves"...
...islands of safety where history can be remembered...
...and the human being can continue to function...
...in order to maintain the species through a dark age.
In other words, we're talking about an underground...
...which did exist in a different way during the Dark Ages...
...among the mystical orders of the church.
And the purpose of this underground...
...is to find out how to preserve the light, life, the culture...
...how to keep things living.
You see, I keep thinking that what we need...
...is a new language...
...a language of the heart...
...a language, as in the Polish forest, where language wasn't needed.
Some kind of language between people that is a new kind of poetry...
...that's the poetry of the dancing bee
that tells us where the honey is.
And I think that in order
to create that language...
you're going to have to learn how
you can go through a looking glass...
...into another kind of perception...
...where you have that sense
of being united to all things...
...and suddenly you understand everything.
Are you ready for some dessert?
Uh, I think I'll just have an espresso.
Thank you.
- Very good.
- I'll... I'll also have one. Thank you.
And...And, uh, could I also
have, uh, an amaretto?
Certainly, sir.
Thank you.
You see, Wally, there's this incredible
building that they built at Findhorn.
And the man who designed it
had never designed anything in his life.
He wrote children's books.
And some people wanted it to be
a sort of hall of meditation...
...and others wanted it to be
a kind of lecture hall.
But the psychic part of the community
wanted it to serve another function as well...
...because they wanted it to be a kind
of spaceship which at night could rise up...
...and let the U.F.O.'s know that this
was a safe place to land...
...and that they would find friends there.
So, the problem was...
'cause it needed a massive kind of roof...
...was how to have a roof
that would stay on the building...
...but at the same time be able to fly up
at night and meet the flying saucers.
So, the architect
meditated and meditated...
...and he finally came up with
the very simple solution...
...of not actually joining the roof
to the building...
...which means that it should fall off...
...because they have great gales
up in northern Scotland.
So, to keep it from falling off,
he got beach stones from the beach...
...or we did,
'cause I-I worked on this building...
...all up and down the roof,
just like that.
And the idea was that the energy
that would flow from stone to stone...
...would be so strong, you see...
...that it would keep the roof down
under any conditions...
...but at the same time, if the roof needed
to go up, it would be light enough to go up.
Well...
it works, you see.
Now, architects
don't know why it works...
...and it shouldn't work,
'cause it should fall off.
But it works. It does work.
The gales blow, and the roof should fall off,
but it doesn't fall off.
Yep.
Well, uh...
...do you want to know
my actual response to all this?
- Do you want to hear my actual response?
- Yes!
See, my actual response...
I mean...
I mean... I mean,
I'm just trying to... To survive, you know?
I mean,
I'm just trying to earn a living...
...just trying to pay my rent and my bills.
I mean, uh...
Ah, I live my life.
I enjoy staying home with Debby.
I'm reading Charlton Heston's autobiography.
And that's that.
I mean, you know...
I mean, occasionally, maybe...
Debby and I will step outside,
we'll go to a party or something.
And if I can occasionally get my little talent
together and write a little play...
...well, then that's just...
that's just wonderful.
And I mean, I enjoy reading about
other little plays people have written...
...and reading the reviews of those plays
and what people said about them...
...and what people said
about what people said.
And I mean, I have... I have a list of errands
and responsibilities that I keep in a notebook.
I enjoy going through the notebook...
...carrying out the responsibilities,
doing the errands...
...and crossing them off the list.
And, I mean, I just... I just don't know
how anybody could enjoy anything more...
...than I enjoy, uh, reading
Charlton Heston's autobiography...
...or, uh, you know, uh,
getting up in the morning...
...and having the cup of cold coffee
that's been waiting for me all night...
...still there for me
to drink in the morning...
...and no cockroach or fly
has-died in it overnight.
I mean, I'm just so thrilled
when I get up...
...and I see that coffee there,
just the way I wanted it.
I mean, I just can't imagine...
...how anybody could enjoy something else
any more than that.
I mean... I mean, obviously, if the cockroach...
if there is a dead cockroach in it...
...well, then I just have a feeling
of disappointment, and I'm sad.
But I mean, I... I just...
I just don't think...
I feel the need for anything more
than all this.
Whereas, you know,
you seem to be saying...
...that, uh...
...it's inconceivable that anybody could
be having a meaningful life today...
...and, you know,
everyone is totally destroyed...
...and we all need to live
in these outposts.
But I mean, you know,
I just can't believe... Even for you...
I mean, don't you find... Isn't it pleasant
just to get up in the morning...
...and there's Chiquita,
there are the children...
...and The Times is delivered,
you can read it.
I mean, maybe you'll direct a play,
maybe you won't direct a play.
But forget about the play
that you may or may not direct.
Why is it necessary to...Why not lean back
and just enjoy these details?
I mean, and there'd be a delicious cup
of coffee and a piece of coffeecake.
I mean, why is it necessary
to have more than this...
...or to even think about
having more than this?
I mean, I don't really know
what you're talking about.
I mean... I mean,
I know what you're talking about...
...but I don't really know
what you're talking about.
And I mean, you know, even if I were
to totally agree with you, you know...
...and even if I were to accept the idea
that there's just no way for anybody...
...to have personal happiness now...
...well, you know,
I still couldn't accept the idea...
...that the way to make life wonderful
would be to just totally...
...you know,
reject Western civilization...
...and fall back into some kind of belief
in some kind of weird something...
I mean, I don't even know how
to begin talking about this...
...but you know, in the Middle Ages...
...before the arrival of
scientific thinking as we know it today...
...well, people could believe anything.
Anything could be true...
the statue of the Virgin Mary...
...could speak or bleed
or whatever it was.
But the wonderful thing
that happened...
...was that then in the development
of science in the Western world...
...certain things did come slowly
to be known and understood.
I mean, you know...
...obviously, all ideas in science
are constantly being revised.
I mean, that's the whole point.
But we do at least know that the universe
has some shape and order...
...and that, uh, you know, trees do not
turn into people or goddesses...
...and there are very good reasons
why they don't...
...and you can't just believe
absolutely anything.
Whereas, the things
that you're talking about...
I mean... I mean, you found
the handprint in the book...
...and there were... There were three Andrs
and one Antoine de Saint-Exupry.
And to me that is a coincidence.
But...And-And then, you know,
the people who put that book together...
...well, they had their own reasons
for putting it together.
But to you it was significant, as if that book
had been written 40 years ago...
...so that you would see it,
as if it was planned for you, in a way.
I mean, really... I mean...
I mean, all right, let's say, if I get
a fortune cookie in a Chinese restaurant...
I mean, of course,
even I have a tendency...
I mean, you know... I mean, of course,
I would hardly throw it out.
I mean, I read it.
I read it, and... And, uh...
I just instinctively sort of...
You know, if it says something like, uh...
"A conversation with a dark-haired man
will be very important for you"...
...well, I just instinctively think, you know,
"Who do I know who has dark hair?
Did we have a conversation?
What did we talk about?"
In other words, uh, there's something
in me that makes me read it...
...and I instinctively interpret it
as if it were an omen of the future.
But in my conscious opinion, which is
so fundamental to my whole view of life...
I mean, I would just have to change totally
to not have this opinion.
In my conscious opinion,
this is simply something...
...that was written in the cookie factory
several years ago and in no way refers to me.
I mean, you know,
the... The fact that I got it...
I mean, the man who wrote it
did not know anything about me.
I mean, he could not have known
anything about me.
There's no way that this cookie could actually have to do with me. And the fact that I've gotten it is just basically a joke. And I mean, if I were gonna go on a trip on an airplane... ...and I got a fortune cookie that said "Don't go"... I mean, of course, I admit I might feel a bit nervous for about one second. But in fact, I would go because, I mean... ...that trip is gonna be successful or unsuccessful... ...based on the state of the airplane and the state of the pilot. And the cookie is in no position to know about that. And I mean, you know, it's the same... ...with any kind of, uh, prophecy, or a sign, or an omen. Because if you believe in omens, then that means that the universe... I mean, I don't even know how to begin to describe this. That means that the future is somehow sending messages... ...backwards to the present. Which—Which means that the future must exist in some sense already... ...in order to be able to send these messages. And it also means that things in the universe are there for a purpose... To give us messages. Whereas I think that things in the universe are just there. I mean, they don't mean anything. I mean, you know, if the turtle's egg falls out of the tree and splashes on the paving stones... ...it's just because that turtle was clumsy... by accident. And—And to decide whether to send my ships off to war on the basis of that... ...seems a big mistake to me.
Well, what information would you send your ships to war on? Because if it's all meaningless... what's the difference whether you accept the fortune cookie... or the statistics of the Ford Foundation? It doesn't seem to matter. Well, the meaningless fact of the fortune cookie or the turtle's egg... can't possibly have any relevance to the subject you're analyzing. Whereas a group of meaningless facts that are collected and interpreted... in a scientific way may quite possibly be relevant. Because the wonderful thing about scientific theories about things... is that they're based on experiments that can be repeated. Hmm. Well, it's true, Wally. I mean, you know, following omens and so on... is probably just a way of letting ourselves off the hook... so that we don't have to take individual responsibility for our own actions. But I mean, giving yourself over to the unconscious... can leave you vulnerable to all sorts of very frightening manipulation. And in all the work that I was involved in, there was always that danger. And there was always that question of tampering with people's lives... because if I lead one of these workshops, then I do become partly a doctor... and partly a therapist, and partly a priest. And I'm not a doctor, or a therapist, or a priest. And already some of these new monasteries...
...or communities or whatever we've been talking about...
...are becoming institutionalized...
...and I guess even in a way, at times, sort of fascistic.
You know, there's a sort of self-satisfied elitist paranoia that grows up...
...a feeling of "them" and "us"...
that is very unsettling.
But I mean, uh, the thing is, Wally, I think it's the exaggerated worship of science...
...that has led us into this situation.
I mean, science has been held up to us as a magical force...
...that would somehow solve everything.
Well, quite the contrary.
It's done quite the contrary. It's destroyed everything.
So that is what has really led, I think...
...to this very strong, deep reaction against science that we're seeing now...
...just as the Nazi demons that were released in the '30s in Germany...
...were probably a reaction against a certain oppressive kind of knowledge...
...and culture and rational thinking.
So I agree that we're talking about something potentially very dangerous.
But modern science has not been particularly less dangerous.
Right. Well, I agree with you.
I completely agree.
No, you know, the truth is...
I think I do know what really disturbs me about the work you've described...
...and I don't even know if I can express it. But somehow it seems that the whole point of the work that you did in those workshops...
...when you get right down to it and you ask what was it really about...
The whole point, really, I think...
...was to enable the people in the workshops, including yourself...
...to somehow sort of strip away every scrap of purposefulness... from certain selected moments. And the point of it was so that you would then all be able to experience... somehow just pure being. In other words, you were trying to discover what it would be like to live for certain moments... without having any particular thing that you were supposed to be doing. And I think I just simply object to that. I mean, I just don't think I accept the idea that there should be moments... in which you're not trying to do anything. I think, uh, it's our nature, uh, to do things. I think we should do things. I think that, uh, purposefulness... is part of our ineradicable basic human structure. And to say that we ought to be able to live without it... is like saying that, uh, a tree ought to be able to live without branches or roots. But... But actually, without branches or roots, it wouldn't be a tree. I mean, it would just be a log. Do you see what I'm saying? Uh-huh. Uh-huh. I mean, in other words, if I'm sitting at home and I have nothing to do... well, I naturally reach for a book. I mean, what would be so great about just sitting there and, uh, doing nothing? It just seems absurd. And if Debby is there? Well, that's just the same thing. I mean, is there really such a thing as, uh... two people doing nothing but just being together? I mean, would they simply then...
...be, uh, "relating,"
to use the word we're always using?
I mean, what would that mean?
I mean, either we're
gonna have a conversation...
...or we're going to, uh,
carry out the garbage...
...or we're going to do something,
separately or together.
I mean, do you see what I'm saying?
I mean, what does it mean
to just, uh, simply, uh, sit there?
That makes you nervous.
Well, well, why shouldn't it make me nervous?
It just seems ridiculous to me.
That's interesting, Wally.
You know, when I went to Ladakh in western
Tibet and stayed on a farm for a month...
...well, there, you know, when people come over
in the evening for tea, nobody says anything.
Unless there's something to say,
but there almost never is.
So they just sit there and drink their tea,
and it doesn't seem to bother them.
I mean, you see, the trouble, Wally,
with always being active and doing things...
...is that I think it's quite possible
to do all sorts of things...
...and at the same time
be completely dead inside.
I mean, you're doing all these things,
but are you doing them...
...because you really feel
an impulse to do them...
...or are you doing them mechanically,
as we were saying before?
Because I really do believe
that if you're just living mechanically...
...then you have to change your life.
I mean, you know, when you're young,
you go out on dates all the time.
You go dancing or something.
You're floating free.
And then one day suddenly
you find yourself in a relationship...
...and suddenly everything freezes.
And this can be true in your work as well.
And I mean, of course, if you're really alive inside...
...then of course there's no problem.
I mean, if you're living with somebody in one little room...
...and there's a life going on between you and the person you're living with...
...well, then a whole adventure can be going on right in that room.
But there's always the danger that things can go dead.
Then I really do think you have to kind of become a hobo or something, you know...
...like Kerouac, and go out on the road.
I really believe that.
You know, it's not that wonderful to spend your life on the road.
My own overwhelming preference is to stay in that room if you can.
But you know, if you live with somebody for a long time, people are constantly saying...
"Well, of course it's not as great as it used to be, but that's only natural. The first blush of a romance goes, and that's the way it has to be."
Now, I totally disagree with that.
But I do think that you have to constantly ask yourself the question, with total frankness: Is your marriage still a marriage? Is the sacramental element there? Just as you have to ask about the sacramental element in your work... Is it still there? I mean, it's a very frightening thing, Wally, to have to suddenly realize...
...that, my God, I thought I was living my life, but in fact I haven't been a human being. I've been a performer. I haven't been living. I've been acting.
I've... I've acted the role of the father.
I've acted the role of the husband.
I've acted the role of the friend.
I've acted the role of the writer,
or director, or what have you.
I've lived in the same room with this person,
but I haven't really seen them.
I haven't really heard them.
I haven't really been with them.
Yeah, I know some people
are just sometimes...
...uh, existing just side by side.
I mean, uh, the other person's, uh, face
could just turn into a great wolf's face...
...and, uh, it just wouldn't be noticed.
And it wouldn't be noticed, no.
It wouldn't be noticed.
I mean, when I was in Israel
a little while ago...
I mean, I have this picture of Chiquita
that was taken when she...
I always carry it with me. It was taken
when she was about 26 or something.
And it's in summer,
and she's stretched out on a terrace...
...in this sort of old-fashioned long skirt
that's kind of pulled up.
And she's slim and sensual
and beautiful.
And I've always looked at that picture
and just thought about just how sexy she looks.
And then last year in Israel,
I looked at the picture...
...and I realized that that face in the picture
was the saddest face in the world.
That girl at that time was just lost...
...so sad and so alone.
I've been carrying this picture for years
and not ever really seeing what it is, you know.
I just never really
looked at the picture.
And then, at a certain point, I realized I'd
just gone for a good 18 years unable to feel...
...except in the most extreme situations.
I mean, to some extent, I still had the ability to live in my work. That was why I was such a work junkie. That was why I felt that every play that I did was a matter of my life or my death. But in my real life, I was dead. I was a robot.

I mean, I didn't even allow myself to get angry or annoyed. I mean, you know, today Chiquita, Nicolas, Marina...

All day long, as people do, they do things that annoy me and they say things that annoy me. And today I get annoyed. And they say, "Why are you annoyed?" And I say, "Because you're annoying," you know.

And when I allowed myself to consider the possibility...

...of not spending the rest of my life with Chiquita...

I realized that what I wanted most in life was to always be with her. But at that time, I hadn't learned what it would be like to let yourself react...

...to another human being.

And if you can't react to another person...

...then there's no possibility of action or interaction. And if there isn't, I don't really know what the word "love" means...

...except duty, obligation, sentimentality, fear.

I mean...

I don't know about you, Wally, but I...

I just had to put myself into a kind of training program to learn how to be a human being. I mean, how did I feel about anything? I didn't know.

What kind of things did I like? What kind of people did I really want to be with? You know? And the only way that I could think of to find out...
...was to just cut out all the noise
and stop performing all the time...
...and just listen to what was inside me.
See, I think a time comes
when you need to do that.
Now, maybe in order to do it,
you have to go to the Sahara...
...and maybe you can do it at home.
But you need to cut out the noise.
Yeah. Of course, personally,
I- I just, uh...
I usually don't, uh...
like those quiet moments, you know.
I really don't.
I mean, uh, I don't know if
it's that, uh, Freudian thing or what...
But, uh, you know, the fear
of unconscious impulses...
...or my own aggression
or whatever, but, uh...
...if things get too quiet, and I find myself
just, uh, sitting there...
...you know,
as we were saying before...
I mean, whether I'm by myself,
or-or I'm-I'm with someone else...
I just, uh...
I just have this feeling of...
...uh, my God,
I'm going to be revealed.
In other words, I'm adequate
to do any sort of a task, um...
...but I'm not adequate, uh,
just to... To be a human being.
I mean, in other words, I'm not, uh...
If I'm just, uh, trapped there
and I'm not allowed to do things...
...but all I can do is just,
um, be there...
...well, I'll just fail.
I mean, in other words, uh...
I can pass any other sort of a test...
...and, you know, I can even get an " A"
if I put in the required effort...
...but I just don't, uh...
I just don't have a clue
how to pass this test.
I mean... I mean, of course,
I realize this isn't a test...
...but, um, I see it as a test...
...and I feel I'm going to fail it.
I mean, it's... it's very scary.
I just feel, uh, just totally at sea.
I mean...
Well, you know,
I could imagine a life, Wally...
...in which each day would become
an incredible, monumental, creative task...
...and we're not necessarily up to it.
I mean, if you felt like walking out
on the person you live with, you'd walk out.
Then if you felt like it,
you'd come back.
But meanwhile, the other person
would have reacted to your walking out.
It would be a life of such feeling.
I mean, what was amazing
in the workshops I led...
...was how quickly people seemed
to fall into enthusiasm...
...celebration, joy, wonder,
abandon, wildness, tenderness.
Could we stand to live like that?
Yeah, I think it's that moment of contact
with another person.
I mean, that's what scares us.
I mean, that moment of being
face to face with another person.
I mean, now...
You wouldn't think it would be so frightening.
It's strange that we find it so frightening.
Well, it isn't that strange.
I mean, first of all, there are some
pretty good reasons for being frightened.
I mean, you know, the human being
is a complex and dangerous creature.
I mean, really,
if you start living each moment?
Christ, that's quite a challenge.
I mean, if you really reach out and you're really in touch with the other person...
...well, that really is something
to strive for, I think, I really do.
Yeah, it's just so pathetic
if one doesn't do that.
Of course there's a problem, because the closer
you come, I think, to another human being...
...the more completely mysterious...
and unreachable...
...that person becomes.
I mean, you know, you have to reach out,
you have to go back and forth with them...
...and you have to relate, and yet you're relating to a ghost or something.
I don't know,
because we're ghosts.
We're phantoms.
Who are we?
And that's to face, to confront the fact
that you're completely alone.
And to accept that you're alone
is to accept death.
You mean, because somehow when you are alone, you're alone with death.
I mean, nothing's obstructing your view of it, or something like that.
Right.
You know, if I understood it correctly,
I think, uh, Heidegger said...
...that, uh, if you were to experience your own being to the full...
...you'd be experiencing the decay of that being toward death...
...as a part of your experience.
You know, in the sexual act there's that moment of complete forgetting...
...which is so incredible.
Then in the next moment,
you start to think about things:
...work on the play,
what you've got to do tomorrow.
I don't know if this is true of you,
but I think it must be quite common. 
The world comes in quite fast. 
Now, that again may be because we're 
afraid to stay in that place of forgetting... 
...because that, again, is close to death. 
Like people 
who are afraid to go to sleep. 
In other words, you interrelate, and you 
don't know what the next moment will bring. 
And to not know 
what the next moment will bring... 
...brings you closer 
to a perception of death. 
You see, that's why I think 
that people have affairs. 
I mean, you know, in the theater, 
if you get good reviews... 
...you feel for a moment 
that you've got your hands on something. 
You know what I mean? 
I mean, it's a good feeling. 
But then that feeling goes quite quickly. 
And once again you don't know 
quite what you should do next. 
What'll happen? 
Well, have an affair, 
and up to a certain point... 
...you can really feel 
that you're on firm ground, you know. 
There's a sexual conquest to be made. 
There are different questions. 
Does she enjoy the ears being nibbled? 
How intensely can you talk about Schopenhauer 
at some elegant French restaurant? 
Whatever nonsense it is. 
It's all, I think, to give you the semblance 
that there's firm earth. 
Well, have a real relationship 
with a person that goes on for years... 
That's completely unpredictable. 
Then you've cut off all your ties to the land, 
and you're sailing into the unknown... 
...into uncharted seas. 
I mean, you know, people hold on to these
images of father, mother, husband, wife...
...again for the same reason...
'cause they seem to provide
some firm ground.
But there's no wife there.
What does that mean?
A wife.
A husband. A son.
A baby holds your hands...
...and then suddenly there's this huge man
lifting you off the ground...
...and then he's gone.
Where's that son?
All the other customers
seemed to have left hours ago.
We got the bill,
and Andr paid for our dinner.
Really?
I treated myself to a taxi.
I rode home through the city streets.
There wasn't a street,
there wasn't a building...
...that wasn't connected
to some memory in my mind.
There, I was buying a suit
with my father.
There, I was having
an ice cream soda after school.
When I finally came in,
Debby was home from work...
...and I told her everything
about my dinner with Andr.