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INTERVIEWER: Jacqueline Contré  
CAMERA OPERATOR: Dean Whiskens  
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Q: What's your background?

FR: I was born in **Salford** after the war. I was born in **Salford**. My father was a doctor in the community there. This was before the NHS was actually put in. I grew up on a working class community as a middle class Jewish girl really, who played with working class people all the time and spoke to them every day and sat with them in the kitchen on their knee while they had a cup of tea. It was before the health service and they would bring in chickens. **Salford** was very different. When you woke up in the morning you heard cocks crowing and things in those days. It was a major industrial town with people working and very poor and kids without shoes, I remember post-war. I grew up in a working-class area, which I think is the beginning of a thread towards what I did. I obviously just felt that that was an ordinary home, but it was also a very, well post-war once the health service came in... They stopped bringing my dad chickens and things, and came in and asked for prescriptions for cotton wool, because people had been so screwed over and their health had been so threatened that once they didn't have to pay for any health, they didn't bring the bottles or whatever it was or the chickens or the eggs or the things that were all being grown and bred in the back streets of **Salford**, as people had to live. So I went through that time to Manchester High School for Girls, which was a middle class girls' school, which hated me and which I really rather hated. It suppose it was a big contrast because you had to go all the way to Didsbury from **Salford** to go to Manchester High School for Girls. I suppose I grew up like a lot of people did, between the contradictions of those class relations. I've never said it like that before; that sounds a bit doctrinaire. But I suppose it was like that. I remember when I was at school in Willington, not Didsbury, what happened to the working-class girls in that school is that they were very much discriminated against. I remember I was their friend and I remember them standing in Platfield's Park, one of them, and telling me how awful it as at the school because people

were so prejudiced against her because of her class, and thought she was stupid. I knew perfectly well there was nothing stupid about her, but that was the sort of perception. My perceptions were affected very strongly by that sort of growing up, and I went and taught in a school before I went to university, I went and taught in a school right down in the depths of **Salford** behind where we lived on Broad Street. I remember there being small children who couldn't talk, a school with working class kids, some of kids couldn't even speak, and they had no shoes. In the mid to late '50s there were children in **Salford** going to school without shoes. The reason they couldn't talk was not because their parents were bad, but because the poverty was so extreme and their parents had no time to properly look after those children. I remember how distraught the teachers were; I was a teaching assistant. I remember how distraught the teachers were about that. It was ghastly actually, but also you saw courage there and you saw existence and determination and you also saw this disgusting, which was of course being resolved because they brought the NHS in. I thought, as other people did, that the changes after the war, because they knew the working class had learned to hold a gun, you know the song, and that if they hadn't done that everybody would've gone to Soviet Russia, because they had all those health services in the Soviet Union. So those were really strong early influences, and lots of theatre. I went to Stratford on Avon and went to the theatre in Manchester. My parents made sure I had all that education in theatre. I always thought of theatre for a long time as something you watched, didn't take part in. Manchester Library Theatre, David Scase, all of those early repertory theatre builders – I went through that, went to workshops at Library Theatre as a kid. What your question made me think of in relation to Banner is I wouldn't normally narrate it like this I don't suppose, but the sort of mixture of things going on in my childhood. My parents were very strong because, like all parents, they had tremendous faults, but they never for one moment told me that as a Jew I had to fear the Holocaust. Lots of my friends were brought up in terror of the Holocaust. Their parents would say to them, don't trust the English. There was anti-Semitism around us all the time, but in fact I was never told to fear the Holocaust or to expect another one. So my parents never gave me a fear of the Holocaust, for which I'm endlessly thankful. I saw the terrible distorting effect of it and I still see it, well I see it in Israel now. ? Zionist ? and of course there were kind of, I think Manchester High was anti-Semitic. My friend Gillian, who I still know, said to me, didn't you notice how anti-Semitic the school was? I didn't. I think that was probably an indicator of how I'd not been endlessly warned about people hating

Jews, so I never assumed that they did. I remember one day at school somebody did say something anti-Semitic and I went home and burst into tears. I was quite young. I asked my father and he explained it very nicely to me without creating any more fear. So I kind of grew up with a sense of hating racism, being against racism, but also not being scared of it personally. Hating racism, actually my father was South African and I went to South Africa at the age of four, and at the age of 15 I realized I was a racist, and I must have picked it up there. I went back there again and saw it and had to start to work out how to get rid of it. But of course it's not the only place in society where you pick up racism. But because he'd grown up in South Africa he had certain classic prejudices about black people, which he was not vicious about but which was sort of automatic. He was a very good doctor who was absolutely loved by the whole community, which was largely white then of course, at the end of the '60s. So I did realize I was racist when I was about 15 or 16 and just worked on it and thought about it and tried to understand it. But for white people to get rid of racism is a very long process and it may never go, I don't know, I can never work it out. But certainly that's where that awareness came. I'm saying this because I'm thinking about why I did political theatre, because I didn't do political theatre straight away.

Q: What did you do after being a teaching assistant?

FR: I went to university, Bevery College, London in the early '60s and did English and was actually quite disillusioned by it. I thought the way they were teaching it was wrong, and explained this to them in some detail. For example, if someone asked you to read Chaucer and write an essay on it in two weeks, it's not a mythology. It's a frantic reading of Chaucer in Middle English – I studied Middle English and Early English – at top speed and then writing an essay on it. I remember going to my teacher saying, I'm not doing this because you can't read Chaucer and write an essay on it in two weeks. I discovered cultural studies, the beginnings of culture studies. I said, what about the cultural and political implications of Chaucer? How do you do that in two weeks? I'm not doing it. I got a low second. I remember the teacher saying to me, you should've got a 2 one. I said, then why don't you give it to me? Why didn't you just give me a 2 one in that case? If I was worth it, why didn't I get it? I snorted off. But in those days it didn't matter what degree you had, it didn't make any difference; you just went off and did things. So I went off and eventually did various jobs.

Went to Rodder, did stage management, because I did love the theatre and I had been taken to Stratford from the age of about eight. Eventually after messing about a bit I went to South Africa, then was horrified by it and loved it at the same time. In 1986 I went back to South Africa and saw it, when to Rhodesia and saw Victoria Falls, and decided I would never go back there again ever, because it was still apartheid. My relatives were all involved in it one way or another, whether against or for it. One of my relatives in Durbin continually got families in as servants and then educated their children. Others were less charitable whom I felt were died in the wool racists, grim racists with a kraal, do you know what a kraal is? A village full of Zulus and beautifully painted walls. So I swore I'd never go back to Africa, and slowly progressed my way into the Royal Court Theatre where I worked with Bill Gasgow and a whole lot of brilliant alternative directors at the time who were bullies. Bill Gasgow was a very nasty man. I was a female assistant stage manager and two things happened. One is that I got bullied and the other is that I saw some of the best directors ever: Peter Gill, Bill Gasgow, and others. I saw some of the best actors working and some of the young actors like Malcolm Teeny and all that lot, Corine Redgrave, they were all there then. They all became ?. They all went into the WRP and were in equity as a kind of resistance group, which I was in continual conflict with – we were, not just me. But that was an amazing experience. Marianne Faithful was on stage in a play called Early Morning by Edward Bond, which was an extraordinary play. Edward Bond has never been bettered, and as the Royal Court went on it stopped doing such highly political, difficult experimental stuff. Anyway, I was eventually fired from the Royal Court for being insufficiently subordinate. I had been very quiet and rather shy, but when Gasgow tried to bully me I didn't respond, I just carried on doing my job. I was accused of being insufficiently subordinate, yes, and went on to the Open Space Theatre with a man called Charles Marowitz, who was one of the leftie mad experimental directors of the time who was running a theatre on Topencourt Road called the Open Space Theatre. It was amazing and I should never have left. He handed the stage management assistancy of the theatre over to me. I saw some extraordinary stuff; I can't remember what they were but I do remember they were remarkable. I should've stayed with him instead of going on to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, which I'd always wanted to do, with Roy Dotrice in that play where a lot of things fell over; it was quite a famous play. It was a monolog with enormous set at the Aldrich Theatre. The set was so gigantic that at one point the entire ceiling came down and formed another stage with this one guy performing.

He was famous, Roy Dotrice. Anyway, I then went on to Stratford and assistant stage managed at Stratford, and there I began to see what was going on in the theatre. I was actually bullied by the directors: Terry Hans, not bullied by Trevor Nun. . . But I was bullied. The idea that as a young stage manager or assistant stage manager you might be a creative being was kind of stamped on. What I was allowed to do, I watched the production I was on, Pericles, which I thought was terrible. I remember sitting on the book in that, the prompt book, shocked rigid by it because I thought it was so ridiculous. Eventually he tried to fire me and failed, the union stopped him. He demoted me to props, which was fortunate in a way, but by that time the actors thought I was stupid. The reason why I was so shocked by the production was that all the performers had to wear nappies, great big nappies, because in Pericles's time of course they wore nappies. This was utterly ludicrous. So on the first night I went in, all the nappies were falling off at dress rehearsal. So I went out and bought some safety pins and went in with the safety pins, and the actors realized I was really intelligent. So at that point I began to learn from the actors, because they started talking to me. I'd give them a safety pin and they would go, oh, absolutely brilliant. It was one of those crazy moments in life. The reason I'm going on about this is that the people I learnt from in theatre were actors, not directors. I learned something from Trevor Nun. In fact, when they fired me from Stratford. They were ready to start a strike in Australia as the assistant stage manager, supported by all the centre actors in the company, and they fired me, unfortunately. Trevor gave me a very good reference when I left, because I'd done quite a good job, I'd been perfectly decent as a stage manager. But it was an amazing experience at the Royal Court and Royal Shakespeare. I got to talk to the most famous actors at the time. ? I worked on. Twelfth Night, I sat on that book for Twelfth Night for a year and a half. I went to Australia, I sat with Donaldson, all the best actors at the time, Brenda Bruce, ? James he's now dead, Derrick Smith, and I learnt everything from them. I learnt very little from the directors and I would learn I think even less now because of the sort of over crunching of ideas in theatre. So I got fired from the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and thought, sod this, and set up a company of my own. I remember meeting just near the Ulrich Theatre at the Opera Tavern with Graham, who you know, and Sue, and we started a company and opened it at the Landflag Pub in Covent Garden. Eventually we called it Recreation Ground. We were looking around trying to work out its name, and we looked through the ages out of London and I said, oh let's call it Recreation Ground, so we called it Recreation Ground. We started there and did, it's all on

unfinished histories on the internet. We did our own work, we brought in directors, actors, new writers and started doing stuff. I worked in the basement theatre as well and started just directing and directing and directing.

Q: What year was that?

FR: That was 1971, I'd have to check the dates again, '71, '72, '73. Then eventually we applied for funding and got funding to go on tour, and we started doing political theatre. This is one of the questions you're going to ask – what drove people into doing political theatre. At that time there had been upsurges going on with miners and it was quite inspiring. Also at that point I met Charlie and started organizing independent fringe theatre, it was called then, into equity of the union. It was an ultra-right-wing union with a fascist leadership, some of which took their holidays in South Africa. Gosh, Nigel Davenport, Mary Scoring, ultra-right-wing actors. It's funny because equity had been quite left then it was set up in the '30s, as I understand it. Anyway, they were fascists basically. As we began to organize independent theatre into them it came out very clear they thought we were a bunch of rattle and shine boring stupid bits and pieces, and we were not. There was a bigger and bigger movement of independent theatre, part of which was Banner of course. We had an organization called TACT, The Association of Community Theatres. I've got a lot of documentation on that. Set it up with other people, a man called Bruce Birch who died, and various other people. It was very collective. A highly collective organization, the Association of Community Theatre, which eventually set up the Independent Theatre Council, which when we had unionized everybody became the negotiating body, which is still the negotiating body that equity works with. So we fought this, fought fascism. That was what was interesting if you sort of talk about political theatre, there was a big fascist movement in the '70s and the political artists all jumped up to fight it. There were big demonstrations against fascism, and rock against racism started later in the decade. I can't remember all the details of it but we were very active in my company, Recreation Ground, once we extracted ourselves from ? theatre, which had been fantastic, I met so many people. Went on tour around the countryside with political antifascist plays, funded by the arts council. What was interesting about the arts council then was I remember a woman called Sue Timothy who's still around, going to see her and explaining what we were going to do. We didn't say, oh we're going to do jolly little plays for the

working class. I seem to remember saying we would do antifascist plays, and it was fine, they gave us money and we set off on the road and did antifascist plays. The early ones were absolute rubbish. They were very antifascist but we based them on communities, we talked to people and we took them into working class communities. The movement of political theatre then was going into working class communities, was refusing to go to mainstream theatre or didn't go – some did, some didn't. Big ones like 784 and all that lot went to the working-class communities, they went into big theatres. We went into working men's clubs and all the rest. There were debates and arguments, we had these organizations, we'd meet and argue and write contracts and have sets of ethics, which I've still got in lists. It was very exciting and quite dangerous, because we were chased by the national front. When the arts council eventually realized exactly what we were doing, they did cut us off. They must've cut us off in '75. There was a big fight over it, because they cut off other people as well. They eventually began to close down. We'd had a long period of fighting through the union to get the funding, to hold the funding, and to write contracts for it. By '75 we had done that to a huge extent and the arts council began to turn around and withdraw money. We ended up doing really good antifascist theatre for children in schools – very strong. The early stuff we did was very agitprop and as you went on it became quite complexly humorous, anti-capitalist, antifascist, funny and for children. Interestingly enough, there was no question about whether or not we could go to schools to go it, because the atmosphere in the country was resistant to fascism, was fighting it. There were blatant big demonstrations by fascist busters, so I suppose that's why it was easy to go into the schools and be paid the equity minimum wage. I remember one teacher saying to me, Frances, I want to ask you a favor. I said, what is it? This was an antifascist play but I got the script, it's really funny and antifascist. At the end of it the antifascist young girl hero of the play puts a cream puff onto the face of the fascist to stop the audience from attacking him actually. She said, could you do me a favor? I said, what? She said, don't say knickers. It was a school, they didn't want us to say knickers. I thought she was going to say, don't say fascist or don't say capitalist. No, it was don't say knickers. So we went through all that and we did eventually get cut off after a terrific fight to keep the money. Then everything sort of subsided, but we were all so knackered actually. It was after that, it was during that time that I met Charlie. Charlie came to the Association of Community Theatres, we talked a great deal. I was deeply impressed by him, as people always were of course. We became friends. He helped to organize loads and

loads of talking and discussing and debating. Eventually he invited me to join Banner, and I accepted. Then when I got there I realized that he hadn't exactly asked Banner. That's what it looked like, as if I'd sort of been produced for it. I realized that some of the people who I still know were not happy to see me.

Q: When was that?

FR: 1979.

Q: So you started with Banner in 1979.

FR: I'd had quite a lot of discussing with Charlie before that.

Q: This is the recording of Frances Rifkin in my house. I'm Jacqueline and we're recording with Dean on camera.

Q: So you came into Banner, and it wasn't organized in a way that would facilitate your arrival.

FR: Well I came in and there was the big group. I can't remember all this. As I recall, I was asked by Charlie – and maybe by others but I'm not sure that's true. I don't know quite how it happened, maybe I knew at the time and I can't remember now – to come in and help professionalize the central group of six. I also directed the motor trade show; I think that was the first thing I did.

Q: So you were asked to organize a group of six?

FR: Well there was a group of six that decided that they would be professional out of the main group. As I understood it, the reason I came as a professional director with a lot of experience in political theatre was to professionalize it, because it would work fulltime and the other group couldn't. So there were the two groups operating. I don't know if before that, I can't remember what the relationship was like before that, but it is mentioned that there was



a group doing more fulltime work before that moment, but I don't know the history of it; Dave or somebody will know that.

Q: Who were they?

FR: Dave, Chris, I can't remember.

Q: Pete?

FR: Pete.

Q: Bernard?

FR: Yes. Dave, Chris, Pete, Bernard, Charlie was in it. It would be easy to find out because of your programs. They must have been kept.

Q: Programs didn't always mention who was in the productions.

FR: Of course not, because it was a collective so didn't mention anything. That's right. Anyway, it was a strange little professional group and I think they got quite a shock when I started directing them, because I was very sort of rigorous about it. But actually what happened, I'm trying to work out what order things were in. I did direct the motor trade show and I can't remember exactly when.

Q: The Housing Game was a show that happened in 1979, the year that you joined, but I don't know whether that was before. You joined in August, I found. The motor trade show was after that. It was called On the Brink.

FR: Oh yes, I definitely directed that.

Q: And Steel was also...

FR: Yes, that was mine.

Q: So you don't remember The Housing Game?

FR: I remember it, but I think it was already on when I arrived. I was sent to Corby with Pete.

Q: What was the first show you directed?

FR: I went to Corby with. . . I certainly didn't do the Great Divide. If I could see a video of The Housing Game I'd remember whether I directed it or not. I remember the show. I did direct it.

Q: So The Housing Game would've been the first.

FR: Yes, I think so. I've got a picture in my mind of directing something, and that was the main group.

Q: The Housing Game wasn't the main group, was it?

FR: Yes, wasn't it?

Q: No, I don't think so. Chris was in The Housing Game, so we could ask her.

FR: Yes, check it. I'm pretty sure that it wasn't, oh maybe it was. I was then sort of sent hastily, because I had realized that I wasn't particularly welcome, because it was seen as an imposition or major change. I was actually ? the way the actuality was used. Yes, I think I directed The Housing Game because I remember it was already set up, The Housing Game, I just put it together as a show. I thought the actuality was used as sort of illustration, not as dialog, not as drama or theatre, but as documentary with a very old-fashioned documentary form, as if there was a truth in it in a way. I don't think Charlie did think that actually, I don't think he did. So information presented in parallel with the action. I'd have to see a video of

the show. But I remember that the actuality was used as sort of speeches, not as interactive dialog. The documentary notion of it was that it was documentary and therefore in some sense factual in its own right though not necessarily true from all points of view. I know of course that Banner was a political theatre company doing work that challenged the dominant views of what was going on at work. The actuality was not meant to be ultimate truth, it was meant to be the truth of the working class, the truth of that particular person, which I agree with. But as I remember, if you look at the videos of old shows, the actuality is used in a very I thought quite dead way, not as energy producing but as fact. Do you know what I mean? Does that make sense? But then I seem to remember being shot off to Corby because nobody wanted to go. The people who were sent there were Pete and me, because Pete was relatively new in the company so they could easily send us to Corby. It was a total revelation, it was the most amazing thing. We were supposed to go there, collect actuality, come back and write a show, a show that eventually took two years. Late 1980 it was, yes that's right. What we did was when we started doing the recording we realized that we'd been sort of parachuted into the middle of a community in total upheaval with strong trade unions in it. I've got a load of stuff written about it, with rows and conflicts and unity and all sorts of stuff. What I can say about it is nowhere near as coherent as what's written in here. In fact, the more I think about this the more incoherent I become, because structurally speaking it was, its overall structure was quite clear but the internal structure of it was very complex, and that's what I learned. That's where I learned that actuality isn't just people talking. We found ourselves dropped by a guy called Keith Jones, who was the union organizer, into the middle of this maelstrom of stuff. We started talking to people, so all the tensions about what you should and shouldn't ask, who you're talking to; whether you can talk to the blast furnace workers, which we couldn't, because they wanted to close the works down – all of that stuff was surrounding the actuality work. Then when you got into the actuality work you just had all these different complex people, different positions, and united positions. It's really very difficult to talk about because... and male dominated of course, because it was the steelworks. Pete was brilliant. Pete was brilliant, and the pair of us together managed to develop a kind of technique and approach which was completely immersive. ? as I say get back there by Christmas and do a show and we said that we couldn't. So we did a piece of street theatre called The Great Corbini, which was about defeat obviously of the management there by the workers. I think there's a film of that somewhere, I hope there is, maybe there isn't; there's a

script somewhere. That was outrageous. We did it in the middle of the market square. Of course it sparked arguments, debates, disagreements – we just were completely sort of transformed by it really. This poem I read to you a minute ago or asked you to look at, that notion that your eyes had been closed until that point, and I had been doing political theatre for years. But actually listening to the actuality, listening without interrupting – because I did Charlie’s technique, which I took as a very uninterrupted technique. When you start at the beginning with somebody you try to get them talking and then you begin to find out what their actual span is, what they want to talk about. I remember talking to one guy who was a steelworker and we ended up on the wheat fields of Canada in a great big mowing machine traversing the wheat fields, and eventually ended up in Corby. So you’ve got these epic stories which came down to the struggle, and that made me feel more and more that the way the actuality had been used, and I’m not saying the Steel show isn’t brilliant, I look back at it now and go good heavens. Nevertheless, you sort of thought, gosh the actuality spans life in a very complex and interesting way, which is not just about narration, using it was a form of documentary of that particular kind. I’m looking at this because this will spark off, yes the other thing that taught me was attitudes to notions of the working class and struggle, the way people can be minimalized into their struggle so all you talk to them about is their struggle. Actually what they are is full three dimensional ten dimensional people, and that has never left me. It’s the notion that you define somebody by their suffering or by what their opposing – it’s Marxist actually. I’m a Marxist but that realized through art has got to be thought and rethought. It took me a long time to rethink it because I was very much into the dialectical oppositional thing. I had done comic antifascist shows which had been about triumph, not about suffering, about winning. But that listening to the actuality and the complexity of that forced one to look. That was where cultural studies was going of course, and Charlie had been in touch with a lot of those cultural studies people when he did his recording work. Let me just have a look. Yes because going to Corby as somebody who’d been doing productions and finding ourselves parachuted into this community, we were given a place to live by council. We were in the arts centre, you remember Brian Bloomer and Mary Ellen? We became part of their arts centre. We were given an enormous history of the steel industry and specifically in Corby, by Jim McDonald, who was one of the main people there. He was one of the trade union leaders there in the strip mills.

Q: Did you have people like Renata there at the beginning?

FR: Yes Renata was there; I'd forgotten that she was there lots of the time, and she was really good. This is the danger in Banner, is that the eclipsed people don't get mentioned. Pete was an intensely brilliant practitioner in a multiple way, so it was through him and through Banner that we not only went in there and did a recording project with Renata too, but we also were there to take song evenings in and do all sorts of things as a cultural group in the town around the struggle. Pete was absolutely key in that.

Q: What were his roles?

FR: He did the recording, well both of us had apparent roles of collecting actuality, but we ended up in dozens, it's all in this article, in many kind of social and political situations which we couldn't have predicted. If we'd done the classic Charlie process it would've meant going there, collecting a set of recordings, and not knowing quite when to stop. That was one of the problems, knowing when to stop, because nothing was happening, there was no conclusion to anything. I did a show last year at the Serpentine with a bunch of refugees who I work with there, and I realized I learnt from that situation in Corby. As we put this show together I realized I didn't know how to finish it. It was a big participatory show with performers and the audience onstage all the time being drawn into the performance and then taken out of it again. I realized I didn't know how to finish the show, because there wasn't an end of any kind to anything. I think now it must have come back to me from Corby that if you don't know how to finish it then don't finish it. I didn't think that at the time. We did wait in putting the show together, and I think we were right to do that, we did wait until there was some way of doing a complete piece of work but also of collecting all of the information, knowledge, talking, histories, lives in that process, none of which, very little of which was actually used. It's all in the archive and there's an amazing picture of the city at that time of crisis in that archive. If anybody ever wanted to dare to try to get into it, dare – absolutely terrifying really to do. I think I lost track. What did you ask me?

Q: About the people who were involved.

FR: Yes, Pete and Renata.

Q: Was Bart involved as well?

FR: Yes, Bart was involved. I think he recorded.

Q: Did he perform in The Great Corbini?

FR: Yes he did.

Q: The Great Corbini was a piece of street theatre that preceded the play. How long was it?

FR: Twenty minutes.

Q: I remember seeing that.

FR: You came and saw it? It was quite good.

Q: It was very entertaining. It was quite big.

FR: It was quite big, it was huge. It had a monster being confronted by, a heroic monster really. Pete was in it, I wasn't in it. . . . What we should probably do is meet and reconstruct it.

Q: How were you and Pete funded?

FR: I was paid by Banner.

Q: Do you know where Banner got the money from?

FR: No, I can't remember. Maybe it was arts council, I think it probably was the arts council. Oh yes, the arts council funded Charlie until he died and then they funded us. They were

funding Charlie and then by about 1985 they realized what they were funding, and pulled it or tried to pull it and did project funding on it.

Q: Could you tell us about the work on the slides for Steel, because that was also a departure.

FR: Was it? In what sense?

Q: You used several screens.

FR: That's right, we used two screens. I remember that, Charlie did the slides. Charlie did then.

Q: Not Pete?

FR: Charlie and Pete.

Q: Do you remember much about the work on the slides for that show?

FR: I do remember that we agreed that the slides would fill gaps, not narrate, not illustrate. I felt very strongly about that, just as I felt extremely strongly about the way actuality had been used. What was done with the Steel show was we created dialog out of the actuality. We used the recorded voiceover but basically all of the dialog was taken from the actuality and from the scenes and situations described by the steel workers. The pictures, it was one screen on top of another with contradictory pictures on it, and as I recall they were not illustrations at all, they were associative, which meant they must be there, those slides must be still in the archive. They would draw in associative stuff, for example the Russian Revolution. I don't know whether we literally used it but we would've used stuff which would be in contrast with, would enhance, would give another layer to what was going on on stage. It was actually, as I remember, I rather liked it, what we'd done. That was done as a, we had a real struggle over it, because Banner didn't like it. There was a sense in Banner of having broken, particularly as far as the main group. See the problem I think the main group had once that other group came in and the main group did its shows was that the focus changed and there

was a stronger group. I wasn't aware of all this happening but I just know that I was not liked and was not welcome. You would talk to people, Kevin, I don't think they particularly wanted me there. Some of them wanted me more than others, I never found out which were... Chris certainly didn't like it. Chris wasn't in the central group, she wasn't in the professional group, not in the end anyway, and then they split up. All this was going on in the background as well. But they didn't like me and I remember the first performance in Birmingham, the first performance of that show, which I think was at the Grey Cock. They all came in ready for it to be a disaster; they were absolutely looking forward to it. And it wasn't, it was rather good. At the end of it they were thrilled to bits with it, or very pleased, and they came up and thanked me for it. That was the first time that most of those people had spoken to me really in any way.

Q: Who's they?

FR: I can't remember all the names. I will know them if I see them and they will know me, and we will recall versions of that situation. But the main group, the people you've been talking to, were all ready for it to fail, because they really disapproved of my having been asked in. On reflection, they probably didn't much like the idea of there being a central group doing the work. Probably they didn't like it, but because Charlie's word was law, because Dave was powerful, etc., it was done. I'm only guessing and I'm not saying this in a critical sense, I realize how much I really didn't know. But I did know that I was not particularly wanted by quite a lot of people, and that when that show worked it changed.

Q: Were you working with ? Steel the whole time you were in Corby?

FR: Yes we were working, and what was interesting there was that we wouldn't get away with it now. Banner got away with it, probably because of Charlie even then, is that we took three times longer to do the show than we were supposed to, but nobody said a dicky bird as far as I know. People wondered what on earth we were up to and why it was taking so long I'm sure, but actually we got away with it because Charlie was the overarching figure. The arts councils loved him because he was so famous and he was so brilliant. I remember watching him doing the slides, and he was extraordinary, a great genius actually.



Q: Did Dave Rogers write the songs?

FR: He did write the songs.

Q: Who performed in the show?

FR: It was the central group. If you look at the film, there is a film of that – Dave, Pete, I haven't got it down here. Was Renata in it? No she wasn't. Whoever was in that central group, we need to check it out before I leave if we can. Dave and Pete,

Q: I can't remember. I know there's a video somewhere.

FR: There is, I've got one at home.

Q: Do you know when the first performance was?

FR: I think it was at the end of 1980.

Q: At the same time Steel was going on, Pete got involved in the Handsworth Project.

FR: Yes, and I was in the Handsworth Project. I can't hardly remember anything about it. Mamie was in it, and she might remember all that stuff. But we did a lot of work. An HS street show, On the Brink, the future of British ?, and that was a big group, a main group show.

Q: You directed that.

FR: Yes.

Q: So you didn't direct any of the Handsworth?

FR: I did.

Q: What did you direct?

FR: I can't remember. Once the miners' strike started, we didn't do big shows in the miners' strike, that sort of slipped. We were doing lots of performances and rushing around the country recording, but as far as the miners' strike was concerned we didn't do a show about the miners as such. But all those things like Songs of Struggle, cabaret experiences of the mining community, that went all over the place. It went to Northern Ireland, it went all over the place. But there was a set of shows which I've got on the list here which I was involved in, and I can't remember much about them. It's extraordinary but I've done so much stuff since: an HS street show, Put People First show, do you remember the Put People First show? Women at Work, Celebration, Songs of Struggle, 1988 Little Red Mole; 1989 The Reign of Pig's Pudding, now that was a big show, I remember that very well.

Q: Did you record that?

FR: Yes, it's videoed. 1990 Rock & Roll Jordan. . . I'll switch it off. . . Is the camera still going? . . . I didn't realize I was involved until that late.

Q: It says in one of the minutes that you left in 1988, but I think you came back to do the Reign of Pig's Pudding. Chris Johnson actually wrote that.

FR: That's right, who's now dead.

Q: I don't think you were involved in Rock & Roll Jordan.

FR: Possibly not. That was when Dave Dale played with Dave Rogers and that's where I just love Dave Dale. He was irresponsible but he was always there when needed him in performance, he was there on the edge of the ?. Dave was like that in performance and you had to realize as you were directing the pair that Dave Rogers found it very difficult to perform a script, Dave Dale flew at it. Eventually after the summer holiday when Dave

Rogers came back he learnt it, because it had to sink in. So what you had with Dave Dale and Dave Rogers were almost opposites in the performance scale. Dave Dale would never fix on anything but would be there on the pinpoint doing it. Dave Rogers would slowly work his way towards it, deeply resenting having to do it at all, but I think he probably enjoyed performing it in the end, I hope; I could ask him. Totally oppose processes. What I want to say to you about Dale is that working with him in that show, once one realized you could trust him to be there, was an absolute pleasure, one of the most lovely performers I've ever worked with actually.

Q: Any other memories that you have of Pig's Pudding?

FR: Pig's Pudding? Dave didn't like it, Chris as I remember it, they didn't get on. I think the notion that you did that kind of offended Dave. I'd love to talk to him about it at some point. He was not happy, because it was not what he usually did. Well you could see what happened next, that the one side left and Pete wasn't there anymore and everything went back to whatever it was really. That was the biggest departure that we did. We didn't have sides, we performed in the round and we went around the communities all over the place. It went very well and was really enjoyed. It was rather a nice piece of theatre actually. Chris Johnson was a good writer and he really picked up on the metaphor of the two people walking in partnership through the countryside, one of them rather rightish and one rather leftish, and the things that happened to them. The audiences really enjoyed. I remember going up to the communities above Sheffield. They would all go out for dinner and come to the show in lovely smart clothes, which made me realize how out of touch Jeremy Corbyn is with how working people like to be when they're not at work. They treated it as a great evening out, and I was particularly moved and instructed by the fact that the self respect and determination to live and enjoy in spite of disappearance of the pits. I remember through all that recording time the complex relationship the people had with their work. When they decided they didn't want the pits to close they were ? down the pits, ? their children down the pits. They all said, as the Welsh miners did, we don't want our children to go down in the pits. We want them to have a job, and if they'll make sure we have jobs we'll be perfectly happy. Which links up to now and the crap that's being thrown at people for voting for Brexit. I don't agree with them, but that rage was so enormous. Pig's Pudding was very different from the other Banner

shows in that it did act as a kind of evening out of a very different kind from what we usually did. When we went out and took the shows around, the actuality, although they were dramatized when I was doing them around those communities, people were coming with their drinks to sit at the tables. I remember the Steel show up in the northeast, we played just near that big steelworks. They all came into the show. This was not like Pig's Pudding. They sat down and watched the sides and show and they'd be going, oh there's me, I'm in that picture. They talked their way through the show, and they chatted and chatted to the actors. I remember the actors eventually chatting back, because the normal theatre relationship was never there and it certainly wasn't there then. It was like a dialog with a community. I remember that performance particularly. We'd done a lot of the research and a lot of the pictures had come from the northeast and the people walking down as well, and they even recognized, I don't know if they recognized the people on the pictures of people walking down to Corby, but they knew the stories. When all the stuff about we walked to Corby in 1932 came up it was like the most extraordinary resonance. That relationship with the audiences was what taught me more and more about audience relationships. I'd learned a lot in Recreation Ground but in Banner using the words, working with the words, the idioms of the people in the audience, was ultimately powerful. If you put it into dialog it still worked very well. You didn't have to just simply put it up as a kind of set of statements. You realized that they understood it better than we did, and that was really fascinating. When we're with the Steel show again performing to working class communities and steelmaking communities and getting loads of laughs at places which I hadn't realized were funny or particularly pointed, and you took it into Birmingham where the trades club even, much more middle class or much more insulated against that, and you didn't get the laughs. You got interest and fascination, but no laughs. I remember thinking about, this is what Charlie taught me and what the whole process taught me and what I always feared the company hadn't really learnt is this multi-dimensional nature of talk, of speech, the complexity, the class nature of it, and how that is not just a question of one lot speaking better than the other. It's brought me right through to the present actually, is the gut quality of speech and the poetry of it is actuality and the structure of it is cultural. A steelworker or miner or a manual worker describing their theory of life will use a different set of references and language to an intellectual. Particularly for the working person, the gut level is missing from the academic or the middle class level frequently. The actual gut relationship with the analytical structure, because it is an analytical

structure, it's just a different kind of analysis. That has taken me right through to now because I work with a lot of people whose second language is English and I've done recordings. I made that radio ballad a year ago, and some of them have very grammatically confused English. But they spoke actuality because of where it was coming from, what it was about, and what it was attempting to embody and what it did embody. It's nothing to do with sodding grammar. It isn't even to do with extensive vocabulary, though obviously the more words you have and you're in contact with the better. But even so, it's not even to do with the extent of the vocabulary, it's to do with gut and thought, cognitive and intuitive, and what goes on between those. I always felt Charlie understood that, he really did. I listened to the radio ballads again when I was preparing mine. But I felt that that was frequently absent in Banner and that a tendency to the mechanical could set in, not always at all, there was some very powerful... I thought that the songs that were written for the Steel show, some of those were brilliant, absolutely brilliant. Some of the songs that were written, particularly by Dave, were frightfully good. Some of them weren't – that's the same with all songwriters. That goodness did come out of an internal grasp of the actuality, which was actually rather different from the way it was used, not by me, but the gut grasp of it in the song writing did not necessarily manifest itself in the use of it as actuality. Does that make sense?

Q: Could you talk about working with the big main group?

FR: What would be helpful with this is to be able to talk to one or two of them so we can throw the memories around. I remember that I enjoyed it, I really enjoyed it, and so I think did they. I think that they enjoyed doing, we did quite a bit of sort of movement and visual movement on the stage. As I remember it, they enjoyed it and so did I. I'd have to see it again. I'd have to see a video of it or read it in order to get the memories together properly. I haven't got a copy of it, have you?

Q: What do you remember about working on On the Brink?

FR: I can't remember it. As I think of it I seem to remember the need to train as an ensemble, not as a set of individuals. I always do that anyway, as a director. I think that was really necessary to get them together, because the work was being done before. They hadn't been

together, they'd been sort of separate individuals doing things. I always do and always did do that work with absolutely anybody I work with, and that is of course is the transforming nature of theatre. In fact, the work I do with workshop work with my refugee people now is all on the basis of bringing people together to think and to make, and that's what I think I did in Banner. I don't think they all liked it but I think quite a lot of people did, and On the Brink had that in it. Do you remember it?

Q: I remember sections, I remember some songs, whereas I don't remember any songs from the Steel show.

FR: [she sings] It was a lovely song actually because it was right at its moment, really right. If I went through it I would remember all the songs I guess. [sings]

Q: What about the women's group? Do you remember anything about directing it?

FR: I only did a little bit with the women's group, because they were not terribly, as I remember it, not totally friendly. I didn't do very much with them, did I?

Q: I don't know because I wasn't involved. I didn't come back until '82 and then I was asked to join the women's group because Mogs was leaving to travel for a year. That was the first I ever got involved in Banner.

FR: I think I did run a few rehearsals for them but I don't think I really ran it at all, I think they did it. I was not madly interested in feminism as such. They did some very good work. I was a feminist but I was a socialist feminist, still am actually I think really, because of class and stuff like that. One way to get this clearer would be to get a couple of people from each group and me and others together to actually chuck the stuff around, and the memories would come up.

Q: I'll suggest that to the heritage project as our next step. I'm going to go through the chronology now. People's March for Jobs, wasn't that based on a partnership or collaboration with Jubilee Arts?

FR: Yes, it was.

Q: What do you remember about that?

FR: Practically nothing. I just remember the march itself, coming down. It came down from the north, didn't it? Practically nothing. Have you spoken to Jubilee about it?

Q: No.

FR: They may have records of what went on. That was Sylvia, who I got on quite well with actually and found very interesting to work with. I'm just trying to remember what we did and I can't.

Q: According to the catalog, Banner Theatre and Jubilee Arts developed a piece of street theatre to be played to audiences along the route of the march. Through the framework of an outside broadcast by a fictitious company, Peoples' Television Services, PTS, passersby were interviewed about unemployment and continuous instant video replay provided the performance aspects of the show. I remember nothing about that.

FR: I remember nothing of the show.

Q: I don't even remember seeing that.

FR: I don't remember seeing it, I'm not even sure it happened.

Q: So maybe you weren't involved in that.

FR: Maybe I wasn't involved, but where would I have been if I wasn't involved? I was there.

Q: 1981. The ? Show, that was a piece of street theatre. Surely you would've directed that.

FR: Yes I would've but I can't remember it.

Q: That had Sylvia in it and Pete and Dave I think.

FR: That's right.

Q: Then there was Put People First, which was a show that was financed by Nalگو. It said it was written by you and Pete and Dave.

FR: Quite likely. Does Dave remember it? Really I think actually we ought to put some of this together and put it back that way, because I'm quite alarmed to think that I've done all this work and it just got overlaid by complexities of other kinds.

Q: Then there was the miners' strike tour and a second women's group show called You've Got No Sense of Humor. I wasn't in that.

FR: It had nothing to do with me, no.

Q: Anna Seymour joined the company; she was the only other professional director that ever joined the company as a core group member. You ? her, didn't you?

FR: Yes that's right. Didn't she work with the women? I think she must've done. I'm getting a picture of Stoke. The Stoke on Trent group, is that in any of our list? There was a Stoke women's group, wasn't there? She's not on my list, either.

Q: Do you remember the circumstances of Anna joining the group? We'd like to record her, but that'll be later.

FR: Where is she?

Q: Up north.



FR: Right. She and I stopped speaking to each other and I can't remember why, but that was some time after that. I think she worked with the women's group, that would explain why I wasn't directing them. It was partly that I didn't want to, and I think she was associated with the work in Stoke. There was some really good work in Stoke because of that whole, bloody hell.

Q: But you weren't involved directly?

FR: I don't think so. I seem to remember having been there, it was Stoke and then my mind has flitted to Manchester University as well. Jesus.

Q: You left in '88 and I left in '89, then you came back for Reign of Pig's Pudding, and I think after that that was it, wasn't it?

FR: That was it, yes. At that point I realized I was completely shattered, but I didn't realize it was as late as that. Isn't that funny? I was only looking at this list and I thought I'd finished in about '87 and that Pig's Pudding had been done by then. Then literally I wanted to do acupuncture straight after that, and then went to work with Augusta in 1990. What I've got here, 1992 Saltley, and that was the Saltley commemoration. We all met outside Saltley gates and we all sang Saltley Gate songs.

Q: But you didn't go down as a worker, did you?

FR: No, I came down, I just came down. '95 Green Green Shoots and '94 Sweat Shop.

Q: Other way around, '94 Green Green Shoots and '95 Sweat Shop.

FR: Oh right. But Saltley I think was probably the last time I was on a stage with Banner.

[Break]

FR: There are things I'd like to say about actuality, Charlie and the company, which I've got written down but which are not easy to say in the course of conversation. They've got structures, like the significance of actuality and Charlie's position on it, and the way things like that might or might not change. I have already said a bit about that where I said that actuality is a term which can be applied to people speaking second language English with passion and focus. So there are things like that which I think is really important to say, because I was very kind of involved in the actual quality and nature of actuality and why it works and how it works. The theatre I'm doing at the moment in a way is performed actuality. But there has been performances of what has happened to people or what they are doing about it, what they want from the actual stories they perform themselves. Actuality based work for me I said here, and do I agree with myself still, focuses primarily on the relationship between the owners of the source material, the artists/makers, and our exchange and developing consensus on how the work should be carried through. Inside that is the issue of collaboration, which I don't think Banner always did. I'm not blaming Charlie for this, he was a radio producer and he collected the material, took it away and chopped it up into millions of pieces in the most extraordinary way, amazing way, and then used it but it didn't go back to the people. I think one of the things that I scandalized people slightly by doing was actually – not scandalize, Pete and I did this with Renata – was in going to Corby and feeding backwards and forwards about the material. One of the things that I say in that article is that we became aware that as a result of collecting that material we were in a complex relationship with a lot of people, so we remained confidential about pretty well everything that was said because we realized that we could cause a major row, major horrors, if we released what was in the material. At the same time as doing that, we created a space we were told, and that's in the article, for people to talk so the organization didn't split until it was deliberately split by that horrible man who did it on purpose. So we were in this really complex contradictory situation with the actuality trying to treat the material in a principled way so that the emotional, political, personal and all of those things intertwined with the public and social intertwinings. It was a most extraordinary situation, which I think we tried to put into the play and probably failed actually to do. It would've taken Shakespeare really I think, or certainly a very good playwright, to put it together. Not David Edgar really. So the actual things about the quality and nature of actuality, which I think probably changes ever time or one's view of it changes every time. So I said things like, the artist's perception of a

reflexivity on their own many identities, and I think that's what we discovered, we had a lot of identities when we were in Corby. You couldn't just be a recording person. I held many identities, social being and existence. Am I part of the group? Which parts of me/us are a part of the group? Am I the other? Who am I or we in this context? In other ways, am I the other in Corby, am I not the other, as I've become so intimate with this situation. Who and what am I now and what do I do about it? What's the relationship between the people that we've been recording? What do they expect of us? That was a very strong element. Does everybody understand why you're doing it? How often does that change actually, because it does change. Going on about the Corby situation is I've seen that similar things happen since, whether with or without actuality, is how the artist places themselves. One of the things that's revolutionary about what ? was doing and about what Dave's done and I've done and other people have done, is to reposition the artist but to forget that you may have to keep on repositioning the artist. Never leave it assuming that it's never going to change is really quite important. So your own positioning in relation to everybody else and what an artist is, why am I calling this an artist? There are people I've worked with who I could categorize as artists quite easily and immediately. You looked at the way Jim McDonald handled his relationship with us, with the town, with the people. You could say there was an esthetic in that because it was carefully balanced, carefully thought about, and had a kind of rhythm of its own. It's difficult.

Q: How did the work relate to the politics, to the general environment of what was going on, to the movements, to the struggles? Why were you doing political theatre?

FR: Because I wanted to change things and because I was quite passionate about and still am about trying to get some kind of decency and justice in society. Because I'm also a Marxist, I do believe in issues around power and domination, which we get clearer and clearer in the whole Brexit moment. They haven't yet told us which branch of capitalist is paying the Brexiteers, maybe they're so rich they're paying themselves, who knows. But those relations between class and power and life, everyday life, how you think, what you understand. There was a program on dictators on BBC 4 television the other night. It went right through Gaddafi and what's his face in Iraq, all of those dictators, Saddam. The only time they mentioned foreign backing was when they just about admitted that Saddam Hussein had been urged by

the Americans to attack Iran and had actually been paid by them. They bought weapons and paid for the army, and the attack on Iran was theirs. That was actually the only time with Gaddafi and everybody and the guy in Egypt who they all backed and then dumped, if you remember, after the Egyptian spring. They didn't talk about international money and international intentions in relation to what goes on in the Middle East in relation to those dictators. That's now, you look through history and you realize this has been going on all the time. I think as an artist and probably us as artists are continually trying to upend the perceptions and the grasp. We're rather like Shakespeare really but we're not Shakespeare, unfortunately. What Shakespeare would say he might've been doing in Twelfth Night, which I've studied quite carefully now and realized that Olivia in Twelfth Night is actually Elizabeth I refusing to marry. It's quite affectionate, it isn't vicious at all. But when you look at something, in what sense are you understanding it? A piece of theatre that people like us want to do, rather as Shakespeare did in Twelfth Night, kind of reveals undercurrents rather than hides them. Most of what happens on television hides undercurrents rather than reveals them. Does that make sense? Is that a reason to do the theatre? In the '70s of course there was a passionate intention because of the big industrial conflicts that were going on. And because of fascism, the fascist ? uprising that was going on, which the fascists have learned to stop doing. They come back as UKIP now, now that they've done very well recently.

Q: How were the themes chosen for Banner shows?

FR: I don't know who quite decided to do the Corby show, but one of the reasons would be that it was an attack on the steel industry. There'd been a series of attacks that were going on and it must've been perceived as big enough to do. I don't know who would've decided to do it. Would it have been the Banner main group?

Q: What about the other shows? That was the first show that you tackled, but there were others.

FR: The motor trade show obviously was a show about the West Midlands, Birmingham and Coventry. I would guess the motivation was that people would want to see it because it was local.

Q: For you, was that a primary motive for doing those?

FR: I have no idea, I'm trying to think of why I do what I do now. You've got groups of people interested in things similar to you, and you do them. But the context is really important. I suppose in the context of the late '70s early '80s with Thatcher coming into power and a massive attack on the industrial base of the country being carried through, that to defend the major industries, particularly in Birmingham and particularly steel, was quite important, and coal. She was attempting to and did close down the coal industry. You've got the other things there with traditional working class ? around coal and the sort of long history. The Durham gala is still going on, very few Durham miners left. So I suppose another element in it is a sort of working class tradition which is now to some extent broken but seems to have come back. I was wondering what the new form would be, as you were saying, and the young people popped up in support of elder people and voted for Corbyn. That was presumably you must've been wondering too, what was going to happen and how long it was going to parallel what had happened in the '70s, what was it that would spark it off. That did spark it off. So I suppose when you're asking those questions you're asking the question about what the environment is in which you are and what strikes you most, whether you're a Marxist or not or a trade unionist. What seems to be the most primary thing at the time? With the labour movement the way it was in the '70s it wasn't that difficult to say we'll do this, we'll do that. Certainly in the antifascist movement it just seemed like the perfectly obvious thing to do, particularly if we could get arts council funding for it, which you couldn't now.

Q: I suppose what I'm saying is I'd like to examine in what way Banner's show is to that political environment at any given time to what actuality is to a Banner show.

FR: Well what Banner did and does is that it worked for its audience. Its audience was working class, sections of working class. If you choose that audience, I think the first choice is which audience? The notion that you choose an audience is still largely absent from the mainstream, because you put a theatre up and then they come into it. Some of them may well be working class, but there are assumptions that they aren't and I don't think those assumptions are correct. In fact, we're having a big thing in equity at the moment, we've

rewritten a funding policy for the future which means evening out the funding. Don't do it ??, even it up so that the ? audiences actually gets funded. I think for me it is your choice of audience, and that's driven by circumstances in the society, by your own particular politics or lack of them. You may not care. If you say you don't care about the audience and you work in the national theatre, you do care about the audience, because that's the audience you're working for, one that will come to a big theatre. That will be relatively varied but it will not be the same as the audience that you get in Barnsley working men's club. If you go to Barnsley working men's club you have made a decision to work with them in very much the way that Shakespeare made decisions to work at the Globe and to run it. It may not be exactly the same, but you know what I'm saying. For me what created the split, what enabled us as political theatre people and to some extent as general theatre people in the alternative movement, was a choice of audience. Who did you want to see it, why were you taking your dance work out to there? Because you wanted to work with those audiences. The fact you did that didn't necessary mean you changed what you did a lot, or it might've meant that you changed what you did a lot or that you were changed by your audience. The notion of being changed by the audience and working in dialectical relation with the audience was very strong for me then and it is now. I think probably that is a key to who. You know you ask the questions: who, what, where, why, when? I use them all the time. Who do you want to perform for? Accordingly, what will you do and how will you find out what it is you might do? Will you just make something and take it or will you go and talk to them and find out? Will you do a mixture of that? Why will you do it? Where will you do it, because that means are you going to be using the national theatre or a working men's club or some sort of community centre in a park, children's theatre? I think all those questions are questions we started asking when I was booted out of the Shakespeare's Royal Court. What I was beginning to realize is that a theatre is about audience probably more than it's about what you do. What you do develops for that audience, and Shakespeare and all that I think were aiming at a particular audience. Of course what they had in those theatres in Shakespeare's London were massive mixtures of people, the groundlings, etc. There must be loads of stuff written. I assume that the whole progress towards the English revolution and the political nature of art or the integrated ? nature of art shifted and I've begun to think that they created true art which I don't think they had then, art that was above things, later on. Have you picked anything

about this, about why art became abstracted from the society rather than an integral part of it for all classes?

Q: Could you tell us about how the company worked? How it was structured, how it organized itself?

FR: Yes, we were a collective.

Q: What did that mean?

FR: It meant that we... Recreation Ground started off as a collective and ended up as a management group which employed extra people to come in on different contracts. With Banner we worked as a collective group but there were people doing specific tasks like administration, as you remember. I had discovered, and I think Banner discovered too, that if everybody does everything you're screwed. There are people with specialisms. I was allowed to direct but I didn't want to administrate, which was perfectly fine for me and for the administrators. So I think we did operate and make collective decisions, group decisions, but we actually organized the company on the basis of structure. We brought Graham in, remember Graham came in and worked on the Steel show? He helped write it as well – Pete, me and Graham, and we went on the road with it. As I remember it, we had arguments and debates and discussions and decided what to do, and that was varyingly okay and not okay, as with other organizations. But it could get very, very complicated; everybody had affairs with everybody, sort of all normal.

Q: What did Banner learn from you?

FR: I don't know because it all dropped when I left, it went back to song and talking. So I have no idea. I don't think Dave learnt anything, not much I don't think. Other people may have done so. Did you?

Q: I was not involved in the production side of things and the creative side of things, I was very much involved in the administration side of it. If I learned anything it would've been

from Marian Pike. My involvement in shows was as a performer, and quite a reluctant one at that.

FR: Marian Pike and ? were colleagues so if she was there doing administration that's because there was that element in the company about getting it properly administered. She was very good at it.

Q: So you don't get a sense of what your legacy was?

FR: I got the sense that it was wiped out actually, because it was sort of irrelevant to Dave, because he just didn't like it. He was in agony in Pig's Pudding, although he was rather good in it. I think Dave was impossible and that's why really I left, because Pete wasn't there anymore. Pete was a genius in his own way with his vision and everything. I think Pete and I were equals, we were different and equals. So I'm not worshipping Pete but I am saying that I thought he was remarkable and that his views on music and how you play right through to how he put... We were both quite versatile but he was also a very concentratedly good musician and a very difficult man.

Q: Nothing like Charlie.

FR: Nothing like Charlie.

Q: What was the difference?

FR: I didn't find Charlie difficult, but some people no doubt did. I was very much in tune with what Charlie did but I didn't always agree with him. What was the difference? Pete was more introverted I think. He was a musician, he was a very intense musician, as I remember, and a very sort of, it's hard to describe. He was not a public person. Charlie was much more public, not in every aspect, but he threw himself around a lot more. Pete didn't do that. Pete retained himself in a way, for good or for bad, and was intensely creative, totally impossible. But I was probably not entirely not impossible, I was probably impossible too. That's what you get in theatre companies really. Pig's Pudding and all that stuff would not have happened



if it hadn't been for Pete and me working together. The minute Pete was no longer around I gave up completely.

Q: Do you have memories of other characters? What about Renata?

FR: I remember a certain amount about Renata, yes that's right, we had a row. There were many rows. But again those are people I didn't really know after I'd left. I did leave you know, I left in a very complete way.

Q: Why did you leave?

FR: Well I left because there was no longer work I could do. I went back to live in London. I came to Birmingham quite frequently at that time, because Naomi was a friend and we saw each other. But Naomi was quite cut off from Banner and Dave, because she was made unwelcome. She felt that she had been made unwelcome. Whether she had or not, I will never know, but that was how she felt, is that they were very cut off and not interested in her. I knew that Dave didn't want me around. There was no point in my being around, because he was not workable as far as I was concerned, and it was that missing Pete really. So I did to some extent cut off and went off in a new direction, which was Augusto Boal and running my own company and doing organizational stress management. Yes, I did, I got very good at it. I used acting as a model of stress management, which it is of course – breathing, thinking, feeling, all in the right order – performance.

Q: Can you remember more about other people you worked with over your time with Banner?

FR: I'm trying to.

Q: Like in On the Brink?

FR: I don't remember working with them individually very much, it was working with them as a group. On the Brink was not in my immediate sense. I remember having great social

times with people. I remember not getting on with Chris really, but how many people got on with Chris? Don't show this video to ?.

Q: What about Bob Etheridge?

FR: Bob Etheridge I was very fond of, loved a lot, actually. And your dad I got on with very well. Bot Etheridge was great, he was amazing, and he was an actuality provider. He was a lovely, warm, slightly divergent character. But I never got to know him deeply personally. Fiona Tait I got on with very well. But again there was not a deep personal relationship with her, but it was a good relationship with her. Renata too and Richard, I stayed with them. But that all shifted, they split up.

Q: Richard left Banner but Renata remained.

FR: That's right.

Q: Do you remember Bill Shreeve?

FR: What did he look like?

Q: Very white hair.

FR: Yes I do remember him, I didn't know him very well. Yes I knew them all, but if you're directing you are in a very peculiar place. I still find that – you're in an odd position. . . . I can see it in terms of the work I'm doing now. The questions are asked here, are you inside or outside the group? Who are you, where are you, what does it mean? While in the early work I've done I have very close friends who are professionals that I worked with and I'm again working with nonprofessionals quite a lot at the moment. The issue of this kind of social relationship is complicated. You have to be able to treat everybody generally speaking equally, whether you like them or not and whether they like you or not. When you go into a rehearsal it's rather like a surgeon or something, having to take a completely across the board view of what you're doing and get the right thing done. That means that you do not over

develop personal relationships with certain people. You might or might not outside the rehearsal, but it makes it more difficult, and I can see that with the groups I'm working with at the moment. I've known some of those people several years. We're still not social friends, but that might be my fault, it could be me. I should go to a psychotherapist. But I think that's probably why, is that you drop in to a large group of people who are all fighting each other of course, aligning. In the case of Banner, many aligned against me when I was first working with them. You have to come up with an end event and in my case you have to come up with one that's as collaborative as possible. Firstly, I never know what I'm going to do, I never know what it is. Secondly, as a matter of principle I work collaboratively and I always work collaboratively with Exodus as well, professionals as well. I do in the end know what I want and how to do it, because I'm technically quite good and I'm also creatively quite good, but the way I find it is by a process of wandering, which people have got to be able to put up with. I think that what you're asking is, what was it like to be the director. I think I've just said and I realize it's still the case when you're working with groups of people. It's different with professionals, it's true actually. I haven't directed professionals for a while but with professionals they are totally aware of the boundaries between the person friendly back in the pub have a drink go out to the pictures relationship and the in rehearsal relationship, and they're very good at not mixing it up. With nonprofessionals I now realize, of course they don't know, so one in a sense keeps it, has to hold it quite carefully. Then of course if you start showing signs of favoritism to the nonprofessionals it can be very problematic, very. So I would say that that's what happens in Banner, which is probably why I'm not so clear about if I went through the shows and I looked at it again I would remember them all I'm sure. But the relationships I had with them would not have been particularly close. As I say, I do remember that sense of being thoroughly unwelcome when I came in. Was I close to Charlie? We certainly were friends. What happened to his partner?

Q: Rhoma died.

FR: Was she ill? Shame.

[ END ]