

A PINEWOOD DIALOGUE WITH TERRY GILLIAM

Former *Monty Python* animator Terry Gilliam is one of cinema's premier fantasists, a creator of films notable for their stunning visual style and their iconoclastic sensibility. With *Brazil*, Gilliam created the ultimate film of bureaucratic hell, and then experienced his own version of the narrative when Universal tried to bury the film's release. Ironically, the same studio later financed and released Gilliam's *12 Monkeys*, which was the number-one film in the country when Gilliam spoke at the Museum. He greeted full-house audiences twice that weekend—with *12 Monkeys* and *Brazil*—the latter on the day of the blizzard of '96.

A Pinewood Dialogue following a screening of *12 Monkeys*, moderated by Chief Curator David Schwartz (January 6, 1996):

SCHWARTZ: Please welcome Terry Gilliam.
(Applause)

GILLIAM: Enough of that stuff. Actually, we are going to be providing hats for all of you to throw up in afterwards; at least, some of the reviewers felt that about this film you're about to see! Which is great, in fact, those are the reviews I actually like the most, because the ones who don't get it sometimes tell you more about what you've done and succeeded at doing than the ones who do get it. I'm supposed to introduce *12 Monkeys*. This film was smuggled to me, really, by an executive at Universal two years ago. And the idea of Universal being interested in making a film with me again is almost too ironic to pass up.

The person who really deserves almost the most credit and hasn't received much credit on this film is Charles Roven, the producer. He has many attributes. One is that he has been married to Dawn Steel for many years and survived. And unfortunately he's lived in her shadow because she's been always associated with these very so-called popular films—lower-culture popular films. And despite her success he's maintained a desire to make interesting films. He is the one that got [screenwriters] David and Jan Peoples to look at Chris Marker's film *La Jetée*—a film [that] I still haven't seen—and think about making a film about it. They wrote the script, he shepherded it through to Universal, [and] they got it to me. He managed

to keep Universal interested, despite my involvement. And he really has been the man behind this film and deserves a lot of credit, and he's not here. He died yesterday. That's a lie. Something about retrospectives makes me feel the kiss of death is hanging in the air. Like the lifetime achievement awards. You have one step in the grave when these things start happening to you.

What else could I say about *12 Monkeys*? I was trying to get Universal to offer a deal to cinema-goers, because I thought the film was better the second time, and it really does take a couple of viewings to get as much out of it as one ought to. So I was trying to get them to offer deals. For the price of one-and-a-half tickets you get two tickets to see the film. And they wouldn't do it. It was a good marketing idea, I think, because you do have to come back to see this thing more than once. I don't want to tell you too much about it, except that I think I got it mostly right. It was one of those films that—I was scared shitless when we were making it. I didn't know what we were doing half the time, and it has a circularity you'll see in it. We constantly lost track of where we were when we were shooting. We thought, "We've done this one before. We've done this scene." And there [was] always this extra bit of information we didn't know whether we needed, or we could get rid of, or we could ignore. And Mick Audsley, the editor, always said, "Listen, the big adventure starts when you get back to the cutting room. "

So we shot everything not knowing whether we were going to use it, but very little we shot isn't in the film. Things have been re-ordered. Because

what's interesting about a film, especially one like this, because it's so complex—you start with the plan, you work forward, things happen along the way that sort of divert you and confuse you. You keep plugging away, and then at the end of the whole process you go back to the editing room, back in London, a long way away from Hollywood 6,000 miles to be exact—and a long way away from the executives and the people who are really interested and trying to help us out and make a good film (Laughter), and then we start playing with these pieces. And one tries to be very, very respectful of what we intended to do.

On the other hand, the film starts speaking to you after a while, saying, "This is the way it's gotta go." And so we shifted dreams around in the course of the thing. \ We'd find that the very last line of a scene was better as the first line of the scene. So we did things like that. I hate audience research screenings, because they're just such painful experiences when people who have a lot of spare time and can hang around shopping malls come and decide what America watches at the cinema. (Laughter) We did have a couple in Washington, and we did learn things from [them]. Because there is a certain pressure from different quarters to make the film more romantic, and their idea of romance was not necessarily mine—and it was a more sentimental, obvious, cheap romance. And we tried to do this, and the audience—for better or worse, they didn't buy it. It was an interesting process because we found that we were under pressure to make it then more romantic. I said, "No, no. The problem is: make it less romantic. Pull the things out. Let the audience decide. Leave room for the audience to decide what's going on rather than try to tell them what they should be thinking and feeling at every point. And that's what we tried to do. So it's a film that you've really [got] to engage yourself in; you've got to work. We've done a lot of the work, and you've got to do almost as much as we did. But hopefully at the end of it, because you've invested more than you do in most films, you often get more back in return. That's my theory, anyway. So I think it's time for you to go work!

SCHWARTZ: We were talking a little bit about the fact that [*The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*] did not do well in this country theatrically. It did well in certain countries, including France, where it was the

number one film for a while and in Spain. But it seems to have a loyal following.

GILLIAM: Well, it's very interesting, because the perception is that *Munchausen* was this great financial over-budget disaster, one of the greatest of all times. I think in Roger Ebert's history of the cinema, it's supposed to be one of the most expensive films ever made. And it's not true. The film cost about \$40 million. The budget was 23 and a half, mind you. But then I discovered subsequently that other people who have never been blamed for going over budget have gone over far more. But in the studio system, it's all been hushed up. The film Neil Jordan made called *We're No Angels*—it went over budget more than *Munchausen* went and nobody ever noticed this simple fact.

What happened here was one of those situations where the people who were at the studio when it began were no longer there, change of regime. And there's a tendency for the new regime to have less interest in the old regime's work, because your work shines a bit more if the previous regime has failed. I worked very hard convincing them... Dawn Steel was the president of Columbia Pictures at that time. (Laughter) I spent a lot of time trying to convince her that she could make it her film. It's the only time that, I actually feel, I betrayed something about myself—is that I cut the film down to two hours and I think it would be better at maybe two hours and three minutes. It's a small thing, maybe even two minutes, but there [are] pacing things that made it a bit frenzied to try to get down to this magical two hours so that they would embrace the film and release it. And I trimmed a bit more than I would have hoped to.

The film came out, it got the best reviews they had [had] since [*The Last Emperor*]. It was doing the best business they had [had] since *Last Emperor*—and in the second week of its release, which was only in 53 cinemas. There was a secret meeting and at the time the company was trying to sell itself to Sony, and a guy named Victor Kaufman was running the show, and it became an accounting exercise about how you decide not to spend the money to balance the books. And they pulled the plug on *Munchausen*, and there [have] only been in this country 117 prints of the film ever made. An R [-rated] film goes out and gets 400 prints. So the

film was basically never released. It played in the big cities and [then] they pulled the plug on it. So I have no idea what it would have done had it been released properly. But in the countries where it was released properly, and had the backing of all the distributors, the film did well.

SCHWARTZ: Even after they said, "Well, after *Munchausen* you'll never work for Columbia again," *The Fisher King* was made for a different regime, but for...

GILLIAM: Well, actually it was TriStar, the sister company, but it was always in the same house. But that just keeps happening. What happens is that always, at any moment, there's somebody out in Hollywood that likes what I do and they work their way into positions of some power and I always have a patron in one form or another that gets me through the next stage. Also, after *Brazil* and *Munchausen* I was like the really bad boy of Hollywood. I don't know why you would say because I'm not of Hollywood. The bad boy of movies. Yet, there's always somebody—in the case of Lynda Obst and Debra Hill who did *Fisher King*—where they kind of wanted to be the people that could tame the wild beast, and to be artistic, because they think I'm that. And neither of those things is correct about me! [But] there's a certain cachet in dealing with the troublesome guy and trying to whip him into shape. So I take advantage of those people and they come through!

SCHWARTZ: A few weeks ago we had Robert Towne here with *Chinatown* and he was saying that Hollywood would never make *Chinatown* again, these days. And when you look at *Brazil* you think, "Well, that kind of film would never be made." But the fact is that *12 Monkeys* was made at Universal. You were talking on *Charlie Rose* the other night about how you were reluctant at first to put big stars in the movie because you thought that might blow the budget up too much.

GILLIAM: That's absolutely correct. Because I felt the thing was to try to keep the budget down, because it kind of takes the pressure off you and the studio is more at ease, their investment is less. This one was really interesting because it was just a series of events. I used to think of Hollywood as this monolithic place and sometimes I wish I continued to think of it like that. It's easier. And just say,

"They're all guilty until proven innocent." And now, unfortunately, I know too many people out there, and some of them are quite nice and they can lure you down paths you don't really want to go because they're nice people.

But on this one—Casey Silver is a big friend of David Peoples and David had written *Unforgiven*, *Blade Runner*—and so they got David and Jan contracted to write for Universal. Then Chuck [Inaudible] in *La Jetée*. They wrote a script. And so Universal had an investment in this film [that] they've got to get back. Then when it came to me, they were intrigued by that because Casey Silver was a guy who had actually brought Monty Python to Universal. We had a development deal there.

So, again, he was trying to prove that his taste was great. And I thought we were going to go ahead on that basis and without big names, but the costs were beginning to creep into this thing. Maybe it's because I'm very bad at these meetings and rather than reassuring people what an easy film this is going to [be to] make, and how much everyone is going to love it, I said, "You're really brave." (Laughter) And that gets them nervous! Which is a pretty stupid approach on my part, but it's more fun! (Laughter) So he got more and more nervous and started throwing these name stars, and I said no and walked away. And then Bruce [Willis] came up several weeks later and I said, "That's a good idea." So now we had Bruce Willis and we got this thing and it's a reasonable budget.

The other thing that made the budget even more reasonable was, half the money for this film came from Germany, Japan, England, and France. Universal probably has an investment of only \$14 million in this film starring Bruce [Willis] and Brad [Pitt] for all the world except those four territories, and that's the best bargain on the planet today so on just a pragmatic level they're comfortable and they can spend money promoting it. Each film seems to have its own scenerio of how it gets made. So we were lucky. They couldn't believe it when Brad became involved, because Brad wanted to be in this film. He had been following it for some time, and I didn't even want to meet him because I just thought he was wrong for the part. And he came to London and we met, and I liked him, his enthusiasm and his determination to escape from the blonde bimbo role. It's pretty hard to say no to

somebody like that. And then I said yes and the studio couldn't believe their luck! They have the hottest guy on the planet in the film.

And I just liked the fact that here were these guys with all this power and money, and stars who are trying to escape from all these very successful traps that they've fallen into. They could keep going on and making the same old thing, making a lot of money, but I think the smart one knows how limiting that is, that time runs out. And there are more and more who are trying to find ways of proving to the world that they are actors, not just stars. So we were the beneficiaries of that.

SCHWARTZ: I wanted to jump back a bit. I just wanted to cover some of your life story. You once said you would be the kind of person who would follow the advice, "Go west, young man"; you've always been going east. After moving from Minneapolis, you grew up in Los Angeles, basically, [and] you moved to New York and then to London. What can you tell us about the time in Los Angeles and what your moviegoing was like as a child growing up?

GILLIAM: I just watched movies. I never thought of them as anything other than movies. I just went and had a great time. You went to the dark place and these magic worlds appeared. And it could be anywhere, anytime. I basically loved big epics. I loved biblical epics because they were a chance to escape from what seemed to be a rather mundane, predictable world to these historic big places with funny costumes and lots of monsters to kill.

Actually, what I think was a bigger influence than movies to me was radio. I grew up in Minnesota, and before we had a television we had radio. And there was something that was just extraordinary about radio, because it's storytelling without any sets, costumes, places, and you've got to invent all that. I think it's great exercise for your imagination. I was just addicted to radio. And then along came television. But the movies always fascinated me.

The movie that I remember the most as being something that changed my attitude toward the movies was *Paths of Glory*. I was about fifteen. And it was at a Sunday matinee out in River City—kid's matinee—*Paths of Glory*. Why they had a matinee for that I don't know! Kids were running up and

down the aisles, and this extraordinary story was being told. And I just was stunned. I said, "Movies can do that?" It's not just about Martin and Lewis—which I loved, and I loved all the Disney cartoons. I just loved movies. And I was very eclectic and not very judgmental. But *Paths of Glory* made me—"Oh God, you mean the world's unfair, and the world could be a dark place and injustice can occur?" That's extraordinary. I remember running around trying to tell my friends about this movie. None of them saw it. If they'd seen it, they didn't know what I was talking about. But that was the one that really twisted me.

SCHWARTZ: You moved to New York, where you worked in cartooning and advertising. When did you start drawing and becoming an artist?

GILLIAM: I would always do it as a kid. I just drew. It's one of those things you did. The great thing about cartooning and drawing [is] that people think it's magic. If you write, nobody is very impressed with that, because everybody thinks they can write. Writing is writing. But drawing—there it is, and you draw this thing, and it's like, wow! I have always been a sucker for immediate feedback. So the business of drawing funny little cartoons and getting people to say, "Wow, aren't you clever?" and things like just encouraged me and I continued doing that. And then I used to do things like—I loved building sets for plays. At the senior prom I'd build a castle and things. And plays in school—I would always be in plays. But I would always be making things. My father was a carpenter, and he worked for Charles Manville putting up portable partitions, movable partitions. And they were in four-by-eight corrugated cardboard boxes, which are the best things you can use to make castles and sets. Great big sheets of corrugated cardboard which you lay out in the backyard and make these things.

If we're going to go through all the turning points in a young man's life, (Laughter) when I was working my way through college in my junior year I was working in the Chevrolet assembly line in Van Nuys on the night shift. Behind us these cars kept going around. 52 cars in that room and I had to clean—all the glass on the right-hand side I had to clean with ammonia, inside and outside at a time when the wind screens were really slow in the back. Your inside in the middle of the heat. And so I'm rubbing

all these marks off that the inspectors put on the car, and I made mine really sleek and it was so beautiful. It was about a month later I discovered that they went around and somebody else marked these things up and so my entire existence, as far as I could see, was pointless. (Laughter) Somebody else was scribbling on the car! And I said, "That's it, I quit. I'm never going to work for money in my life again and I'm never going to do anything I don't have total control of."

I set those rules, and I actually stick by them. And it's interesting because it makes life easier in a strange way. Because all the doors shut immediately! That's great. And so, what do you do? I can still draw. So I did cartoons and people would buy them. And then that, eventually, way, way down the line, years later, millennia later, ended up being a situation which led into Python and then from Python into directing films.

SCHWARTZ: In college you were in New York for a few years in the early 1960s. You talked about that as being an important period for you. What do you remember from that?

GILLIAM: First, it was just getting way from home—and the Big Apple and living like...I don't remember reading all these books about nineteenth-century artists and garrets and things like that, but somewhere maybe I had seen them in the movies. But there I was, living in a really rotten, cockroach-infested garret by Columbia University, and I was making fifty dollars a week, which is two dollars less than I would [have made] on the dole. But I was working for Harvey Kurtzman—*Help!* magazine—one of my great heroes, and this is great. And out of fifty I was saving twenty-five a week, which I eventually bought my first Bolex camera and tape recorder. And I didn't always do a lot of stuff, but it was living the role of an artist, and I actually had my pet cockroach, which appeared in some of my cartoons later. And [it was] a strange and really painful time, which I think probably scarred me to produce things like *Brazil* and all. This sort of nightmare relationship with the city. And all of that. On one hand, it was totally free, and on the other hand it was totally frustrating because I kept wanting to make movies but I didn't know how you did that.

So these friends—once I had my little Bolex—every Saturday, with a three-minute roll of film, we would invent a movie. Depending [on] what the weather was, we would go and perform it and film it. And I remember doing animation that way as well. We would go around the dustbins and get old bits of film and then we would scratch on them, each frame, make little animated sequences. It was...pathetic! (Laughs) But kind of learning something in the course of all this. Anger is, I think, what I learned! Hatred for society, and wealth—the powerful people that I've never been able to deal with subsequently! (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: Was there any influence at all from what was going on in New York in the underground film movement at the time in the 1960s...the kind of collage style of animation you developed, which was rather unique.

GILLIAM: I think I remember seeing somewhere, projected on a sheet in somebody's flat or something, a Stan Vanderbeek cartoon. [That] was the first time I had ever seen cutout animation. I remember—I don't know what the film's about—but it was Richard Nixon photographed with a foot in his mouth that was going in and out, and I found it outrageously funny. I was still trying to do kid animation—you know, Disney style—fully animated cells. So that years later, when I was in London and still drawing fucking cartoons, I was on a show doing caricatures of the guests and they had some material they didn't know how to present. So I said, "Why don't I make an animated film?" And I had 2 weeks to do it in, for maybe 400 pounds. And the only way I could do it at the time was to use cutouts. I won't explain what it was, but it involved a famous DJ, radio DJ.

So I got all these pictures of him and I just did silly things with these cutouts. And nobody had seen that before on British television. So I was hailed as an inventor of a new style of animation. That's the power of television, to do something like that. At the time, there were basically only three television stations. So the power of that going out there and millions of people seeing your stuff—it was incredible. And the results were almost instantaneous. Within the week, I had all these offers to do all this other stuff.

SCHWARTZ: I'm going to force you to talk about one more turning point, which is the move out of the United States. It was a very turbulent political time when a lot of people were disenchanting with American society, and you decided to move to London.

GILLIAM: After three years in New York, the magazine [*Help!*] collapsed, and I had a \$1,000, I'd saved. So I said, "I'm off to Europe"—this "go east, young man" theory of mine. And I just bummed around Europe for six months and I just fell in love with it. It was a great eye-opener because suddenly I saw the world through other people's eyes, other perspectives than the American perspective. I thought, even though I was in America, [because] I was well educated and I was reading all the best newspapers and everything, [that] I understood the world and America's role in it, and other people's perception of America. I walk out of America to Europe and, hello! It's a very different world out there. The joke was, I was actually very much against the war and I was very critical of everything the government was doing, and found myself defending America against the Spanish peasants, whose opinions I actually agreed with totally. "How dare they? My country, right or wrong! My country!"

But there's something about the diversity of Europe that really just intrigued me. And it's a very nice feeling to walk through a world where everybody's speaking a language you don't understand. There's a kind of freedom in that, in being a stranger. And I fell in love with the architecture. There was a sense of being part of—once I was in Europe—history around you, 24 hours a day. Sense of this continuum that America doesn't have. America tries to reinvent itself immediately. Doesn't matter who your father was, doesn't matter who your grandfather was, nothing seems to matter. But there you felt there were... things that have been going on very long thing that's been going on—and it was castles, really. Castles on hills. I mean it, Disneyland never created these; they were real. But anyway, eventually I came back, and it was really to test myself, to see if I really wanted to stay in America.

So I was here about a year and a half. I worked in advertising. My illustrating days were becoming less and less remunerative and Joel Siegel, the famous television critic, was one of my old friends,

and in fact the very first cartoon I had ever had published was an idea by him. And he was now working in an ad agency and he got me in because I had long hair. The agency needed long hair! So I became an art director and a copy writer. And the last job that we had there, Joel and I were doing adverts for Universal Pictures. I can't get away from Universal Pictures. What's going on in my life? Universal keeps calling me back. And we hated the job. Richard Widmark did this movie called *Madigan* and the kinds of things we were throwing back to Universal were, "Once he was happy, but now he's Mad—igan!" (Laughter) And we just hated this job!

I was loving living in Los Angeles. It was a time before things were named, that I liked so much—before hippies existed, before any of the great Flower Power revolution occurred. It had no name but it was happening and it was great. I was enjoying it. And then I got more and more disillusioned because I got involved in police riots and things like that. It was just one of those things. I just thought, "I can't stay here. I can't deal with a place where I have to be a full-time activist, and then to be a terrorist, and I don't think I'm good at that. I'm better at drawing silly cartoons." And I was living with an English girl who wanted to go home and I said, "Let's pack up and go."

SCHWARTZ: Could you talk about the working atmosphere, the collaborative atmosphere on Monty Python?

GILLIAM: I don't think there's anything—I don't know if anything has been quite like Python, because we were in an extremely rare situation where the BBC at that time was a very *laissez-faire* organization and we had complete control of everything we did. There was no director or producer saying what we could or shouldn't do, and no market-research people. There were no worried executives. We got into a situation where we, the six of us, did the show. And again, because we were writing and appearing in it, we had this total control. So what it was all about was just what made the six of us laugh. It was as simple as that. And you don't get that very often. Normally there are so many other forces partaking in the decision-making process.

And also, we had the situation of having to churn out a half hour every week, which meant a lot of material that, given more time to think about, we might have lost confidence in, and not done. We had to throw it in, just keep filling this thing up. And some of that material resulted in the best stuff because it was so way out there, and who knew whether it would work or not, but it did. So that was an extraordinary time.

Everybody was in their late twenties or pushing thirty, so we'd done a lot of work by then. So we were fairly skilled in our jobs. And we chose to be together. And again, we weren't forced. We chose each other because we respected each other. And working was bitter and awful. But we just laughed, and there [were] all the things that would happen in a very tight community. But the show was all that ultimately counted, so everything took a back seat to that.

I admit I was the luckiest. What happened. Because Mike [Palin] and Terry [Jones] wrote together. Graham [Chapman] and John [Cleese] wrote together. Eric [Idle] wrote on his own, and myself on my own. But they would all bring in their material to these sessions and it would all be read out loud, and the stuff everybody agreed on went in that pile, intermediate stuff went there, and the stuff with problems went there. But they all had to read material in front of the group except for me. Because my stuff was unreadable; it didn't exist. I had this very wonderful, incredible freedom to take off from a certain part where they got stuck and get us to a point where they were starting up again. And it was very nice to have those kinds of parameters to work with, and just sail around within them. I was the luckiest, because they didn't know till the day of the show what I was doing. I would come in, "There it is, folks." And, luckily, John is so totally illiterate he didn't know if it was good or bad! So he would attack Terry Jones and the other medium-height people. He didn't know what to say to me.

SCHWARTZ: With *Jabberwocky*, how frightening in a way was it to be suddenly solo? You co-directed on *Holy Grail*.

GILLIAM: It wasn't frightening, because I was so arrogant and so full of myself, so happy to escape from the group and the pressure. Because when

we were making *Grail*, it was a constant fight going on because I felt my job was to translate what they had written in the visual sense, and yet the others didn't understand. Also, I think I had been on my own for so long during the animation [that] I had no social skills anymore. I could barely even speak. And I had to explain, and I didn't have the patience. Because pieces of paper never talked back and got me in trouble. If I stuck it down it stayed down! And also, because of my distorted eyes, I sort of forced people into these frames that worked fine for a cartoon but not for real people.

That really did happen on *Jabberwocky*. I drew my storyboards the way I draw my cartoons. I exaggerate the head and the body is smaller. That's why *Time Bandits* was a breakthrough—because I got guys in the right shape! (Laughter) What was great, what was a surprise to me, was being a director. And you go out there and there was Max Wall, who is one of the great, great British comics of all time. John Le Mesurier. And these were, like, giants in the world of comedy. And I would say, "Lie down there and I'm going to dump all this dirt on you." And they would do it! (Laughter) It was extraordinary. I suddenly realized the power a director had at that point because the Pythons would never submit to that type of thing.

But it [*Jabberwocky*] was a strange kind of film, because again—I suppose it's emblematic of the kind of weird arrogance I had—they're all making a medieval movie that is very comedic but not totally, with at least three Pythons involved, and putting it out in front of critics and the public and expect[ing] it not to be judged like *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. And of course it was, and it fell short because it wasn't as funny. But it wasn't my intention to do something as funny, and yet I got lambasted for that one. I couldn't understand it. I even remember writing a letter to the New York film critics trying to explain that this is not a Monty Python film and hopefully you won't judge it as such. If anything, it's more of an homage to medieval painters like [Pieter] Brueghel and [Hieronymus] Bosch. And I was just ripped apart by the critics. First of all for daring to suggest that they might not understand the film, or to compare myself in any way to Brueghel and Bosch. So I was pilloried for that one.

SCHWARTZ: This is a kind of more general question, but as an animator, when you start from scratch

and anything in your imagination can basically be there on the screen, do you feel like you kind of visualize and have the whole film in your head and then you can get it onto the screen but you can't get a complete vision on there?

GILLIAM: I don't know. I'm always suspicious of these complete visions that I hear about. I don't think it's ever really been that clear, ever. Even when I was doing animation, I [would] have an idea and do a little storyboard. Then, because of my lack of time or sheer laziness, I would try to find photographs or drawings or things that already existed that I could then use. And of course it would never be quite what I intended, and yet along the way what developed was something more interesting. And that's really the way films have gone. I have ideas, very definite ideas, but then as they develop, as we can't find the location we really want or we can't get that actor or whatever, it changes and shifts. And I just got more happy and I'd fight less when those frustrations occurred. I would sort of ride those things and see where they would lead. And in the early days it was much harder. Again, I was so determined I was going to do it this way, and I kept hitting my head against the wall, but I was younger. But now, in my dotage, I'm more graceful.

SCHWARTZ: Can you talk about the shift in the last two films—which has been really beautiful, watching *The Fisher King* and this film—is seeing you deal with real locations, locations in the Northeast that we're all kind of familiar with. The trilogy was very much fantasy oriented.

GILLIAM: Well, partly it was a response to the fact that in the reviews I'd been given from critics, they are always talking about the look of the film and seldom about the acting in the film or the characters. [These] all seemed to be secondary to what they thought I was about in the film. That wasn't really true. But I thought, "Okay, we'll show you guys." And I strip all the visual stuff out of the way. Now we're going to deal with characters and you can see I actually can work with actors and tell a story with some emotion, emotional content. That was really how I stepped into *The Fisher King*. And it was also partly having come from the debacle of *Munchausen* and all the nightmare that went on. I was really incredibly depressed and I just lost confidence in my own ideas and my own ambitious

plans. And I was just brooding around for a long time.

Then this script came in. I thought, "Great"—I understood it, because I knew those people. Those thoughts, they're my thoughts. And it was told without the need for all these great special effects and visuals. And so here we go. And the great thing was, again, it was a containable thing. It was basically four people. And it was a real joy, because you get the cast—well, you get the right people. And I just wanted the characters to dictate everything.

Of course, it doesn't go like that, because we still had to go under the Manhattan Bridge to where the bums hang out, in this alleyway. And they'd [say] that Jeff's [Bridges] house should be a loft downtown, but no, I had to turn it into this sleek metallic thing. Because there's no way of stopping, and I just thought that with this story there's two ways of doing it. You can do it the way Rob Reiner might, or even Woody Allen, which would be a fairly straight shoot in New York straight across like that—just people down the street. And the city doesn't become necessarily a character—not the way I see the city.

And I thought, "No, what's here is a fairy tale." So I started thinking of everything in terms of fairy tales. Jeff [Bridges]'s character's would be the sleekest, most modern and most photogenic, and probably uncomfortable apartment—a bare, beautiful, but soulless place. That's not a loft downtown, that's the Metropolitan Tower next to the Russian Tea Room, which is this great razor blade slashing the sky in two. And then things like—Mercedes [Ruehl], her video shop is really the peasant woman's cottage in the forest where the prince or king on the run would go. So her place was all colorful and light and earth colors, at the bottom of these great towers. It looked like tree trunks to me. And the whole thing started growing like that. The kingdom had this moat around it, i.e., the East and Hudson rivers. And everything became about a fairy tale visually, but in modern terms. So it made sense to me.

I mean if you're going to live in New York and deal with New York it seems you got to admit to that. There's a story tale approach to living in New York. Most people do what they do in Woody Allen

movies, just look straight ahead. And I always thought New York was about that, and oh, God! Jesus! And it's an extraordinary place. Some of the most beautiful tops of buildings anywhere in the world exist here. Nobody looks at them. Over the last few years they've been tarting them up with a bit of gold paint. And so by conceiving it that way... That's how I started conceiving the film and working in all directions from that. And ended up with a New York that seemed to be fresh to people's eyes, especially New Yorkers'. That was the great joy of watching New Yorkers come down the street [after] *The Fisher King* and saying, "God! This is my city. I never knew it was like that." That's very satisfying.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi. I have a music question. I noticed that you had a Tom Waits song in this movie. I was wondering did you choose that? If you did choose it, do you think you will be doing any more work with him?

GILLIAM: Yeah I mean I did choose Tom Waits. I just wanted Tom to be somewhere near this film. I think he's one of the great American monuments of the... I keep.. There's a scene that's all been written around Tom Waits' song "Temptation", which is off I can't remember which album, I wrote a whole scene around it and so if we do an effective Tom's work will be there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'd like you to talk about the foot. (Laughter) And in both *Brazil* and *12 Monkeys*, at least the way I see them, they come to rather bleak or sad conclusions. And with *Brazil* I found that quite exhilarating. With *12 Monkeys*, I guess maybe I've changed a bit, but I was looking for maybe a little bit more hope. Maybe it's just my reading of it. I was just wondering, do you see anything hopeful in either of those two endings, and if not, does that really reflect the way that you sort of see things?

GILLIAM: Foot. The foot was always my very simplistic way of getting out of whatever was going on. [Laughter] Run out of ideas and squash it. Squash it. And you probably know this it was a foot from a Bronzino painting. It's the foot of cupid. I just love the, "love's foot crushes all." (Laughter) I don't know if I ever thought of it before I told a story of love's foot crushing everything. Helpful question. *Brazil* actually started from the idea of, "Can you make a film with a happy ending of a man going

insane?" (Laughter) That's what it started as. And I thought I did. Because it involves all the answers to whatever life is, at least in his own mind. He was able to create a world in his own mind. Whatever they did to his body, he won in that sense. I don't know if it's hope. I don't know if that word applies, but at least of all the possibilities available to him, I thought it was the only honest one. And the right one.

As far as the ending in *12 Monkeys*, it's hopeful in the sense that Cole did his job, he got the scientist there. As he says several times in the film, he was going to get the virus and take it back, and somewhere in the future they will develop an antidote. And so those survivors that have been living underground for the last... long time will be able to reclaim the planet. So that's hopeful. It's a very long-term hopeful. It doesn't mean that five billion people don't die. I think they do! (Laughter) But they have hope for the planet! But that's like... it's not a quick fix. Those people do die. And, as Cole says, you can't change the past, and he's been there and should know. So, yeah, it's hopeful in the long term.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Did you have any trouble with Universal [on *12 Monkeys*], considering that the ending was kind of downbeat?

GILLIAM: On *12 Monkeys*?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes.

GILLIAM: No. That really resulted [from] my former experience with *Brazil*. We agreed that we could disagree. But there was the script; it was always that way. So we went in and said, this is the script, we all agree, no problem. Done. There's been no involvement and they've been very supportive and everybody seems to be happy. It's a fairy-tale ending!

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I was wondering whether you had any relationship to Chris Marker?

GILLIAM: No, I've never met him. And what's interesting—I talked to David Peoples this morning. And Chris had seen *12 Monkeys* in Paris and called Dave to say how proud he was of the film. Which is really... Chris Marker actually agreed that David and Jan could write a film inspired by *La Jetée*.

That's why he was, like, "I don't want to know anything about it. There's the film, there are some ideas in that film you might like to use and, David and Jan, you know the way to do it." So they wrote a script, and Chris had actually, I think, read the script. And again, it isn't *La Jetée*. We went to a lot of trouble and a lot of trouble with the Writers Guild to get them to agree to a credit [that] just says "inspired by *La Jetée*." They only, before that, had credits that said "based upon *La Jetée*" or "from *La Jetée*." They had a shortage of words in the Writers Guild! (Laughter) We inspired a new vocabulary with this film!

SCHWARTZ: Will you see *La Jetée*?

GILLIAM: Yeah, I've got to see it now! And I'm really keen. Actually, I'm going to go to Paris to meet Chris Marker. Everybody says he's extraordinary—actually, David says he's God.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: If you can't change the past, then why is Cole given the gun to try and shoot the person with the virus?

GILLIAM: Why not? (Laughter) That's the past, that's what happened in the past. He was given a gun, he went to shoot a guy and got shot. That was the past. Nobody changed the past. Now, the future, if you go back five minutes earlier, the future was that Cole is going to be given a gun, he's going to try to shoot a man...

AUDIENCE MEMBER: But why did he take the gun from the future in the first place?

GILLIAM: Why did he what?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Why did the people from the future give him a gun if they knew this was going to happen?

GILLIAM: They didn't know. You've got to assume that their knowledge is imperfect. They've got bits and pieces of knowledge. And I think the assumption is—my assumption is [that] they don't know a lot, the people from the future. But they're getting better. The knowledge, the information doesn't quite come through as clearly as we would like it, possibly. David and Jan and I talked a lot about this, and we're still arguing. (Laughter)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: There are twelve steps in drug rehab, and monkeys could [represent] a drug addiction, so were there supposed to be drug undertones, and if not, why the name *12 Monkeys*?

GILLIAM: There are twelve apostles, too. (Laughter) I don't know. I honestly don't know why we chose it. I never even asked them that. *12 Monkeys*—it sounded nice. You could reason monkeys—maybe it was like *The Dirty Dozen*. When I first saw it I thought—[*The*] *Thirty-Nine Steps* was what immediately came to my mind. It's another red herring. The sound of a red herring from a long way away to me. Actually, to be fair, David and Jan actually did work in psychiatric hospitals as nurses, and so they know a lot about drug rehab and everything, so there may be something in that. But the drug rehab steps [system] is probably based on the twelve disciples.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: How did Brad Pitt develop that kind of a character? Was it your direction or his acting?

GILLIAM: A couple of things. When we started, we talked about it, and I said, first, he's got to be able to speak fast. So I got him hooked up with a guy named Stephen Bridgewater who trained Jeff Bridges in [*The*] *Fisher King* to speak like a DJ, and Steve just started training him [Pitt] like a coach. Just vocally training him, which was a long, long, arduous trip. Because Brad really had no vocal skills before. So he worked very hard at that. Then he started going to psychiatric institutes, checking out real loonies and developing a lot. I can't take credit for much of that at all. I take credit for talking him down all the time! And try[ing] to encourage him to keep his hyper behavior, and with the tics and all.

It was wonderful, because there was a long period in preparing for this thing and he was supposed to be sending me tapes of his progress, which he failed to do every time—which made me incredibly nervous, because I thought, "He's not going to be ready?" And he arrived there, and what you see in the film where we first meet him in the film and that whole scene, that was day-one shooting. And he just exploded. All this stuff going. It was extraordinary. By the end of the day he was like this limp rag. Every take had this extraordinary energy

that was coming out. And the eyes, the contact lenses with the skewed eye, all his idea. Brad gets credit for that one. As a director I just hire the right people, that's what I do. And make it an enjoyable moment.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: A question about *12 Monkeys*. That voice, that comes in, that's not the scientist—who is that? And number two, what is it about clear plastic? (Laughter)

GILLIAM: Remember those toilet seats that were sanitized for your personal protection with that clear plastic? And late at night you came in drunk, and you forgot about it? (Laughs) It has something to do with that! The plastic was, in this instance—it was not so much plastic but latex, because there's these weird viruses, AIDS, condoms... And I was basically working from [David] Webb [People]'s idea that it doesn't matter whether it's condoms or Kraft cheese, it's the wrapping of things in plastic. Or three-piece suits. Or your car, your new car—it comes with plastic covers on it. I've met so many people like that—this obsession. And it worries me, because it's always this layer separating people from people, things from things. Aaagh! It makes me crazy.

GILLIAM: The voice. The voice is one of the great enigmas of the film. Because it's clearly a voice in his head, but the fact that this bum on the street has a voice that's very similar but not exactly the same may just be a coincidence. Maybe not. Coincidences figure largely in life, so I like to keep those in. We talked about that quite a bit. At one point I was going to have—when Bruce was with—the first time they meet Louie in the street... and when Madeleine [Stowe] meets him later on and he speaks in a different voice. So the whole idea was, "Is it all in Bruce's mind?" But then I thought, "No, let's make it more enigmatic and make people talk about this film one way or the other."

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Was there any physical problem about young Cole seeing old Cole?

GILLIAM: If you can track travel in time, there's no reason you can't be two different ages at the same place. If you don't have any problems with turning up in one year and another. It's very disturbing—that's really one of the great things to me in the film, the idea that there is this person, eight years old,

and the [same] person, forty years old. And they're in the same place. There's no reason, if you accept time travel, that that cannot happen. It's easier to accept if it's in another place, in fact, the same place. And the fact that the older version of the person is dying is to me one of the great poetic moments. That's what Chris Marker did. That's what was taken, really. And that was almost the main reason for doing the film for me—I just thought that ending was so extraordinarily transcendental.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My question is about the actors. I thought the best actor so far in the movies was Robin Williams in *The Fisher King*. Would you ever, if it was possible, work with him again?

GILLIAM: Yeah. Robin's great to work with. He's a good friend, so if the right thing came along, yeah, there's no question. But I don't work that way. I sort of work from either a script or ideas I've gotten, and we write it out and then we look at who the characters are and then say, "Who would be best for this?" And it's very frustrating, because a lot of people, like Robin, like Jeff Bridges, who I just love, or Mercedes Ruehl—I can't find parts for them in the things I'm doing. So that's the frustrating part of this business.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Are you a fan of *Vertigo*? Or was it just important to the plot?

GILLIAM: I am a fan and it was important to the plot. And what was really one of the great things in it was Madeleine's [Stowe] disguise, because we didn't plan that. In the script, the character was a blonde and she had a dark wig on in the dream. And because of Madeleine, the dark hair was a wig and I didn't realize it until we were shooting that scene, that, "Jesus Christ! We're getting into a Hitchcock movie here! We've got a Hitchcock blonde there." And then Mick Audsley kept the *Vertigo* [Bernard] Herrmann music going on in the background, so the whole scene became a totally Hitchcockian scene. Then it got even weirder because we had a problem with the soundtrack and so we had to get another version of it, so we had to look at the tape and find out where we had gotten that song, because all we had was a disc of Bernard Herrmann music, which we just lifted and stuck on there. And we went back to the film of *Vertigo*, which none of us watched at all, and we just pulled out the bit in

the forest. And there was the bit of music that we used in that scene in the foyer—and it's the moment when Madeleine—in the film, [*Vertigo*], Kim Novak—comes out in the blonde wig. And it's cut shot-for-shot as we did it, it's with Jimmy Stewart. And the cuts are [in] almost exactly the same place[s]. It was the weirdest thing to stumble on after we had cut this film together, months earlier.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I was waiting to see the stagecoach come up the turn .

GILLIAM: It got weird. You're actually not too far off, because when I shot again with no reference to *Vertigo*, because I hadn't seen it in years—was when they [Bruce Willis and Madeleine Stowe] actually do embrace. What was in the script—they sort of lunge into some broom closet and incredibly passionate sex occurs, and I just didn't want to do it that way. But in that foyer—it's a circular foyer of the Senator Theatre in Baltimore. Around the top are all these figures, almost like a carousel, and they're amazing. And so we actually shot this thing, when they actually do embrace and kiss, and the camera was spinning around, so the whole background was turning around behind them, which is straight out of that [*Vertigo*]. We didn't use it in the end, but it was quite extraordinary. The ghost of Hitchcock was in the air.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Are you working on any more in the CD-ROM area? And as a traditional animator, how involved are you in computer animation?

GILLIAM: I am working on a CD-ROM based on this book I did years ago, *Animations of Mortality*, and again recycling a lot of old material in the most comically ecologically sound way. And in fact we've been working on it for the last few months with this company called Interactive in Washington, DC. We're getting somewhere. It's an interesting process, because CD-ROMs intrigue me because of their lack of linearity, if you choose to really juxtapose things in a way my mind works. We're struggling our way through it. It's a very hard thing, because once in the hands of programmers and things, which I find frustrating because when I make the films or do an airbrush drawing I know the technology. I'm really good at technology. So when I make decisions I'm making smart ones. This one

is in the hands of people that are dealing with some kind of magic that I don't understand.

The stuff that was really hard for me to do now is so easy on computers, basically. But on the other hand, some of the crudeness of what I did has its own charm—I think is the word for it. there's a film that I've been talking about doing, and I've wanted to make it not smooth. I wanted to make it almost look like cutouts. There's something raw and childlike about it that you can't get—or you get with a lot of difficulty—from computers. I find that working on something like Adobe Photoshop would take me longer than it takes me to run over to the Xerox machine, put something on it, color it in, cut it out, and stick it down and it's done! Hours later I'm still on the Adobe Photoshop. We've got this incredibly expensive technology that works very slowly.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: A number of doors are bound to open again for you. So what do you think you're going to do next?

GILLIAM: You're entering into superstition. I've got to be really careful. I keep talking about what I'm doing and it turns out that there are maybe three projects that I could do and they're all pretty close. I'm terrified of talking about them. One of them is my own script, and that's the one that I'm hoping to take advantage of, if this success continues—I mean, it's only been one day. (Laughter) So all of you may be jumping to conclusions, but I'm not. It's like with *Time Bandits* and *Brazil*. *Brazil* was a film nobody wanted to do, but because *Time Bandits* was a big hit we zapped it in there while they were excited about it. You've got to take advantage of the moment. That's all I know. And the other projects can be done later. We'll see. No names mentioned, though.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Have you considered doing—like Tim Burton did with [*The Nightmare Before Christmas*—getting involved in animation without actually directing yourself?

GILLIAM: Yeah, offers have come. But, I don't know, my mind doesn't seem to work that way anymore, frankly. When I look at my animation, it's like another guy. And I'm sometimes amazed at the things I was doing. I can't work out what I was thinking at the time. It may happen at some point.

Tim Burton did a great thing. He got [Henry Selick]. And all the work was done and Tim just put his name on it! He got more credit than he deserved, but he got it made. That was what was interesting about it. Without Tim's name it wouldn't have gotten made.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It was also his style.

GILLIAM: Yeah. But the real work—I mean, he did some nice drawings, and I could do that, but the real work was all the animators'.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I was wondering what it was like working with Harvey Kurtzman during the days of *Help!* magazine, and I was wondering how large an influence he was later on when you went into films.

GILLIAM: Harvey was a huge influence. He was, like, my idol as a kid. *Mad Magazine* and all. And to actually come to New York and walk into a job which was quite extraordinary... *Help!* magazine was basically two people, well there's Jim Warren (who's the publisher, who put up the money), the work was Harvey and the assistant who I became. And Harry Chester who was the production man. That was really what *Help!* magazine was. We just gathered together whatever talent was out there. People were always submitting things—like Bob Crumb's first work was published there. And Harvey, he was so—he was just a stickler for detail, such a perfectionist, and a totally honorable man in the way he approached things: angry, funny—and I just think I learned everything from him. The sad thing was—what he introduced to comic books was the cinematic sense where you zoom in, track things. He used the comic book like a movie camera. And all Harvey ever wanted to do was make movies, but I was the one that ended up doing the movies and he stayed in comics. And one of the other great influences was Willy Elder, who was with Harvey all the time. I think the overabundance in detail in my stuff was probably a result [of] Willy Elder cluttering up every inch of the frame with more gags and details.

But it was an interesting time, because I sat in the office there and ran around, and did all the work he[Kurtzman] stayed up in Mount Vernon in his attic there, and occasionally would come in. And I don't know how he did this stuff. He was always in awe—

that's what intrigued me. He was always in awe of famous people, big things, and yet he was the center of many people's universe. He was very shy and just a brilliant, brilliant mind. And the sad thing was, I suppose I was working with him in his last good days. I met him when they were doing the first episode of [*Little*] *Annie Fanny* and I thought, "Come on, Harvey, what are you doing? This is crap!" It's technically brilliant but it's so far below the level of the work you've done before. But he'd reached that point in his life where family and responsibilities—he was a very responsible man who did a lot of compromising as far as that was concerned, the things he was doing to make a living to pay for his family. He was always worried about things like that. But he was a great mentor. He was always more serious than you'd expect.

The nice thing was, just before he died, Joel Siegel said, "You've got to come, Harvey's really bad." And I said, "I don't know, I don't want to bother him." So we got some Chinese food and we drove up to Mount Vernon. And it was great, because it was the first time Harvey had been out and stayed up late. It probably killed him. (Laughter) But he stayed up late and he was enjoying himself, and it was one of those times that was—because he had a long, painful death, I'm afraid. Again, he was a great mentor, because what he did was what few people do. He said, "I don't want to die in the hospital, doesn't matter what they can do for me." And they had to bring him home. And he stayed in bed. He died with his family around him. "Don't give me any painkillers, don't do anything. When I go, I go." He was one of the few people I've met [who chose] that dignified death. He was a great man.

A Pinewood Dialogue following a screening of *Brazil*, moderated by Chief Curator David Schwartz (January 7, 1996):

SCHWARTZ: Okay. We're very grateful that he's back out in these horrible weather conditions. So please welcome Terry Gilliam.

GILLIAM: I see some familiar faces from yesterday! I think you're the ones that deserve the credit for braving this! Even God can't get in the way, sometimes.

SCHWARTZ: We had given out the list of titles that

Universal recommended [for *Brazil*]. Could you talk about your memories of receiving that list from the Universal offices? And also, when did *Brazil* become the title in your head?

GILLIAM: The list from Universal just sort of confirmed all my worst suspicions about the place. I dismissed it pretty quickly. The original title was either going to be *The Ministry* or *1984-1/2*, which is the one I really like. That would have been the most apposite title, I think. But then Michael Radford made his version of *1984* and he got it out before we did. So *Brazil* we got stuck with. And the song originally wasn't "Brazil." It was Ry Cooder's version of "Maria Elena," which was originally what the song was. It was the first Latin music that came to mind. And at what point it changed to "Brazil," I have no idea. I have a bad memory about this film.

SCHWARTZ: A lot of the discussion about the cuts had to do with the running time and contractual problems about how long the film was supposed to be. But was the running time the real problem Universal had?

GILLIAM: The running time was the one legal stick they could beat us with. Because, contractually, it was supposed to be 2 hours and 15 minutes maximum, and it was 2:22. So it was basically seven minutes over the limit. And we had these meetings and they kept going on about the length. Strangely enough, I tried to get Spielberg's help on this one, because Sid Sheinberg, in many ways Spielberg was [then Universal studio head Sidney] Sheinberg's protégé. He was the one that really backed him from the beginning. And after this disastrous meeting with the studio, after they had seen the thing and really were angry, there was a kind of anger in the air. "How dare somebody make something as awful as this?" They kept going on about length. "It's too long. It's too long. It's too long."

So I said, "Call Steve," and I said, "Can you look at this film?" And we went over to [Spielberg's production company] Amblin [Entertainment], and the two of us just watched it one night. And [at] the end of it, I put my hand over his watch and asked him, "How long was the film?" And he said, "Oh, I don't know, 92 minutes?" So I said, "No. It's 2 hours and 22 minutes. It's not too long, is it?" And I

said, "Now tell your friend Sid." And not much came of it.

And there were, in fact, rumors somewhere along the way when they were reediting the film that Spielberg had been seen in the cutting room. So I have never been able to follow this one through, but, anyway, the length was all they had to beat me with and I said, I'm not going to cut it. And Arnon Milchan, the producer, we were in Paris or something, and he said, you've got to do this. And so we trimmed it down and presented it. And then it became even more sticky, because they said, "Okay, fine. You've done it. That's really not the problem now. It's the ending. If you could do a happy ending the film would be much more successful." And I said, "That may or may not be true, but that's not the story we agreed to tell, so I'm not going to do that."

And it was interesting to see that Sid really had difficulty with this. Because he couldn't understand that I would want to harm my child in that way without letting it reach the largest number of people to have the greatest effect. And I said, "Unfortunately, that's the story we agreed to tell." And so, again, they got into loggerheads, and the situation was they owed Arnon Milchan \$4 million. They had to pick it [*Brazil*] up, and they refused to accept it. So it became a nightmare situation where he needed the money.

And he eventually begged me, for the sake of his children's education, to relent. And he said, "Here's a piece of paper," and basically the paper said that I relinquish my final cut. And I said, "Well, Arnon, you've supported me all the way through this thing. If that's what really needed..." And he said, "The paper doesn't mean anything, it's just face-saving for everybody." And I said, "Okay, if that's what it is," and I signed my control away. Because I just felt. It'd been a good relationship with trust. I will go all the way, right to the end, over the edge with trust. And, of course, when I signed the thing I actually did lose control. And he said, "Oh, it wasn't a joke piece of paper. It was real." And then Arnon was put in a position where he had to honor my trust and in fact did, and ultimately we won this battle after six months of battling. But I just felt, that's the way one's got to go. It's very foolhardy and probably might have been easier if I hadn't

done it. But I just thought, there's been this partnership and let's go all the way with it.

SCHWARTZ: What happened? Talk about the fact that Universal then had this film, it was deciding not to let it into the theaters, and there became this very bizarre war in the press—of course, the *Variety* ad you took out saying, "Sid Sheinberg, when will you release my picture?" The fact that the Los Angeles film critics gave it the best picture of the year before it had been released. So if you could just talk about some of the events of that bizarre month at the end of 1985.

GILLIAM: It was actually several months. What basically happened was, because they then reneged on everything, we actually tried to buy the film back from them, but they wouldn't sell it back. It became about people standing there and butting heads, and taking positions. And somehow I think Sid felt that if I got away with this, the flood gates would open and creativity would overwhelm Hollywood, and they'd all be out of a job, basically. (Laughter) And I think some fear like that was in his mind. So we decided to try to get some help. But it really came down to the fact that Arnon said, "We have to get lawyers." And I said, "Lawyers, that's no good. Because the studios have all the time in the world. They got all the lawyers, they don't have to release this film." This film—they only spent, I think, \$7 million for that film. So it's nothing to them. And so, I said—that's why I took [out] this personal ad against Sid, because I thought, "We've got to do this personally." We had to have a public fight with faces and names and try to embarrass them, shame them into something.

And that's why I took out the ad, the obituary framed notice in *Variety*. At the time it seemed like a very funny idea. I called up and said, I want a full-page ad and I want it framed in black like a death notice and it will say, with all this white space, "Dear Sid Sheinberg," in neat nice type, "When are [you] going to release my film *Brazil*? Terry Gilliam." And then I saw—the first day I saw it, I got *Variety*, and you know, the pages are crammed with numbers, zeros, dollar signs, millions, billions in the first nanosecond. And then you come to this page, and it's just empty, and this rather personal, forlorn statement is there.

And the place just went ape-shit. Nobody had seen anything like that before. I thought I had really done it, I had really [hanged] myself at this point. But it was too late. And basically what happened is, they took out an embargo against us showing the film anywhere in the country. We were trying to get a PR firm to help us. They heard about that, that's it can't show it. So we started taking out notices saying, we will fly—because it had already been showing in Europe, this version you saw was the European version—we'll fly legitimate journalists to Paris to see it. Or if they don't want to go to Europe, we will send them on a bus to Tijuana and they [can] watch it in Mexico! it became this kind of strange joke campaign.

And Jack Matthews, who wrote this book *The Battle of Brazil*, was wonderful. Because he was writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, and what he very cleverly did was maintain a public dialogue between Sid and me. Because Sid and I—we only had a couple of meetings, we had only spoken a few times in our lives. So this public dialogue went on, and [Matthews] reported Sid very faithfully and he reported me. So Sid was happy to be reported, but he was fighting a losing fight, because clearly it was like a David and Goliath situation. Artist against the corporation. The little guy against the big guys. And I just kept saying silly things. Sid would respond in a dour, sort of boring way and say stupid things with his foot firmly in his mouth. And then I would respond to that. And more and more I became convinced that we had a campaign. I had no idea what we were doing. I just responded to things and kept saying outrageous things.

This is where Bobby De Niro was great. Because he doesn't promote his own films, and again, there was this sense of loyalty and trust that was part and parcel of the *Brazil* experience. And Arnon said, "Bobby, we really need your help." So we'd go on things like Maria Shriver's show and Joel Siegel's show with Bobby. Because they couldn't believe that Robert DeNiro, they could do an interview with him. And we'd go on and they'd talk. And Bob would say some nice things, and they would say, "I hear you have a problem with the studio, Terry." And I said, "I don't have a problem with the studio, I have a problem with one man. And his name is Sid Sheinberg, and he looks like this!" And I'd pull out a photo. (Laughter)

I was just determined to smoke him out from behind this corporate responsibility. This grayness. Universal, MCA—their corporate headquarters is this black tower in L.A. [that] looks just like the monoliths in *Brazil*. Everything was like in the film itself, replaying itself again and again. And I remembered USC had a standing invitation for me to go and give a talk one day, and so I agreed finally to go, and I thought I would bring some audiovisual aids along. And I brought my copy of *Brazil* with me! The film that had an embargo against it being shown in the States—I mean it's a long complicated story—but it was just outrageous. There was the Universal lawyer on the phone saying, you can't do this. USC is basically funded by the studios. Ha! So they had this hot potato in their hand, so what do you do? Duck. Don't show it.

They said, "You can't show it." And everyone was up n arms. And I said, "Well, can you call the Universal people?" And, "No, I won't call them." So I got my lawyer to call the Universal lawyer and they were doing this negotiation while I was up there talking about how you make films, with [critic] Charles Champlin. And every five minutes I would be hauled out because my lawyer's on the phone, and I would come back and report everything to all the students—exactly how films are made, i.e., lawyers with lawyers. And it was getting funnier and funnier, and the great thing was, the Universal lawyer's name was, I think, Harold Middleman! *Brazil* again! It was all there! Mr. Middleman was dealing with all this stuff. And the projectionist wouldn't show the stuff.

But basically we reached a point where there was an agreement between the lawyers that I could show clips from the film. And the dean of students that ran the film school wouldn't take the call from the lawyer for Universal. He didn't want to be involved, either. And the students eventually, about a hundred of them, got up and started barricading the door of the dean of students, saying, "Take the call! Take the call! Take the call!" And while all this is happening, Sheila Benson, who's a critic for the *L.A. Times*, and a few other people were there watching this, this extraordinary event. And there were a bunch of students from Cal Arts who said, "OK, we'll show it!" And we took the film up to Cal Arts that night and showed it in a room—it was, like, half the size of this. It was like the black hole of

Calcutta. People were steaming in there, cramped everywhere, watching this thing. And there were so many they had another showing, and it went on through the night and it got people interested.

The L.A. critics got intrigued by this. And then we had another secret showing over at Alan Hirschfeld's house, the guy who was running Twentieth Century [Fox] at that time, and a few other critics came. And he showed it and realized this is a rather important film here that's being shat upon from a great height by the studio. And we had a whole series of clandestine screenings with the L.A. critics. And the great moment was the night of the premiere of *Out of Africa* in New York, because that was Universal's big film that year. \$37 million, big stars, Sydney Pollack, they were all here in New York, the whole thing.

And what was announced was the L.A. critics' best picture, *Brazil*. Best director, *Brazil*. Best screenplay, *Brazil!* *Out of Africa*, zip! They just freaked totally. Because they had made public announcements—[MCA chief] Lou Wasserman, Frank Price, Sid Sheinberg had all made public announcements that the film was totally unreleasable. It was unwatchable. And then they were caught in this impossible situation, and the film came out within a couple of days in New York at 68th Street and L.A. They had no posters, they had nothing. They had Xerox copies of the artwork that was being prepared for the eventual showing of whatever their version was going to be. And [the film] did a lot of business.

But then, the sort of sting in the tail. They—Lou, Sid, Frank—all these people now thought they had a hit on their hands. And they rushed the film out to all these places out in the middle of nowhere [that] had never heard of this public battle. The battle was known about in L.A. and New York and Chicago, a couple of other big cities. And they pushed it all over the place, and nobody came because they didn't want to see a documentary about a South American country! So that time around it didn't really reach the audience we had hoped it would, but nevertheless it is out there and it survived everybody. It will survive all of us.

SCHWARTZ: I just want to ask how you and Sid are getting along now. And with *12 Monkeys*, how did the topic of *Brazil* come into your discussions?

GILLIAM: Well, Sid and I don't really—we have no relationship. He is now—he left Universal, and I'm there! I think it was all done at a lower level with *12 Monkeys*, but I said, "We've been through this once before with this kind of thing." And they said, "Oh, we're all different now." And so I insisted that if we're going to do this thing, I have control of the thing. I'm not going to go into this thing. And that's what happened. So the result of *Brazil* has been really a pleasant experience. So everybody's happy.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have a two-part question. First, how were you able to gain financing and studio backing in the first place? It's a film that doesn't strike me as something that's easy to pitch. And second, how would you explain the apparent lack of difficulty you had in Europe? Was it simply different contracts, a different aesthetic view that still prevails in Europe, or a different artist?

GILLIAM: Basically, we got the money because *Time Bandits* had been a big hit in America, and once you've made money you're a person of some importance. They kept throwing offers at me. And there was this one film—I don't know if you ever saw a film called *Enemy Mine*. Well, anyway, at a certain point, when we were trying to get *Brazil* off the ground, we were going around trying to sell *Brazil* and nobody wanted to know. It was just ridiculous. There was no way you could make this. But I got caught in a situation where they were keen for me to direct something, and they had this film called *Enemy Mine*, which, for whatever reason, they decided was the hottest property in Hollywood. And they'd gone through Spielberg and Lucas and all the top guys. Then they eventually worked their way down the list to Gilliam down here. So, as each of these guys said no, I was elevated.

Suddenly, I became the hottest director in Hollywood with the hottest property. And they said, "You can do this and then you can do whatever else you want." And I said, "No, I want to do this film *Brazil*." So *Brazil*, which had been totally ignored by them and misunderstood—suddenly they had to re-read it in light of the fact [that] they had the hottest director with the hottest property wanting to do something probably even better. So they re-read *Brazil*. So Arnon and I were down in Cannes, and trying to flog this thing—and again it was sort of a dicey thing. We had a budget of \$12

million and the interest wasn't hot enough, so we upped it to 15 to make it more of a classy project.

And we ended up with this situation within a week of Twentieth Century Fox and Universal fighting for this film and paying us more money than we originally needed. And in certain situations down there, the sun is shining, the wine is flowing, and they begin to loosen up. And they get to feeling artistic, some of those executives down there. And that's when they're weak and vulnerable! And we struck! And suddenly there we were with these two companies vying for it. So we split up the world. Twentieth Century had the world and Universal had North America, and Fox was very happy with the film and they released it, and no problem. That's really why we didn't have a problem in Europe and had a problem in America. It was just two different companies we were dealing with. But the reality is the fact that it was out in Europe, it existed. So Kenny Turan was a critic on the West Coast—he wrote a piece about it—"The Masterpiece or, The Classic We Will Never See." All of those things helped enormously.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have two questions. One, for those of us who haven't seen *Brazil* since its initial release or at least recently enough, can you please tell us the missing minutes that we're seeing for the first time today? And the second question is, in view of your experiences with Universal on this film, how does it happen that you have chosen to return to the screen with *12 Monkeys*, again working for Universal?

GILLIAM: (Laughter) The main missing elements are after Sam's arrest, you see—when he is in bed with Jill and they cut the hole in the ceiling, grab him. What you see there is, then it goes black and the bag opens, and it's his point of view looking at the people who are now reading out the crimes. And suddenly he's now this baggie being pushed through room after room of crimes that are building in their importance and cost. So that scene—and the one with Mr. Helpmann as Santa Claus in the wheelchair—that was the one that I really regretted losing for the States.

On the other hand, what we gained was an incredibly powerful cut from Sam being grabbed to the pull-back in the torture room, which was, whoa! Which is slightly more powerful in the American cut.

And then at the end as you see it, when he's sitting in the chair the clouds don't come—in the American version clouds fill the room. Now, the script itself had both endings, one with clouds and one without. Because I could never make up my mind, so I got a chance to do both endings! And I like them both for different reasons.

I think one of the most interesting things was, when we first showed it in the States in Chicago, a guy who had seen it in Paris swore that the European print had clouds filling up the room. And I thought, "Not true." But what I liked was the fact that he thought he had seen them, because that was what we were trying to with the music make one feel. And it's great that what he felt, he thought he saw.

And the beginning, flying through the clouds in the beginning, which are in the American one, [but] which aren't in the beginning of this. So there are little differences like that, but the main thing was—the scene after the arrest [was] the main cut. There's even a cut that I cut out on the day of the premiere in London, which is a scene after they're fighting in bed, making love. The next morning I cut out at the last moment and I have regretted it ever since. It exists in the European video version. So at the moment there's four versions of *Brazil* existing. They're all slightly different. And some have good and bad points.

The deal with Universal [on *12 Monkeys*] was, they offered me money, they offered me a great script, and they offered me total control. I couldn't say no. Basically.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I just have a quick question. You said there [are] four versions. I can only think of three. There's the one that we just saw, the United States [version], the one on video. What's the fourth?

GILLIAM: The television one, the Sid Sheinberg version! Because ultimately—that's what I didn't say, is [while] they were cutting the film, they denied the existence of another film, another version of *Brazil*, which they were cutting at the time. And what was interesting is, if you ever see *Brazil* on syndicated television with the commercial breaks, watch it. That's the Sid Sheinberg version. It's thirty minutes shorter. It's cut out most of the dreams. It has a happy ending. And in a way, I was

very glad that it finally got out there, that people could actually compare it for themselves. They can decide maybe Sid was better than me. I mean there may be a possibility. But there it is. It exists. And I was delighted, because at least it allows people to see the way studios think about things. I think the one thing that makes me crazy—because I never watched it, and I had the tape for a long time and I couldn't bear to watch it...and then I looked at it. And there at the front of it was a pre-credit sequence which was using all the reviews from *Time Magazine* and everything, praising *Brazil* before this other version of *Brazil* started up! Had I watched that earlier, I should have just taken them to court for misrepresentation, because I think they overstepped the mark there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: How did you come up with some of those sets?

GILLIAM: Which ones in particular?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The torture room.

GILLIAM: The torture room. That's interesting. I started with very clear ideas, and one thing about the Ministry was that the more you got into the center of it, the more simple, rectilinear, square it was. The torture room in the script was in fact a cube, a white-tiled cube about forty-foot-square with a chair in the middle. And that's what we were going to do. And then we were looking at locations in this power station in London called Croydon Power Station, where we used a lot of our stuff, all those great machines which were there. And next to the power station was the cooling towers that you see on the horizon with a great smoke billowing out. And I [had] always wanted to look inside. And I opened the door, and there is what you saw. And so I changed my whole rule. The center of the Ministry became this great space, because it was such an extraordinary space, and so I broke the rules. It was almost like a religious space. When you're sitting in that chair and looking up, you see this perfect circle of sky way up there, and occasionally a cloud passed by or a plane. I used to sit there at the end of the day. (Laughter)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: With *12 Monkeys*, you worked again with Roger Pratt as your lighting cameraman. Can you tell us a little bit about the process,

working with him, as far as translating these fanciful ideas into technology, specific shots, and lighting?

GILLIAM: It's such an easy relationship. I create problems for him by using very wide-angle lenses. There's no place to hide the lights. So that almost becomes a determining factor. Where do you hide the lights? I don't know. I don't even know how we work to be honest. I just start with ideas or pictures and find locations, and we start talking. A lot of times it's very pragmatic. It would be easier if we had a window there, because then I could light it. Ok. Fine you want a window there. You got a window. Like, in *Brazil*, we played a lot within each shot. There's both warm and cold light, which you hadn't seen much before. Ridley [Scott] always does this sort of backlit blue. Basically, I approached *Brazil* as if I was doing a German Expressionist movie—So the sense of that kind of angularity.

Then, rather than doing it in black-and-white to make a German Expressionist movie, let's go for German Expressionist colors that the painters used at the time. These reds and greens. And we started building it that way. I don't know how we do it. We just go there and say, "Well, it would be nice if there was some more light going over there." Roger had to do this *American Cinematographer* interview, and he was terrified, saying, "I don't know what to say." [Vittorio] Storaro can talk about all these different colors, and is wonderfully analytical about why and what he does, and has all these theories, and we just don't work that way! We just do it and then it feels right.

It's very much like doing a painting. You don't think about it; you just go, that color looks good there or there. Let's put the camera here. Oh no, that creates a problem. And we effectively build paintings every time. What's interesting is, by working with these extremely wide-angle lenses, it creates a whole set of problems. There's a lens we use in *Brazil*, which is a 9.8mm lens, which is, like, whoo! You see the whole world and your backside at the same time! And what I like about it is that when I look in the camera, I really feel *in* there. And it's almost tactile.

But one of the things about 9.8—it tends to bend the perspective, which is very useful sometimes to make the sets more vertiginous or whatever. But

there is one scene where Jonathan [Pryce]—when he walks into Mr. Helpmann's office, and he comes out, opens the door, and walks in. And the problem is, it bends the set slightly. (Laughter) And he looked really funny when he walked in, because it looked like he was bending. So I actually had him walk in at an angle. And as he approached the center of the lens, when the vertical started becoming vertical again, he would straighten up! And that's how we work! Some people are going to write about this in the future, thinking of these guys sweating and pondering, but we were just so silly! So you don't even think it's a wide-angle lens. It became—how do you use wide-angle lenses without it looking like wide-angle lenses?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: How do your screenplays find you?

GILLIAM: That's actually a very smart question! I don't know how they do. I kind of know that movies make themselves. I really do feel I'm just a hand that writes. Ideas, they come to me. Or I look at things. I actually find almost everything I'm doing basically a documentary. It doesn't look that way, but it always comes from real things. I see pictures that excite me, interest me. Ideas sort of float. They all seem to sort of stick in ways. And I approach it in a very strange way. I just leave the antennae open, and things sort of stick in. And a lot of times, I'll just drag ideas up and they'll just sit on the desk for months trying to find their way into the movie. And some do, some don't. When the movies are being made, I just get into a very strange state about it. Because a million mistakes are happening, but the mistakes seem better than my plan. It's almost like the movie's got a better idea of what it should be than I do. I never work this one out. (Laughs)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The Criterion laserdiscs for *Munchausen* are terrific. And I've heard that there's a *Brazil* one coming. What's the status, and what version will it be?

GILLIAM: Hopefully, it's going to happen. We're having to be cautious about this, because things went wrong a couple of years ago—things were announced too soon. But I think it's going to happen. I just want to make a version that's unlike any other version. So there will be five versions of *Brazil* out there. I want to use some of the stuff in

the American thing, to put in the scene I cut out at the last moment. It won't change that much, I just got to decide a few things, but it will be the longest version. Doesn't mean it's the best, just the longest.

And I was just saying to David, I hate the world of director's cuts, because a lot of people think this American version is not the director's cut and the European is the director's cut. They're both the director's cut—my name is on them. I cut [them]. I take responsibility. I'm happy with both of them for different reasons. And the whole wonderful world of how you market a film again: you sell it as the "lost

director's cut." And suddenly it's like the grail—we finally found the true thing, one of the real nails from the cross. It's the real one, not the one that sort of missed, not the one that got bent and pulled out... There's a lot of bullshit about all this stuff! It drives me crazy! It seems to me that if the director puts his name on the film, that's the director's cut and that's the way it should be. The director should actually take responsibility, not sit and piss and moan about how they were forced to do something. Boy, am I angry! (Laughter, applause)

SCHWARTZ: Thank you. (Applause)

The Pinewood Dialogues, an ongoing series of discussions with key creative figures in film, television, and digital media, are made possible with a generous grant from the Pannonia Foundation.

Museum of the Moving Image is grateful for the generous support of numerous corporations, foundations, and individuals. The Museum receives vital funding from the City of New York through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York City Economic Development Corporation. Additional government support is provided by the New York State Council on the Arts, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Natural Heritage Trust (administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation). The Museum occupies a building owned by the City of New York, and wishes to acknowledge the leadership and assistance of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, Queens Borough President Helen M. Marshall, and City Council Member Eric N. Gioia.

Copyright © 2006, Museum of the Moving Image.