

Christopher Bucklow in conversation with Adam Phillips, 20th February 2003

CB. I was in a thousand minds on my way here - about how to approach this. But here's one way we might begin. One of the things, in my own investigations, I've tried to avoid is being impregnated by Freud. I've mined him for tools to help me work, but I've tried to make sure the use I have put them to is personally rooted in my own understanding of the psyche. So I'm not deeply schooled in Freud and I come therefore with many presuppositions. One would be that Freud must, in his invention of psychoanalysis, have founded it upon intuitions concerning the nature of the psyche that were based upon an interrogation of his own personal and particular psyche. And that this must be the way that he is able to empathise with other human beings and make informed guesses about the nature of their minds. Whether he knows that - at the very beginning - I don't know, I wouldn't presume, but I start to examine his invention by thinking along these lines - that he necessarily would be seeing through his own constitution and projecting it on to others.

AP. I think the way you've staged the question is part of the answer here, because as you think to yourself: "there is this figure Freud - I'm wary of being too influenced by him" - in a way that's a testament to the anxiety about how much power people can have over us and how much they can get inside us, and it might also be a clue about where the idea comes from of inviolable, internal essence - it is as though there is a fantasy (and by that I don't mean it isn't real - I just mean it is a construction within representations) that there is something inside us that is uniquely and individually and ineluctably ourselves - that is potentially distorted or undermined by the presence of others. Now in my understanding of this it is a psychobiological fact that we start as infants in the presence of enormously powerful others that we call our parents. On one model for this you could think, well the project of parenting is, as it were, to provide the soil in the pot in which the plant grows. And just in the way that acorns become oak trees we might think we've got true selves inside us that will unfold in a natural, organically, inevitable way if the conditions are right. That would be a purist version, in one version a Romantic model. Another model would be that there is nothing pure and inevitably ourselves, but that what we end up thinking of as ourselves is this conflict and collaboration between these powerful others. So that one of the things I think Freud is on to is the sense in which we are born into - embedded into - cultures that pre-exist us; of which the first representatives are our parents. These have an enormously powerful impact on us and depending upon the nature of that relationship we will be more or less wary of the influence of others. So Freud as a word - as a figure - his word would be 'transfer' we would transfer onto Freud all the anxieties and wishes we have brought with us from our own experience of our parents. So if I put this in a very cliched way, if I've had an immensely usurping, authoritative and tyrannical father I will be predisposed either to seek out such father figures and I might therefore become a devotee of Freud, or I might be extremely wary of such figures because my experience of them would be - unconsciously - "these figures are going to steal my own thoughts and replace them with their own". So Freud is exploring the anxiety of influence you are talking about - the impact other people have on our own fantasies about ourselves.

CB. I think transference is inevitable. But is he a case of this himself - this anxiety of influence?

AP. Yes I think it is inevitable - you can see this in the drama, Freud's drama, which is that psychoanalysis is actually a sort of concatenation or confluence of a whole lot of ideas around in the culture. Now, of course nobody else actually wrote Freud's sentences, but clearly the influences on Freud's sentences from other people were immense - from his family of origin, his culture, the ideas around in education. So I think that on the one hand you can see Freud struggling with this - in his correspondence for example - on the one hand saying psychoanalysis is my invention, I know what it is and I'm going to tell you, and if you don't agree I'm going to exclude you from the group. On the other hand, he's invented a theory that says that this is basically paranoia. The idea that you have a pure self that needs to exclude everything alien is a problem. So Freud can see that he's on the horns of a paradox here; which is that he's claiming that something is his own in the full knowledge that this claim is itself a paranoid claim; which is a cure for an anxiety about one's own actually contingent irrelevance. So my assumption about this is that claims of originality are ways of dealing with anxieties about contingency; about the accidentalness of one's own life - the absolute uncertainty and insignificance. And I don't think there is no such thing as originality because we know that there is, but I think originality is a fraught idea and the working out of it is to do with an anxiety I think that is more and more of a threat after the death of God (if you believe such a thing), after Darwin, and after Freud.

The actual status and originality and significance of what is, as it were, inside us is really perplexing so when you say for example you are in a thousand minds about 'x', I would say that is exactly what we are in.

CB. Bringing it back to personal experience - I mean this sense of multiple selves - I often have days of writing accounts of my past conduct - great diagrams that sprawl over the paper and grow in many directions. I write on huge rolls of paper. And when I later try to use these accounts to limber up to make a drawing I find I can't get into it again - that it's far too intricate to just re-enter by reading it through again, so that I end up rewriting it, and the conclusions I reach on this new performance differ - often completely differ, from the ones I reached the time before. The experience of this is perplexing and maybe also amusing - after all I pride myself on being quite logical, how could it be that I can contain two - often more - contradictory positions without alarm bells ringing in my head?

AP. In a way it shows, it seems to me, the thing that Freud was working out in free association - it's as if we have grown up believing there is a fixed narrative of the self: that I could tell you, give you, formulations of who I really am; but what I find once I start talking or writing is that it keeps changing into something else. So that one thing I thought about myself evolves, metamorphoses into another thing. So that it is as if one has been living as if one could formulate one's self and one discovers that the self is unformulable because it keeps reinventing itself. It's as though one is discovering that there is a process going on that is a continual process of revision - that we haven't got visions, we've got revisions - and that it has a momentum to it that is rather frightening. One would like there to be forms of closure, or formulation, or authenticity - things about one might reflect, whereas one is actually finding the whole thing is moving quite quickly - if you can bear the vertigo. Once you start talking, you lose your coherence. And this makes us feel sick because presumably we've been educated to fantasies of our coherence that we've invested a great deal in, and we've been shown the error of our ways. It is actually totally unrealistic to believe that we can be realistic about this.

CB. It seems to me that all the institutions of our culture have to do with trying to make this instability invisible. Alright, let's pause for a moment, what would be a lead out from this point? There are so many directions. I don't know if I should follow this one...

AP. Go ahead and follow it...

CB Well I'm very suspicious of it. My method that is. I'm suspicious of my methods of thinking about this whole question in terms of origins. In a way I think this need to go back to origins is actually a symptom of the anxiety about being a multiple, contingent being. But the thing that came into my head was to do with it being completely understandable - the instability - because our species (and I'm talking of distant origins here) our species came to inhabit an evolutionary niche where, in an important sense, we became specialists at being unspecialised. It's that the instinctual codes which govern behaviour became etiolated, attenuated - still strong in certain areas of course - but compared to say a Swallow which knows how to get to Africa and back, we don't have very sophisticated codes for higher conduct and behaviour supplied by hard genetic information. What we have is a space that is capable of being filled with the vast evolved patterns of behaviour deposited in the culture - our external organ. And we gained everything we see around us here in this city now. But somehow that space is radically without stability or foundations. And that is seen as a loss and what we desperately need to do is to pretend that we do have firm foundations for our lives and our decisions and choices.

AP. You could say that we are deeply nostalgic. Darwin says nostalgia is maladaptive - that actually there is a real problem if we want to go on living into the future with old stories. And I think that what you are talking about... well I'm sure that psychoanalysis turned up when it did historically because people were feeling exactly that thing that you are describing. The point at which societies detraditionalize themselves, they lose their parameters and they lose their sense of themselves as beings - like migrating birds or trees. Then people begin to need other stories. The foundation then becomes either that you can't find a foundation or that there may not be one and that we're living with essentially shifting, promiscuous, opportunist selves, where once we might have thought of ourselves as living with traditional coherent selves. And yet of course we're daunted by the fact that there is a sense in which what Darwin says about the self is a transcript of mercantile capitalist Man. That in a

sense we've been given a description of what it is to make our way economically in this culture - you have to be disloyal, you have to have the capacity to lack integrity.

CB. Yes, but when I watch myself - and here I'm not sure who is watching - as I interact with other people, there's a part of me that is trying to step out of that opportunism - that engine which calculates usefulness - the engine that is endlessly producing use-scenarios that we by and large are not meant to be aware of, scenarios that in fact it is very hard to be aware of even as 'we' use 'them' (by the way, that 'we' and 'them' could be swapped around there) : so, for example; How useful will it be to be like this, what advantages will accrue if I'm like this? etcetera; if I try to really see this, and then also just set it aside, or find a little space not to be it - I'm shocked to see how pervasive it is and that it *is* everything in a way.

AP. It is almost like discovering how much one could feel to be simply the ventriloquist's dummy of the culture - that one has all sorts of ideas about one's self and yet one could discover - the way you are describing - that everything becomes a means ends calculus. And it's as if this this has permeated everything. So the question is - What in the self can resist this? Is there any part of the self that can revise this, or can displace it, or have another view of the world. It's not so much how can one live outside one's culture - because it seems to me there is no outside - but what are the resources within oneself to resist the dominant metaphors or to resist the dominant pictures? We really are bewitched by an idea of getting on, of becoming ourselves, and somewhere else in ourselves one thinks this is pointless - this is really a distraction.

CB. Well I look at it - rather than a dominant metaphor that might or might not be resisted - but as something more fundamental - a fabric - something woven into us by time. I'm locating it in origins again here, in human nature. The problem as I've formulated it has to do with how do we escape from a mental patterning that is somehow the one set out for us within the unfolding of our of our body-mind. This is evolutionary - what I see when I do manage to watch it's processes within me is a creature that has become it, that is it. Perhaps once it was a tool that we evolved in the environment we evolved within - society, the group. But now it's...

AP. A prison?

CB. It may be. Or may not be - I mean, sometimes I envy people who are still within it. Still unconscious of it's operation. Still 'operators'.

AP. Yes one would. This is what Blake was talking about (as Freud was too) which is: is the project to live more happily in the prison, or is the project to invent another system or be enslaved by another man's? So in a way you could say when Blake is writing that he's really saying you've got to beat the culture on its own terms. He's not saying let's get away from the system, he's saying come up with your own system to contest the one that exists. Whereas you could think a more radical thing to be saying is What is an alternative to system? Why should we accept the tools of the culture?

CB. Exactly. But it's interesting to me that if one is very far removed from the perspective of the current system one encounters incomprehension and you get called 'mad'. Opicinus attracted that label, Blake of course too; it is a wonder to me that Duchamp escaped it's use of his work early on. The sort of nervous joke at the British Museum now is that I am slightly mad myself.

AP. I think its an interesting point that you said earlier; that you don't know which part of yourself is reading you. When you have written your self-accounts and you read them and reflect upon them: well from where in your self are they coming from, what are the criteria? The criteria must come from the past. And they must come to some extent from outside.

CB. Yes, I agree. But I don't know if that is the internal watcher. The other thing I notice within is instability - uncertainty. But then I also notice its opposite - an incredibly stable, ruthlessly motivated and directed self - and the two coexist - uneasily. What I call "I" here when I say "I notice" is the partial "I" which is here in the space I call consciousness. This "I" has noticed that there is a larger space to me than one is normally aware of. Lets call it the total "I". So perhaps I am like an embassy and that I - the partial "I" - am the ambassador; that I'm ambassador to other universes - you Adam - anybody.

Only - and this is the important point - somehow the ambassador has been kept in the dark - misinformed; so that all along he's believed that in fact he's the King. Whereas in actuality he's merely the Deceived Ambassador - an unwitting spokesman for the actual monarch. So when I say that I'm in a space that I feel is unstable and not rooted in the instinctual world, another part knows well that can't be the whole truth - for as ambassador I seem to be an apologist for decisions that have already been taken, and indeed not only an apologist but also a rationaliser. "I" sugar the pill of what my will has wished in the world during my social interactions with others. Because we are social creatures that pill needs sugaring for the context to be sweeter - for me to get my way without offending the group. It's diplomacy. These then are two contradictory positions. One says "I" am unstable, the other that "I" am incredibly stable - in the sense that I know what I want and I know how to get it - how to manipulate the situation to my own ends - politely.

AP. Yes and it would make sense... it may be more paradoxical or contradictory that you are... you have a strong sense of what you want, but you can be surprised that you don't know everything about yourself. And that may be the main point - it may be that one is being lured down a road which is suggesting that the project in some way is to know everything about one's self as though one could, whereas actually while one knows something, it is really subject to modification. It is astonishing how surprised one can be. It's very interesting to see Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* - the couple are happily married and so on, the wife describes having been in a hotel lobby and some man - she looks across the lobby, and she says at that moment I would have done anything for him. So here is a person perfectly capable of being rooted in a family, married with a child and suddenly has an experience where everything they have organised themselves around becomes redundant in about a second. That's the moment I think we are talking about on a grand scale. On a more minor scale we're talking about what Freud calls dream work. Which is simply that you and I are having this conversation now - we may be interested in the continuities of what's being said, while tonight you might dream about the colour of my shirt. If you were able to take it to an analyst it would disclose infinite ranges of personal history, way in excess of anything you got out of this meeting. So Freud is saying it is as though there is somebody else inside you who has quite another agenda. Freud would say we are now in the dream day, so every day is a preparation for a dream, in which whatever it is, some other artist inside us is looking for something entirely different that is quite at odds with it - and we have no idea what it is. Because there are objects in the world that can evoke parts of ourselves that are just... it's as though the world is potentially too evocative. Which is why we do so much work trying to_____.

CB. Alright, I want to go back to an earlier point in the conversation. The way I think about culture - as an external organ - is essentially the same as I would think about any other organ - such as the heart for example. I refuse to be subject to our culture's privileging of material phenomena as those that are uniquely real - culture, intangible as it is, is every bit as real as say a building. Part of me recognises that the desire to see culture in that way is just part of the human need for stability. But cultural institutions make a show of their longevity, their unchanging nature, their givenness. So their function - seen as external organs, their function might seem to be to lend stability - or its illusion (though this is a real effect) - to the part of the individual that feels unstable. My mutability as an individual runs up against this whole need for stability. When I change, this is what I am up against. When I stopped being a museum curator, one could feel the dismay, all the safety that pigeon holing guarantees was being destabilised. Also as the vehicle of my work changes I feel the pressure this brings. All that is happening is that my understanding of how best to say what I have to say has moved on and my work moves with it. All the pressure in the commercial world is just the opposite - not to change. And yet I change. I am compelled to.

AP. Do you have children?

CB. Yes, Beatrix - she's a year and a half now.

AP. Do you need to know what has happened to you? Do you feel you need a story about it?

CB. Only as part of my armour against the prejudice I've just described against my following this motion.

AP. So you need to give an account of yourself in the world?

CB. I need to make sense of it in as much as it seems incoherent to people. But I suppose I am also fascinated by watching the process unfold. My trajectory is not formal or stylistic, it's thematic. And the theme develops and it evolves and becomes different - in the sense that I see it more clearly for what it is. I am related to the person I was, but sometimes the relationship is... an inverse one.

AP. But you could say one thing that has happened is that destiny has been commodified, that actually the valued commodity at present is the idea of a vocation. That one of the ways that people are registering the disarray they are feeling is by idealising people with vocations. It is as though people value artists as people who have a project that pulls them through - so for example in poetry people are encouraged to find a voice or an idiom or a personal style and it is as though once you've done that, you've done it. It would seem to me this is a commitment based on an anxiety, and the anxiety is that actually there may be no personal signature, that there may seem to be a disarray of versions of the self - un-unifiable. And actually the pressure to unify the self is part of the problem we are talking about. In a sense in being compelled internally and externally to produce a coherent story about what's happening, we are being distracted from what *is* happening. The symptoms - the great thing about symptoms is they give you focus. If you are very troubled by something it will organise you.

CB. Alright, let's move on. I'm trying to think about the ideas I came with. I wanted to discuss some of the ways that self-interrogation is prevented or made difficult. The embassy metaphor furnishes one with the image of the cypher room, the shredding office, the spies the moles. I fantasised on the way here of something - some conversation along those lines. Actually I also thought Why am I coming to see this chap? And I almost convinced myself that there was no point. As if it could help form a useful context for my work. But I also answered that I may be coming because I assumed you were expert in techniques that I am not, and that what I wanted was hints. Hints about seeing, about watching oneself.

AP. Yes I know - about embassies.

CB. And then I thought - No I want to talk about a hinterland of space around my work that might give others a hint about what it is that motivates me. But we seem to have talked about something else. But on the other hand perhaps it is right on...

AP. It may be exactly what we've been talking about - you've come with competing projects. The ambassador would say you have come with a specific project to talk with me about this for the book. But what you discovered is that other needs turn up - there is an array of projects. Because it is an interesting question, why you've come to see me and why I've agreed. We don't really know - we're curious, but actually we have no idea until we sit here and talk, and then all sorts of things evolve or don't evolve.

CB. When I spoke at the seminar organised by Marina Warner to do with her exhibition 'Metamorphing' at the Science Museum. I decided only to talk obliquely about my own work. I talked about Opicinus and Blake. I took the theme - because I identify with it - of the fertility of the labyrinth one enters in this kind of project. And I also talked about their seeming failure to cohere. My own incoherence in those huge written notes I told you about - essays would be more like it because of their great length - that fertile incoherence delights and mortifies and amuses me.

AP. What for me is wonderful about Blake is, as you've said, it is as though he got into his own delirium - intentional or not - and he gave up on the need for recognition or confirmation from the external world. Of course he wanted it, but he didn't get it and so he simply had to pursue his own delirium with all the grief, suffering, conflict, anxiety and pleasure that would give him. But it does mean that you are cut adrift and that is bound to be very disturbing because you lose all the consolations of sociability - and they are considerable.

CB. And it would account for the incomprehension that one finds.

AP. Absolutely. You see I would like to persuade you not to worry about that. That the wish to make oneself known or understood to your self and others is a red-herring. The thing to do is to follow these inclinations and take a chance on them. Because the quest for recognition is a distraction. The very quest for recognition creates a kind of compliance.

CB. Recognition I would interpret there, from my own point of view, as 'understanding'.

AP. Yes.

CB. Let's talk about persuasion then - rhetoric. As 'rhetoric' persuasion has a bad name. Persuasion seems gentler. I see it internally and externally - the way I persuade myself of something as much as the way that I persuade others. That's the worry about Freud - he has divine rhetoric. And yet I am reminded of that Keats letter you quote in 'The Beast in the Nursery' - about the spider spinning its web from leaf tips. That's right for me; psychoanalysis will only ever be those leaf tips for me, that's all I'll ever make of him. I spin my own web. Even as an academic in a museum I was never the type to grind away at a specialist subject. I was always a cherry-picker.

AP. Me too. Here Freud, is not too radical, but actually useful, because you could redescribe this as dream work. Which means we are not diligent scholarly beings we are basically scavenging and we just pick up what we can, and it's not about reading every sentence in the book at all, it might be about reading three words. That's how it works and you go with that. All fantasies of rigour or diligence are just that.

CB. The internal rhetoric I try to watch keeps coming back to this "use" or cost-benefit calculus idea. This is something that I'd like to explore a bit more if possible. It is so intransigent. One wants to snap out of it and yet it has you - I won't say it has got everybody, but I suspect it has.

AP. Me too. You see you could say, if we didn't use words like cost and benefit we could say that we are profoundly pleasure-seeking creatures and we are trying to persuade ourselves and others in order to acquire certain pleasures of which we are unconscious. But we are always very pleasure-seeking. What we need to just write into this is that we are unconscious of the pleasures we seek. There are certain trophisms, we've got inclinations and directions but they are experiments. Wanting is experimental. So I may think I love orange juice; I go to a shop and on the way I see something else. the question is can I let myself follow that whim - can I follow my eyes, or do I have to follow my other forms of determining. I think we are inevitably pleasure-seeking and that's a good thing, but the problem is we've become very narrow minded about our pleasures. Pleasure-seeking can become compulsive and therefore counter-imaginative and therefore become too limited.

CB. I want to move on. I have a question to put to you about the psychology of the infant. The Romantic position seems to imply almost that the infant mind is "raped" by culture. That this is imposed onto it, whereas I think it must be a willing symbiont. Culture is not parasitic on the human. Obviously the infant, indeed the adult form, cannot do without it. It's like a beautiful medieval knot.

AP. I agree. I think it is a knot. It is a perfect consummation but also by the same token a trauma. That acculturation is violent and radically disturbing is because - in psychoanalytic language - because of the disparity between wishfulness and desire and reality. How those two things fit together is a good question. One is inevitably born into a great deal of conflict and frustration and dissatisfaction. But the idea that there is something better than culture called an infant is absurd.

CB. The Romantic myth may be ridiculous and yet it seems perhaps that we might be interpreting it now through our own projections. Maybe the cult of the child, of the spontaneous, of the mad, of drugs etcetera, do not privilege those things over and above the acculturated adult; maybe the adult is always in mind, and these things are merely techniques that the isolated ambassador might use to contact the monarch? The aim being a fusion? How would you characterise the infant mind before acculturation begins? I know there may not strictly be a before.

AP. Yes I agree, there may not be a before; but in so far as there is I think one is a bundle of psychogenetic potentialities. One is, from an adult point of view, a disarray of desire which is going to

be formed and contained and constrained by acculturation. So I think of it as something like genetic potential although that is too formulaic.

CB. I'm interested in the mythology around the Romantic -modern outlook. There is latent in Genesis as interesting psychological story. To me the important part of that myth is the disobedience - rather than anything else it has to do fundamentally with autonomy. The sin was to be autonomous. Adam and Eve had no need of language before the Fall as they were in perfect mind-union with God. Either they were psychic or they really all had one mind. So the story of the Fall seems like a disguised psychological theory of origins. Suppose we take it that they were all one mind in the myth, then the story is that the autonomous part of us - the supposedly autonomous ambassador - has sinned by separating itself from... from what - the inner god; actually, the unconscious. Only one might also - as the Gnostics did - turn it around and say that the unconscious created a space within itself and emitted a particle - that space - as an ambassador - a cover, a screen - sent abroad to lie for its country.

AP. What we call autonomy is actually transgression. It seems to me it's not that people are out of control it's that they are doing forbidden things and that culture is primarily a series of prohibitions and these prohibitions then become a provocation to a lie. The lie being that you are, that your capacity, that your vitality depends on your capacity for transgression. I don't mean to glamourise transgression, but I think that it's something to do with acknowledging that fact that you must not have what you most want and you can't help but pursue it. I think you are right - people don't begin unified and then become dispersed, I think unification is forced upon them, and I think that unifications are in the form of transgressions.

CB. Well I wonder if there isn't some kind of reunion implied in my experience of being able to at least see, well partly see, in this labyrinth, my unconscious desires - whereas I had been on autopilot before - unable to see them? That's interpenetration in some way? Recognition? But it's this labyrinth that seems to be my project. I'm involved in chasing down as far as I can. But if I set this within the idea that I am a 'use'-centred creature I really wonder what the use of it is for the total system - my unconscious wishes are served in what way? In a way I am attracted to the vertigo, the danger. But it is in this area of wishes that it gets really complicated. Investigation involves a lot of wishful thinking. One looks internally and wishes that the seeing - really an act of interpretation - is right. There is no way around it. It mimics the process of theorising in science - you come up with a theory and weigh it against the reality. A theory is a wish. Here though one is using wishful thinking to detect phenomena that are in themselves wishful thinking. It doesn't add up. So the exciting thing for me here is the discovery that the discarding of wishful thinking is a complete fantasy - an impossible one. The whole language is full of the notion that wishful thinking is not real in some way - you had to qualify your use of the word 'fantasy' earlier on - its the same thing. But the exciting thing for me is that we are what we wish to be. I used to be fascinated by the boxer Chris Eubank. He was always being ridiculed for his false nobility - as opposed to earlier fighters of genuinely noble nature. The criterion used was that Eubank's nobility was willed - wished into reality. I couldn't make that distinction - willed nobility, and willed courage, is just as valid - perhaps more so.

AP. I think wishes are very much unexplored territory. I agree, wishes are what we are. Now wishes alone are no use - because wishing for a meal won't nourish you, but wishes really abided by and reality really abided by is really where the action is. I think to disparage the wish to privilege reality is an anxiety - is clearly a flight from the power of wishing.

CB. There's that wonderful text by Pico della Mirandola - the 'Oration on the Dignity of Man' from about 1490 - where Pico, in placing the creature Man between angels and beasts, he puts words in God's mouth and has him telling Adam that he can be the maker of himself and can determine the limits of his own nature for himself. Only the whole of cultural history shows that that is harder than anything to achieve. For example look at the legal system - the whole institution of Justice - what is Jurisprudence but an elaborate scheme to legitimise someone's wishes by having them converted into 'nature' - so that laws become like laws of nature - "givens". In fact, beneath all the precedents a judge's original ruling was just his wish, his opinion. The weighty tomes, the wigs, the gowns, the architecture of the court, the whole solemn system is all there so that the word "just" can be excised from that sentence. It's this fantasy that I've found internalised and that I'm interested in watching.

AP. It's rather wonderful to see that there is wishing everywhere. Because we are being persuaded that there are wishes and then there's something else. Whereas it's quite interesting if you just see that there is only wishing. And actually the places we come to find reality are the places where the wish is most deeply buried or encoded, like in justice. There could be nothing more wishful than law - the place of our most powerful wishful fantasies - or in formal constraints in art.

CB. It is so pervasive that trying to see it is daunting.

AP. It is. Because we tend to think about rules as ways of containing or organising wishes - whereas rules are a form of wishing.

CB. That's what's so lovely about Blake - that something in his upbringing - he was a child of sceptical nonconformists - made him aware that in any pronouncement, by anyone, priesthood or monarchy, there was rhetoric; and behind that was a wish. His analysis of these institutions from this point of view is so wonderful.

AP. What Blake's really onto is that one has a wish to be persuaded. And that's what one also has to deal with as you've said when you spoke about internal rhetoric. I think that's right, he's wonderful about the fact that you need privilege nothing more than your own internal discrimination. It's your reading of it that makes the bible. To return to the rhetoric idea: you could see that the point of rhetoric is making one's wishes as persuasive as possible. The point is not to tell the truth, the point is to make wishes as eloquent and powerful as possible.

CB. Yes. When I'm at my most amazed and actually most pessimistic, I see the whole world as disguised intention, and that deception and camouflage - 'hinting' as you might call it - are everywhere. It's extraordinary. I try to allegorise this in my work. Blake gave me the hint there - I make no secret of it. It goes back to origins again - it's what one would expect in a group situation - one has to disguise personal intent to some extent - what are manners for and why do we prize diplomacy? One has to disguise personal intent as something else - possibly group intent or altruism or whatever. And the best way to do this effectively is to have evolved a part of the mind that is not aware of its role as dissembler. It's my ambassador - as I said - sent abroad to lie for his country.

AP. Yes exactly, and negotiate accordingly. And that can be artful and optimistic. One can have a grim view that everyone is lying and cheating all the time, whereas one might say is; what's wonderful is how inventive people are in relation to their wishes. That's what we should be looking at. Your little daughter has to find a way of getting what she wants and of being as delightful as she can in the process. That's a good project