Edith Bowman: Oh instant hush! Lovely!

[Laughter]

Hello ladies and gentleman, my name's Edith Bowman thank you so much for being here, um right then, from a very, very early age Christopher Nolan was making movies. A film fan who very vividly remembers going to watch films and the experience of that with his father in Leicester Square, and now he himself uh an architect of film who writes and directs with finesse and purpose, raising questions about the human condition, survival, time and love. Let's remind ourselves of some of his work.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

EB: Ladies and gentlemen please welcome to BAFTA Life in Pictures: Christopher Nolan!

[Applause]

EB: Welcome.. um what was the last film you went to see at the cinema? Not your own.

Christopher Nolan: Oh, err Emma what was the last film we saw in the cinema?

[Laughter]

CN: huh? Lady Bird I think.

EB: Good choice, great choice!

CN: Yeah

EB: Sorry I threw you straight away with the first question!

CN: Well I, we go to the films quite a lot so, but 'cause, I don't go to the films when I'm working, so we finish a film and then you know try and catch up on..

EB: Like a release almost?

CN: Yeah, yeah well, it's just a, it's great fun but I find when I'm working it's distracting and I don't enjoy the films, I'm sort of analysing..

EB: Yeah.

CN: You know if I'm mixing sound I'm hearing the sound and if we're in the middle of shooting you're just looking at the choice of shots and stuff so, you kind of have to be done with what you're doing and then you can, you can go and watch.

EB: I mentioned in your introduction about um hearing you talk very vividly about your memories about going to the cinema in Leicester Square and seeing films and, and I wanted to ask about those films throughout your life before we start talking about your own films, that maybe pinpointed certain elements to your life, and the films and the filmmakers that, that have influenced you to get to the point where you started making films yourself.

CN: Sure, I mean I, I think, pretty much anyone my age, I'm, I'm forty seven so for me one of the most impactful films uh as a youngster was Lucas's first *Star Wars.* I was seven when it came out and I think I went to see it twelve times in the movie theatre.

EB: Whoa!

CN: Pre home-video though, bear in mind so I wasn't the only person to see it a lot of times um, but I do remember because everyone would go for their birthday parties you know, take their friends to see *Star Wars* for two years until *Empire Strikes Back* came out..

[Laughter]

CN: and I do remember at one point, asking my dad to take me when it re-released and I remember him finally saying I, 'I've given George Lucas enough money', you know 'I'm done', you know.

[Laughter]

CN: Uh but that, that was a huge impact for me um, it was really my first experience of how transporting movies could be, that the screen could just open up and you know take you into other worlds, um and then in the, in the wake of that success they re-released Kubrick's *2001* and my dad took me to see it in the Leicester Square Theatre and it was just a tremendous experience, I mean I had no idea what it meant, or, you know it was a very abstract pure cinematic experience that I, I really loved and I remember it very clearly and then I introduced actually a BAFTA screening, we had a BAFTA screening of *Interstellar,* it was the last film to play in the Leicester Square Theatre before they knocked it down, uh so it was nice sort of..

EB: Yeah.

CN: Uh, a nice end to that I suppose.

EB: Well, I love, I heard you talk about *Space Odyssey* and, and the fact that you loved it and enjoyed it but you didn't understand it..

CN: Yeah..

EB: But that didn't matter.

CN: Well I think I did understand it, I mean that's the thing, I think I understood it the way it's intended which is, it is a purely cinematic, abstract experience, it's, it's in a sense an emotional experience, and it may be puzzling in certain ways but it's one of those things where the more you try to understand it in a literal sense, the less you get out of it, uh and I think kids are very open to that kind of experience, uh and a lot of my friends, you know, went to see that film, 'cause we were into spaceships, you know, we just enjoyed it on really I suppose just a visceral level, just the the sheer fun of watching those images.

EB: Um, now I have it on very good authority, uh that you are in fact, and I quote, 'he's a bigger comedy nerd than you would think', Mr Edgar Wright told me that.

[Laughter]

CN: Very good authority, yes! As comedy nerds go, very good authority. Uh, yes I mean I think people sometimes imagine with filmmakers that they only actually like the kind of films that they make but you only have to meet James Gray, I don't know if you ever met James Gray?

EB: No, I've not had the pleasure

CN: He's hysterically funny, just you know, the exact opposite of the films he makes, you know uh, I think that's very often true, and, and I've always liked all different, different types of movies, particularly, stupid comedies.

EB: Favourite comedy film?

CN: *Withnail and I*

EB: Brilliant, oh I was gonna swear there, I was gonna recite 'Monty you terrible' but I won't!

CN: [Laughs] Don't, don't, don't!

EB: I will not! Um, did you, what did you aspire, what type of filmmaker did you aspire to be when you started making films? Did you know what type of filmmaker you hoped to be?

CN: Um, I think it changes over time, uh, and still changes, but I think the interesting thing about the way filmmakers engage with movies is, unlike literature, unlike authors talking about what books influence them or whatever, really every filmmaker comes through mainstream Hollywood cinema as a youngster

EB: Mmhm.

CN: You know there aren't that many eleven or twelve year olds who are watching Godard or whatever, I mean they might claim to afterwards, but the truth is we all come to our appreciation of movies really through the Hollywood machine, and so later on, you know in your teens or whatever, you start responding to more interesting, more different things, and that leads you different places. But I think for so many of us, and particularly for me, at the back of my mind, there's always this idea of the large scale blockbuster, when it really does something transporting, something you haven't seen before, that's the brass ring that you're reaching for. Like if you can give an audience, if you can recapture that experience for, for yourself, uh I think that's the prize you know.

EB: Well, I heard you say that, you know you make films for the audience..

CN: Yeah

DB: ..Not for yourself, has that always been the case or is that something that you've discovered as you go through as a filmmaker in your own right?

CN: Well, it's not quite accurate to say, I, I make, I am the audience, is what I'm saying, I mean, we're all the audience and I never trust any conversation I get into whether it's with studio executives or you know department heads or whatever, whenever people start talking about 'they' as the audience, and excluding themselves from it, I think, I think they're missing the point, we're all the audience and we all have particular expectations of the type of film that we've paid our money to go see, and I like to be, I suppose I would say, I like to try and be

intelligent and constructive about how you are in a dialogue with those expectations, not to sort of defy them or ignore them or pretend they don't exist but sort of say okay if you make a superhero film for example, you know the audience is going into that with a, with a certain expectation, and much as I made *The Dark Knight* films not as superhero films and really tried to make them just, you know, tried to make the best movie I knew how to make, but you have to be aware of what an audience is paying their money to go see.

EB: Mmhm.

CN: And then you're trying to maybe play with that expectation, shift it a bit, or change it a bit, but you can't ignore it.

EB: When you started making films with your, shorts to start with, um, can you talk me through that, that kind of journey and how you, how you came to the narratives that you wanted to tell with those, with those first shorts and how.. what you learnt along that way.

CN: Well, I feel very fortunate to have been, I suppose really the last generation to grow up with Super 8 film, so I started making films with my dad's Super 8 camera, um with the little cartridges that ran two and a half minutes and were silent, so it wasn't really a question of sophisticated narrative, it was really just a question of trying to put an interesting image together and then find another one to follow it and messing around with techniques and stuff. And so, for me in my childhood, and my teens and then getting, getting older, it was really a process of trying to find an increased level of purpose I suppose, or sophistication to the way those images fit together. And then eventually, in wanting to do more, uh legitimate short film work on 16mm with sound and everything, you suddenly find yourself having to write a script and having to sort of address the written word and how that, plays into it. But I think that, it's very different for kids today who have sounds attached to their images and it's, it's a sort of a different entry point really and I actually feel pretty lucky to have come in, you know, in the silent cinema as it were.

EB: [Laughs] Yeah, well it's cause that appreciation of the visual, it's that, you know and not being reliant on anything else, purely what you can see and trying to get those, those images to tell a story which we'll actually get into when we get to talk about *Dunkirk* a little bit later on in a wonderful example of that. First up then, 2000's *Memento* which we'll talk about once we look at a clip.

[Clip plays]

EB: How do you feel, thinking about.. yeah please, a round of applause.

[Applause]

EB: It's the lovely luxury of this, of being encouraged and reminded of all these wonderful films that you've made but what do you think about or what's the first thing that kind of pops into your head when you are reminded of *Memento*, what do you think about it?

CN: I, it's hard to describe really, I mean the films you make, they, they have a, as they do for the audience, they have an interesting place in your brain, they're very much like dreams. I mean there's a real familiarity with, with the scene and every shot that's gone in it and I mean, different filmmakers approach it differently but my process, as is my writing process, is to go over things again and again and again and again so I've seen that scene, I haven't seen it in years, but I've seen it thousands of times..

EB: Yeah..

CN: You know so it's very much, a part of me, in a, in an almost dreamlike way, so it's like sort of tapping into an old, an old state of mind or something which..

EB: Yeah..

CN: It's a weird mix of nostalgia and kind of, you know, um, yeah I don't know, it's, it's interesting.

EB: The, the story came from your brother's short story that he wrote, and in terms of translating that into a screenplay and, how you would then go on to film it, I'm really interested In terms of, of how that worked because the, the narrative and the structure of it is so intricate and interesting and, am I right in thinking that you decided to deny, the original idea was to deny the audience, the information that the protagonist was denied and that was the whole, kind of purpose of, the kind of structure of it?

CN: Yeah, I mean, Jonah first told me the story, we were driving cross country in America, we were going from Chicago to Los Angeles and he told me this story that he was writing, or he was intending to write, I don't think, I think he had a draft of it but he just told me the story verbally and my comment to him was, 'that's a terrific idea for a movie', um, and do you have a way in story, and can I find a way if you'll let me write a screenplay from it, to make it subjective. You know if you could put the audience in that character's point of view, I felt like you'd be doing something that hadn't been done before, you'd sort of crack something, and Jonah agreed, 'let me write my screenplay'. He went off and worked on the story forever, I think we'd finished the film before he finished the story in truth, um and the story is very brilliant but he, he experimented with a lot of different ideas, like having a random set of scenes that you'd shuffle like a deck of cards, you know things like that, really, really fascinating ideas. It's final form when it was published in Esquire, right when the film came out uh, it's, it's a very brilliant story, it's pretty different from what I did with the screenplay. My approach to the screenplay was, I spent a lot of time thinking about, I felt like there must, there must be a conceptual way of mimicking the condition in the content of the film, and I just, one day it just sort of clicked for me that if, you told the story with a reverse chronology, then, as you say, the information will be denied the audience. You wouldn't know what had just happened, the way the character doesn't know what just happened.

EB: And how did you film it? Did you film it, sort of from start to finish chronologically, or did you.. did you shoot it..

CN: I, I wrote it chronologically having worked out the structure, um, the film I'd made before this, uh, *Following,* I had figured out a structure, written a chronological version of the script and then sort of cut and pasted it, and then there'd be so much re-writing to make it flow as a narrative experience for the audience, um, that I , that I knew in *Memento* I had to write it from page one to page one hundred and twenty or whatever it was. Um, when we came to film it, films are shot in a, in a totally arbitrary and peculiar order anyway, based on actor availability, location availability all of that, so that wasn't really such a problem, um, I only ever viewed the material in the order that it, that it was in the script, I never re-ordered it to to sort of look at it. I always felt it was important to try and view it the way the audience was going to see it, um, so it was shot, you know, like any other film, it was shot in a strange order. There were a lot of questions from the crew, I mean they're all pretty fascinated by you know, how does this fit together and all the rest but, I always sort of said I didn't want anybody to reorder the script or make it chronologically, I think Emma might have made a chronological version for certain crew members without telling me uh..

EB: [Laughs] Secretly going..

CN: Secretly, yeah I think there was maybe a secret, a secret source of chronology somewhere, uh, but I, but I always, quite rigidly, and in the edit suite as well, quite rigidly tried to watch it the way the audience was going to receive the information.

EB: Because Guy's performance is incredible in, in this film and..

CN: Yeah

EB: And you know, almost within the two films in the film, the sort of the black and white and the objective view and the colour and, they're very different performances as well which is, is so clever to get within one film of one character..

CN: Yeah

EB: Ah and I, I was really interested to find out what the discussions that you had with him were or, or if you did talk to him much about his performance and what you expected of it.

CN: Well, we talked a lot, I mean Guy, he came to LA early, LA is where we shot the film, Burbank, and uh he, he came a couple of weeks early to rehearse and to talk to me about it and we did things, we actually went to the motel that was the location we were going to shoot in and spent an afternoon, er, in a room just talking about it, rehearsing that whole sequence and everything. Um, I think it's a tremendous performance, and he had an incredible knack for understanding the script and how it was meant to work and, not just his characterisation but, but how it was all going to fit together, which was very helpful to me, I mean it was a tremendous creative ally. And the film was shot very quickly, you know we shot, twenty five and a half days, and the half

day was an extra bit of time that we were able to secure because all of the black and white sequences, everything in that room and the ins and outs of that room, were scheduled for one day, which is still crazy, uh and, but he had agreed to do it and you know in the end we were able to get another half a day and just give him a little more time. But I think the fact that he was able to do everything that he did in such a kind of pressured way, because very often with independent films on tight schedules, you know, the performances, it's very tough, there isn't time to really try things and really, you know so he, he worked out what he was going to do, we talked about it and he was very precise and everything and just did it very, very efficiently.

EB: Um, from a small independent film then, um we move forwards and we've, we've put *Batman* together I hope you don't mind?

CN: That's quite alright, ten years of my life collapsed into one that's fine!

EB: [Laughs] Yeah, like a flash, it's like *Interstellar* meets *Batman*! Um [Laughs] uh and, so much to talk about but, there's three wonderful clips from the three that we've put together for you right now.

[Clips play]

EB: Ah, amazing

[Applause]

EB: What do you think, your seven year old self would say if, he knew you were gonna write and direct three *Batman* films?

CN: Well, I mean a lot of the fun of, you know, a lot of the fun of the job I get to do is you do have moments where you're able to sort of sit back and say, you know, we've got to design a car from scratch and, and build it and then race it up and down streets and stuff and it, it's pretty amazing. Um, yeah, I mean I.. It's funny when you look at it because I.. I came to *Batman,* my knowledge of *Batman* was from the TV series.

EB: Mmhm

CN: Uh.. which I saw, when I was very young, four of five years old and when I look at these films, to me that's kind of the seriousness with which the TV series played when I was four or five years old. Of course when you seen it now, you're like, it's a bit more camp than that..

EB: Pow!

CN: A bit more humorous and you know, but there's something very elemental about the character and about the business of the Batcave, the costume and the way that all works, and you know really it's a lot of time and effort trying to tap back into the way you saw those elements when you were a kid, when they were just speaking to this, kind of primal sense of what that would represent and not asking all the logical questions that you then, in these films, have to try and address.

EB: When you were first asked to do *Batman Begins* were you always going to do the trilogy?

CN: Well, yes and no, I mean, the, the movies I've grown up with, my sense of how big movies work, you know what I grew up with is you do a movie and you put everything into it and whatever you have in the back of your head about a sequel or how you would move on from there or whatever, you don't save anything for that, you don't plan that too carefully you.. in a way you don't want to jinx things, so you just, with *Batman Begins,* you know David Goyer and myself and my brother, we had loose conversations about where you would move on, but then we immediately kind of put that to one side and said no we're gonna put everything into the movie and that was kind of how we did each film. Um and that way, we were able to kind of grow with the films, there were three years between the first two and then four years between two and three and so we had time to change as people, let the story evolve, um, and so really it was, it was all sort of written and constructed over you know nine years and that's a privilege that's a luxury really that filmmakers aren't afforded anymore actually, I think, I think it was probably the last time anyone actually got to say to the studio 'yeah I'll do another one but it might be four years' you know I, it's, there's too much pressure on release schedules to really be able to do that now. And I think creatively for us, it was just a huge advantage. So yeah we had vague plans but we had a lot of time, we had the luxury of time to be able to do other projects in between and develop as people and storytellers and you know and then come back and put the family back together

and, and see where it's gone you know, which is, yeah it was a tremendous privilege.

EB: And in terms of creating that world and the visual and the design of it and, it, it sounds like you had a very clear idea in your head as to, to the stories you wanted to tell but also how you wanted it to look, how much of that was you?

CN: Well I work very closely on every aspect of the films and on the design, you know I worked on all three films and on most of the films I've done with Nathan Crowley who's a very brilliant designer, and we've known each other a long time, uh, and we start every project just the two of us, so rather than hiring a department, we'd work out of the garage of my house and you know we would set up a table on the washing machines or whatever and start building things and talking about it just the two of us. And we'd do that for I mean months, and because then there's no pressure to be sort of feeding the beast. So you get to try things, you get to find the look of things in private really, and just do it in a very uh, a fun way and a sort of childlike way without pressure of time because the expenses are very low, and I would be, you know, working on the screenplay at the same time and so we'd sort of try and meet and start hiring people as we actually needed them, you know later in the day. And so that was how the Batmobile was designed and the Batpod and everything and the truth is, I didn't have a fixed idea of how I wanted the films to look, what I had was a sense of tone that I wanted and right from the beginning, Nathan, who's very much a modernist, he wanted a very stark and modern feel, and on *Batman Begins* I pulled him back from that a bit and said look I, you know, there've been such successful telling's of this character in a very gothic manner, I don't want to abandon that completely I want some feeling of that and a bit of the modernism. And then by the time we got to *The Dark Knight* we felt we could go further in that direction and so that became very much more stark and stripped down, and then on *Dark Knight Rises* we sort of got to, in a sense, combine the two things. There's a little more romanticism, there's a slightly different look, um, but that's a lot of the fun of making these kind of films is figuring out that whole world and we do it in a way that's very different to the way these films are made generally, uh, because we don't hire teams of concept artists and tell them, you know, come up with a bunch of ideas for this, come up with a bunch of ideas for that. With every film we just talk it through ourselves and chat and look at images and just start to try and build it from something small. We try and find a thing that is the jumping off point. And in the case of *The Dark Knight* trilogy it was the Batmobile, cause I had a thing in my head and I felt like if we could make a model of it and then show it to the studio when we showed them the screenplay, they, they'd get the idea of what, what the tone is.

EB: Yeah

CN: Uh, and I think that worked quite well.

EB: Um, *The Dark Knight* in 2008 and this iconic character that, that you and uh Lindy Hemming and Heath created for the Joker is, is a character that will go down in history as one of the most iconic characters on film, period, I think.

CN: Well and John Caglione who did his make-up as well, that was a big part of that creative process yeah.

EB: And, and I watch this wonderful little behind the scenes films of you all talking about it, and the swatches of fabric and it was so precise and you know it was ten different shades of purple but there was one that was just the right purple, and can you talk to me a little bit about that creation of that character because, as I say, it's wonderfully iconic.

CN: Well I left the purple up to other people because I'm colour-blind

EB: Not your colour?!.. [Laughs}

CN: No, I can barely see shades of purple, I'm red-green colour-blind, uh so I left that aspect up to Lindy very much. Um, but no it was a tremendous thing to be involved with because Heath didn't do many films and he would wait a long time between films, as he put it to me he would wait until he felt he needed to go out and do something else, like he really would wait until he was hungry.

EB: Yeah

CN: He'd wait a little bit too long on purpose so that he'd be sort of desperate to do it. And um, it was really amazing to sort of find the character, because of the Joker, and he understood this, it's sort of about the

appearance of the character. Um, cinema acting, film acting has gone through various phases, uh, you know and if you think about the more external acting of Olivier or Charles Lawton or you know, that then becoming the sort of method and you get Brando and, and you know De Niro and Pacino and everything, where it all becomes internal, um, but Heath was one of, younger actors today, and Tom Hardy is another one I worked with, where the two things sort of come together so there's an interior process that goes on, and Heath was very diligent about figuring that out, but he's also thinking about how, the props and the costume are going to affect the movement, the walk, there's a, there's an external sense that harkens back to almost silent films, so if you watch the beginning of *The Dark Knight* and you look at him when he's standing on the street corner, there's a particular aspect to him, it's like Buster Keaton or something. There's just a, there's a physicality that is telling you a lot about the character. Um, and so, the hair and make-up tests we did, which we filmed on 35mm and everything, um, they were his chance to start exploring that and, uh wally with lights and stuff, or we'd get the hand held camera out or whatever and he would try the coat on, try different knives, different weapons and all that, and start to move with it. Try the make-up. Um, I brought in a book I had of, Frances Bacon paintings, uh and I showed that to John and to Heath and I was like this, to me it feels like that's the language, you know, the reds, the whites, the smearing, there's something there to inspire us and then the thing Heath had figured out is, he said he wanted to have John design it and then at least once or twice in prep, apply the make-up himself, as the character would. And, you know figured we'd just get something from that, how that would work, and of course, the thing we got from it was, you know if you watch the film he's got traces or make-up on his fingers the whole time, because he, as he would, and it was that kind of thing, to watch him figure that out, and start to, to bring that together. And, he had such a unique way of moving that he'd worked out, that was so unpredictable in it's cadence.. and the way he spoke, you never knew whether what was going to come out of his mouth would be very high of very low, it's, it's very unpredictable and I've watched a lot of people try to do that kind of thing since he's done it and I, I've never seen anyone pull that off. I mean he, it was very unique and the first time he did it for me I was scared shitless of it.

[Laughter]

CN: I was like, I don't, I don't know what people are going to think, I was imagining a much more traditional, you know, sense of it, or whatever but then, the thing I remember, is, you know I just trusted him because he was a.. you know he'd really worked on it, he was a terrific actor. But I can remember, watching the crew respond the first time he really used that voice and really talked and you know you could feel that, everybody could feel that, he was doing something very special.

EB: You've mentioned that a couple of times in terms of the crew reacting to things and it feels very much like you know, you, you do have a wonderful team around you..

CN: Yeah.

EB: People that you work with on a regular.. you know regularly, but you listen to people, it's important for you to have those voices on set where you, you trust and you, you listen to what they have to say.

CN: Yup, well, I mean being a director it's, it's an odd thing to describe, I don't have a job on set, I don't actually have anything to do.. er, I don't record the sound, I don't act in the film, I don't photograph it, you know I'm just there, I think it's, it's like being the conductor of an orchestra or something, so you don't play an instrument but somehow you're.. I think I see it as a lens that peoples inputs get sort of focused through, and you need, I think you very much need that individual point of focus. I think it's important, I'm not being falsely modest, I'm saying my role is to listen, uh and to tell people what to do as well but also to listen and you know try and figure out what is gonna serve the story, and the particular telling of the story that we're doing and what isn't and needs to be, you know ignored or jettisoned or whatever. And so you really wanna have the best people around you with the most ideas and you wanna have people who are okay to.. you want people to feel that they can contribute and say anything, but you also want people whose feelings won't be hurt when you say 'that's not right' you know so you can have a very free environment creatively.

EB: Can we talk a little bit about Wally Pfister?

CN: Mm

EB: And, and in terms of the work and particularly through these, the *Batman* films, in terms of how it looks because you know it's..

CN: Yeah, well he did a, a remarkable job on those films and on all those films we did together, and we had a, we had quite a journey together really, um, I mean he's since, since become a director so I've used a different DP on the last two films but um we worked together for many, many years and, and really understood each other and had a, had a very easy creative relationship in terms of understanding what we were after. Um, and we went through this particular journey on these films where with *Batman Begins* it was the first blockbuster either of us had been involved with, and so, he knew that it had to look a particular way, we wanted a particular elegance to it, and a particular style to it. And so he lit it in a very, very, um, well he was always a very fast DP, so it didn't take a long time but for him it took a long time, he was very precise.. and very controlled and, and I think very beautiful, um, we then went on to do *The Prestige* together and I said to him, I want to do that in completely the opposite way, I want it to be completely.. I don't want you to light anything I don't want to have any stands on the floor or any grip equipment or whatever, just light from windows, you know, whatever, And that film was done very much in that way, and I think, I think it's some of his best work. Um so then when we came to *The Dark Knight* and we introduced IMAX into the equation, we did the action sequences in IMAX which was very challenging, uh, what he did was he took the spontaneity and the ease that we developed for *The Prestige* and he applied that to this very large scale film so that it has quite a different look actually from *Batman Begins* its sort of advances it. Uh and the IMAX, for Wally particularly, it shifted the way he had to light things at night for example, so the scenes we just looked at where the Joker's standing in the middle of the street and the truck flip and everything, um, he couldn't backlight those scenes because normally what he would've done is put the light just on top on a frame and put a backlight that's a very elegant and practical way of lighting night scenes. So he had to come up with something completely different, he had to front light the buildings, um because the IMAX frame is so tall, that there's no way to get the lights in from behind. Err and I think that's, that's.. you know, some really beautiful work that he did to sort of combine that and then as with Nathan I think on *Dark Knight Rises* he did a beautiful job of almost combining the two different looks..

EB: Yeah

CN: The sort of romanticism of the first film and the beautiful lighting of that, with the spontaneity and the coldness of some of the things from the second film.

EB: You mentioned the, the truck flip, it was one of my three quick questions actually.. did you flip the truck? Actually flip the truck?

CN: Me personally? No

[Laughter]

EB: Truck flip button!

CN: Uh, I did not, but I said action, I said action and a talented stuntman named Jim Wilkie drove it down the street and flipped it yes, and it was, it was quite a thing to see.

EB: I bet

CN: Yeah

EB: Um, my other question was why doesn't he hit him?

CN: Why doesn't he hit him? Err, that's a very good question, I'll have to think about that, uh..

EB: [Laughs]

CN: Batman doesn't kill people.

EB: Okay!

CN: Uh, no I mean he doesn't and it's an interesting thing, I um, when I signed up to do *Batman,* my knowledge of the comic books, and I've admitted this, was very slim, um, you know I really knew it from the TV show and I, it was a bit of a surprise to me to realise right at the beginning, you know in talking to, uh.. you know friends of mine I have a friend called Dave Savva who's very knowledgeable about comics, and I brought him on as a consultant and the first thing he told me is, and David Goyer told me the same thing, is that Batman doesn't carry a gun, he doesn't kill people. And I sort of went, oh, okay, so how do we..

EB: [Laughs] I've just signed!

CN: But of course that becomes the whole tension..

EB: Yeah

CN: And, this whole thing of how is he going to, how do you fight chaos, how do you fight anarchy, how do you fight somebody totally committed to, you know, doing anything that it takes, when you're not prepared to be as bad as they are and you're not prepared to sink to their level and that, that really is the backbone of the character and so it, it becomes really the driving force in the whole trilogy.

EB: and who drink Fernet-Branca?

CN: Michael Caine.

EB: Only Michael Caine drinks..

CN: Well Michael Caine loves Fernet-Branca and it's it's made from artichokes, it's, it's quite an intense flavour.

[Laughter]

EB: [Laughs] He's made you drink it?

CN: Well I, I, yes we'd been on the press tours and he swears by it because if you have a heavy meal and you drink one at the end he say's you'll never feel hungover or no indigestion. And I tried it and I don't want to say anything negative about this particular drink, um because, in fact I think in all the years I've been doing big films, for some reason like, the people who make the *Bond* films get given like Aston Martins and I've never had anything except Fernet-Branca after *Dark Knight Rises*..

[Laughter]

CN: Somebody sent me a case..

EB: For life!

CN: A large case of Fernet-Branca, and so I've been giving it away ever since.

[Laughter]

CN: But no, no Michael absolutely loves the drink and it's er, yeah so we you know, when it came time to write that scene I thought well it's.. you know.

EB: I love that, I love, it was his, his thing within the film.

CN: Yeah

EB: You mention *The Prestige* and we're gonna take a look at that right now.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

EB: Now I just see Michael Caine with a canary in one hand and a Fernet-Branca in the other hand! Do you think um, films are a magic trick?

CN: Yeah, very much, um, it's funny watching the proceeding clip of *The Dark Knight* which I made right after *The Prestige*. I was watching Nicky Katt who's the policeman, who's the sort of comic relief in the chase and very aware of the fact that having worked on *The Prestige,* I was very precise about, I needed him to come in and do that riff or whatever because he's the misdirection for Gordon being in the driver's seat, so you never think about the driver and never.. so.. *The Prestige* absolutely highlighted to me that yeah movies are a magic trick, a narrative, uh, is a magic trick, or, conversely, when you study magic, uh as I had to for *The Prestige* you realise that it's a narrative art, you know, every trick is a little story, hence the three act structure that we refer to with the made up terms, you know..

EB: Mm

CN: Which magician's, hopefully now use and swear by but uh, you know Christopher Priest invented The Prestige and the concept of it and ingenieur added the first two, The Pledge and The Turn which I think are, really beautiful.

EB: Is the experience different when it's an adaptation? Like this was and *Insomnia* was the other adaptation you worked on.

CN: I mean, every uh, every film you do is different, um, in terms of process, the fact that it was an adaptation, not so much, because we had a very long time to do the adaptation, and we were very free to change things, you know, the book was not massively well known and it had some amazing stuff in it and Christopher Priest did a wonderful job with it. But we felt relatively free and he was fine with us to change it and make it different for the film, and we had a, I had a long time, a lot of

experimentation to do that, so I think with anything , even with an adaptation, even when you hit the floor with it, you feel that you own it. For better or for worse, you feel that you've taken that over and made it your own, so I think, at the end of the day, it didn't feel that different. I think *Insomnia*, because it was specifically a remake of a film that had already been made, uh, that, was sort of closer in a sense that it was sort of a little bit more aware and had to put the other movie, which is a very brilliant film, the original, had to sort of put it to one side and not watch it again and kind of ignore that it existed in a way. With a novel that you're adapting, you feel more authority to be able to go back to it and draw from it and you know try different things.

EB: What did you like about *The Prestige*, what was the attraction to, to make it?

CN: I think in retrospect, I think I very much related to um, the process of the characters and idea of them, their showmanship and the way in which they have to create these narratives for the audiences. And so I think as somebody interested and working in films, it was a pretty, pretty natural match up, but I think the world of it particularly, I very much responded to. I also, I like films, when I talk about other people's films, I like films that don't necessarily have the conventional protagonist, antagonist structure. Um, and the film of a rivalry and a sort of duality in that way, uh, I've enjoyed films like that in the past, I mean think of Michael Mann's *Heat* particularly, that's a favourite of mine, and you know films that just have a, have different symmetry to them if you like, I think I was very attracted to that.

EB: Um, and, working with Christian Bale again who you obviously work with on *Batman* and, and casting, re-casting people that you've worked with before.

CN: Mm

EB: Is there, I mean is it just easier? Is it?

CN: Not necessarily, it depends on the acting!

EB: [Laughs]

CN: Um, no, it's uh, there is an ease of communication certainly, but I think honestly, I think for me what it's more about is that when you work with a great actor, you get excited about seeing them do different things, and so you have them, you know you don't write the part for them, but they're in the back of your head somewhere.. this idea of I'd like to see, you know Christian do this or you know I'd like to give him a challenge. You kind of wanna, you get excited about handing him something and going what could you do with that?

EB: Yeah, have you written roles specifically for actors then?

CN: Almost never, um, you try not to because if you're writing with an actor in mind, you're basically writing something you've seen them do too closely, you know I try to just write the characters as the characters. I think Morgan Freeman, Lucius Fox in the *Batman* films, I very much had him in mind when I, I felt like I sort of wrote to his voice in a way.

EB: Tom Hardy in *Dunkirk*, feels like he's the only person who could have played that particular role.

CN: Very much, but I didn't write it with him in mind, I just wrote it and then, just was like I , I have to, get Tom to do this, say put the mask on again and.. you know.

[Laughter]

CN: But he's, you know, Tom's very loyal and you know he was, he was willing to come and, come and have a go which was great, cause I, yeah I couldn't think of anyone else to do it once I'd written it.

EB: We'll talk a bit more about that in a second, can I, before I move on to the next one can we talk about working with David Bowie as well on *The Prestige* and what, what that was like, that experience?

CN: I mean it was tremendous, I, I mean all I can really say, it's the first time I ever went back to an actor who passed, because he passed on the role, uh through his agent, um who was actually Guy Pierce's agent, that's how we were able to get in touch with him but he, he said no. And, and I've never done this before, cause normally when someone says no you go 'fuck you' you know.

[Laughter]

CN: You'll, you'll see.. come and see the film, you know. Uh, but I, it just felt like the wrong, I mean it just, I couldn't imagine doing it with

someone else, you know and of course the agencies started sending me every pop star who ever wanted to act to do it and I'm like no, no, no, it wasn't because of that.. it's something about his presence and so I called his agent and said, let me try and convince him, you know, uh.. in retrospect that was probably a cheap trick to try and meet one of my idols anyway.

[Laughter]

CN: And then the thing I did is I very hastily wrote an introduction to the character which I, had been slightly missing from my draft because I looked at it with his eyes in a way and said well you know, what does it need? It needs a little more shape, uh and I flew to New York and I met with him and uh he agreed to do it which was terrific and um, it was wonderful working with him and the only thing I could say about him is, I've worked with a lot of very big stars and without disrespecting them in any way, he's the only famous person that I've worked with who was just as sort of impressive and illusive at the end of working with him as before. I mean I'm still, I came out of it just the fan that I had been before, it's almost as if I'd never really got to work with him you know, but I know that of course it would be one of the great boasts of my life to say that I'd worked with him, which it is, and I think he does a terrific job in the film and I'm very glad that he agreed to do it.

EB: Glad you went back there, um, talking about working with an incredible collection of big names in a film, um, the wonderful *Inception*.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

EB: That's what I've seen in my head after that scene cause, you.. how?! It, what, was It a rotating set? I mean, the cast are flying around, the camera's stationary, it's, it's, it's mindboggling and brilliant!

CN: Well, thank you. Uh it was a couple of different rotating sets, and there really aren't any visual effects actually in what you just played which is kind of fun for me to realise, particularly where Joe is, Joe Gordon-Levitt is fighting the guy on.. it was.. they're all in camera shots which is tremendous fun, but I, I, I mean there was a lot of thought on *Inception* where I was writing the script , as to special effects techniques, I mean one of the things that happened, on *Batman Begins* is I'd been introduced to these amazing special effects technicians, by special effects I mean what you do on the floor not visual effects which are post-production effects, and so Chris Corbould who did all the *Bond* films and everything, and they're just these amazing wizards and, the thing when I was writing the final draft on *Inception* it was very much the thought of, okay could they do this and could they do that and how would we go about this? And, and knowing that that would be a lot of fun, and with the corridor and everything, for me it all comes back to, Kubrick's work on *2001* where he did, you know these fascinating things with the rotating sets to simulate zero gravity of artificial gravity, where something's rotating. And, what I got to do and this is the fun thing of using film history, is I got to sort of take that technique and then advance it by building a you know a track, or having the special effects guys build a track, that we could move the camera up and down this corridor, and extend the shot and sort of really, do an extra dimension of it. And so yeah, we built a massive rotating corridor, we built a vertical duplicate of that corridor so that we could do wire work, like the scene in *2001* where he blows out of, or blows into the air-lock from the pod, but, um, and so, we also had the hotel room itself where they fight, there was a separate rotating set. Uh it was a huge engineering feat, um but these guys I mean they really are wizards, they're capable of, of anything and, Joe Gordon-Levitt, I mean, I think there is one little shot in there that's a stunt double, just one and other than that the double, who was a very good double for Joe, but he just sat there by the side kind of coaching him, helping him but Joe did absolutely everything, and learned how to do it. And those sets were impossible, I don't know how he did it, I mean you would stand on that set and it would start to move and your brain just immediately sort of says no this is wrong, you know..

[Laughter]

EB: Did you have a go?

CN: I mean yeah, we all did, because we thought it would be fun. We were like yeah this is great, and it.. it's not like that, it's sort of, you know the room, it's interesting because the room's sort of, eight foot, an eight foot ceiling

or something and then it was, thirty feet wide or whatever and so you'd stand there and it would start to tip and you'd be fine, and it's all very amusing. And then there's, there's a certain point where you realise you can fall thirty feet or something and your brain just immediately panics, I mean it really does and they had a big stop button, you know that if they ever saw it go too far for where the actors were positioned they hit the button and it just stopped dead. Um, but it was remarkable how Joe, I mean, he's a, he's a tremendous athlete and just a wonderfully physical performer and he just loved the challenge of it and he didn't want a stunt double to do anything.

EB: Um, what was the seed for *Inception*? Where, where did the idea come from, for the story?

CN: Well, I**,** a bunch of different things, I'd always been interested in the idea of taking on dreams, uh, in, in films. Knowing the hazards of it, it's difficult to do dreams in films and have people still care about the reality and the integrity of the narrative. Um, but, but really, a lot of what's in there goes back to my college days when I was at UCL and I was living in a hall of residence, and they had free, we paid for breakfast. But you'd be up late at night, so what I would do is I'd set my alarm clock for you know eight o'clock or whatever, whenever breakfast was, wake up, go eat and then go back to bed. And in that state of sleeping you know between ten o'clock and one o'clock or whatever you were doing, you could lucid dream, you were sort of in a different dream state, and so it was very productive for lucid dreaming. Lucid dreaming being, where you become aware of the fact that you're dreaming and then you try and manipulate the dream in some way and it, it's a fascinating mental process and I got very, very interested in the idea that, you know if you have a dream that you take a book of the shelf and you leaf and you look at the words on the page, you're brain is, one part of your brain is creating words on the page and the other part is reading it. It's a really amazing sort of feedback loop and I, I just got fascinated by those kind of ideas and what I could do to explore those and I spent many, many years sort of trying to figure out a genre and approach and eventually settled on the heist film.

EB: Why the Edith Piaf track?

CN: I just…

EB: Was that written in the script?

CN: It was written in the script and I just, I'd always found that song to be, just a wonderfully cinematic, kind of, song, I mean I use music a lot in my writing and in my thinking about films and I, I'd just always been very struck by that song. I thought it would, I thought it'd be good in a film, you know. Um, and then, quite bizarrely, wound up with Marion Cotillard who'd just played Edith Piaf in a movie, in the film but pure coincidence you know, but yeah it was always in the script and , um, we, you know Hans Zimmer, who did the music for the film and his team, they took the original recording and found ways to strip it down, take different elements of it and stretch it over time so that as the time you know lines had a different scale, you would hear the track in different iterations and, and then we re-recorded that with instruments and stuff. Yeah I just thought it was a very evocative piece of music and it just seemed to fit.

EB: Er, we're gonna talk about Hans in a second cause there's a wonderful story about an organ and *Interstellar*, after we've seen this clip.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

EB: So there's this wonderful story about, you sending Hans, a paragraph of this, the idea for the film with no, genre attached to it or anything.

CN: Yeah

EB: And asking him to come up with something

CN: Well I think, you know, the thing about working with people multiple times is you sort of start to get a sense of how you want to engage them or engage the creative process, um, and I think, I felt like the score we were gonna need for this could not be a science fiction score, it had to speak to the heart of the material, um, and I also felt sort of selfishly that I kind of wanted some music to be able to write to, uh, you know, I mean, um, so I, I got Hans to agree to.. he was in the middle of doing the music for Zach Snyder on *Man of Steel* and I got him to agree to give me a day out of his schedule and just take one day and I said to him, I'm going to write you a, like a letter,

describing, what I refer to as the fable behind the story, so no indication of genre just, just about the themes of it and about what the emotional story was going to be. And I said to him you can take one day and whatever you write at the end of the day, play it to me and that'll be the basis for the score. Um, and he agreed, and you know Hans is a legendary procrastinator so it was actually a pretty good way of getting music out of him very quickly, but he, he did, I mean I, he called me at the end of that day and I went over to his studio and he played me this piece that really is, the film, I mean it is the score for *Interstellar* in an almost complete fashion, like everything, almost everything in the film is derived from what he played me that day. And I listened to it endlessly, as I was writing the script, but then after he played me the music I told him that it was a science fiction film and he was, you know genuinely pretty surprised but, he understood what I had done because I didn't, I really didn't want any images in his head relating to science fiction or to the universe or anything else like that I wanted him thinking about the emotional heart of the story. Um, and I think, it's a great score, and it worked very well, I mean I was really, really pleased, it was an interesting process.

EB: You talked already about kind of creating this, the world as much as you can for your actors to immerse them in it, to allow them to be as real as they can within those situations and with this you really wanted to create that world outside those windows of those crafts that your actors were contained in. How did you go about that, but also how did you, you know, these are places that, that, humans have never been to..

CN: Yeah.

EB: In creating them what that would look like and sound like, and feel like.

CN: Well, it was really about I mean the early involvement In the project of Kip Thorne who's executive producer, um, when we came to do the black hole which features later in the film, he had all these equations that he wanted to share with us, um, and I put him together with Paul Franklin the visual effects supervisor and really it was this incredible thing of, you know, Kip is a very brilliant physicist who sometime this week is getting a Nobel price, uh..

EB: Wow.. amazing

CN: But he uh, not for executive-producing the film unfortunately.

[Laughter]

CN: But he, he had all of these equations on what the gravity of a black hole would do to the light and therefore the appearance and essentially we had the graphics machines you know, Paul and his team were able to take these equations and spend months and months and months rendering them and looking at what the mathematics would really provide which was something beyond what anyone would sort of design, and that was really the challenge, is to try and get some kind of serendipity, some kind of, something you wouldn't design into, into the material. So with the wormhole which was one of the toughest things to come up with, um because the mathematics of that are literally just concentric circles, the most boring thing you could imagine. Uh and so, we had to find some way to give it some kind of organic texture and in the end, Paul and his team, having tried a lot of different alternatives, um they actually took, the plate shots we'd done in Iceland of all the glaciers, and used them as texture maps for the computer graphics, so that there would be this kind of random texture to things that they would project stars and flashes of light on to and that way they started to get some kind of feeling of reality to something that otherwise would be completely abstract. Um so a lot of different, a lot of different brains fed into, what it was going to be. But we tried to do everything in advance and not leave things to later, so those visualisations, they were done before we shot, so that we could then put the material onto screens, front projection screens that we put outside the windows and so a lot of those shots are in camera you know, they're just looking out the windows at what was being projected there so the actors knew what they were reacting to and we get the real flashes or light, reflections of the real material and stuff, and, and, it was a lot of fun, it was a lot more exciting to do than if we'd had green screens out there or whatever.

EB: Yeah and also just the reality on earth as well, with the corn.. you planted five hundred acres of corn? I believe?

CN: We did.

EB: Wow, and made a profit from it? Well done.

CN: We did make a profit from it, we were able to sell the corn yes.

[Laughter]

EB: And the dust clouds as well, that was, that was, that was real, to a point?

CN: Yeah most of it's real, most of it's in camera and then some of the big wide shots we, we have to see a vast dust storm like at the baseball game, Um, we did those CG based on uh Ken Burns documentary about the dust bowl, uh, but we actually toned down, you know if you look at the material that Ken was using, the dust storms, it was so huge you really wouldn't have believed them so we actually kind of made them smaller, um but I was so struck by his documentary about this period in history of the dust bowl, that was, and I had never known this, but it was a man-made phenomenon. Uh, you know it was over, over-working the land and not rotating the crops enough and not ploughing correctly, combined with a relatively ordinary period of drought and it just laid waste to entire states and um these amazing dust storms happened. And he'd interviewed um, these people who were children at the time uh and he got them on camera and they give these amazing interviews, and I, um, I called up Ken, who I didn't know but got in touch with him and I said, I want to use, if you'll let me, I want to use some outtakes that you didn't use, if you've got the 16mm negatives. I want to use them in the film, as if they were people in the future talking about uh, a disaster that's yet to happen, um, and so, uh, you know we integrated out characters with, with that real footage of these real people talking about something they actually lived through. And it sounds like they're describing a crazy science fiction phenomenon but it's something that really happened and it was a, as I say, a man-made phenomenon.

EB: Wow.. do you, do you think about your.. the audience seeing your film more than once? Do you like the idea of them seeing your films more than once? Cause I felt so smug after..

CN: I love the idea of them seeing my films more than once!

[Laughter]

EB: I felt really smug after seeing this again, recently going yes I get it! You know it's that kind of thing where, because, the different times that you watch a film, you take, different parts and we'll talk about that with *Dunkirk* in a second but..

CN: Well the way we watch films is different to earlier periods of cinema, I mean I'm the first generation of filmmaker who grew up with home video, VHS, I guess, we got out first VHS player when I was eleven years old, and that changes your relationship with film narrative, because you can stop and start then you can go back and look at things again, and with all of the ancillary market now and they keep multiplying you know to different things, not you've got streaming services and this that and the other. Um, you wind up seeing films that you don't even like three or four times, you know you just do, you know you, it'll be on an airplane or in a hotel or on TV and you watch fifteen minutes of it or whatever and so, I'm the sort of first generation of filmmakers who really have to take that on as a different relationship between the narratives they're seeing and so you see if you can find a way, I mean Disney were the first people to sort of figure this out with the animation they were doing in the 90's, when they started putting in little extra things, they realised that kids were getting these on VHS and watching them hundreds and hundreds of times.. so just to stop the parents going crazy or whatever, you know, they put in a lot of visual detail. Um I try to do it more in a narrative sense, I try to layer the narratives in such a way that they have to work for the audience as their watching it, but there can be layers in there, there can be things that maybe won't get noticed until a second or third viewing. But I don't do it too self-consciously, it's really about information density, you know and in the case of the Disney movies that's about visual density, in the case of my movies it's more about narrative density, and trusting that they way people watch films now, um they're a little more relaxed about missing things, you know or catching up on things later as it were.

EB: Well, I had the absolute pleasure of seeing this next film at the science museum on the IMAX there and it was incredible, it's *Dunkirk*.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

EB: An exceptional film, congratulations.

CN: Thank you.

EB: It really, really is, and you know it's interesting because there's, there's not much dialogue but it's an incredible script, and a script doesn't just have to be about dialogue and I think there is so much in this film that is in the script but is not spoken does that make sense?

CN: Yeah, I mean, I, I'd been making films for years where if you didn't carefully read the stage direction, uh you were lost, and it was problematic, because the truth is the way people, people who read scripts for a living, just read the dialogue, because they're reading so many scripts and it.. and it's the same for me, it's a tendency, you skip over the big paragraphs of description or whatever and you tend to just read the dialogue and I was interested in, I think partly or mainly because of the, it was history, these are actually events that really happened and people really lived through it, I think I think I was interested in taking away some of the artifice of how I use dialogue in films generally, um and seeing what other tools I could use. And so, the script, was intricately constructed and has all the indications of how things are going to work visually, but not with the dialogue, we just sort of removed that. I mean I think that's the most dialogue there is in the film probably. Um, and I found that engaged.. I found that, um, really energised my creative process. Uh, you know just made me have to think about the storytelling in a different way. And actually I know that, at every stage, and particularly the editing for example with Lee Smith, a very brilliant editor I've worked with for years, you know he felt somewhat unmoored putting it all together because you have all these shots and all this material of this reconstruction of different events, but you don't have dialogue, you suddenly realise how much the dialogue becomes your backbone for everything, for pacing, for point of view, for how you do things. And I had found that during shooting, because you turn up for your shooting day and you're not just covering the lines and you realise mostly that's what you do is you just make sure you get every piece of dialogue on camera and then once you've done that maybe you play around a bit, but that's the backbone of your day, and that was.. so I'd already got used to the idea but it took Lee a little while in the edit suite to get used to it because it, it's, it is different you know, as far as how you're creating the emphasis and uh, for me it was all about trying to adopt the language of suspense. Uh, what distinguishes *Dunkirk* as a story, and a real event, is this element of it being, a very intense survival story, and there's a degree of, a massive degree of suspense, and so I was looking at, the cinema of Alfred Hitchcock and Clouseau and the great masters of suspense and suspense is primarily a visual language.. dialogue doesn't tend to be the main weapon that they employ. It's a visual language and it's a fairly pedantic visual language, you have to be very precise about showing particular things, a ticking clock, what a particular threat is, and then in the edit suite you have to be disciplined about maintaining that clarity uh, whereas in action films you can choose to really play around with that and confuse people about things or whatever. There's just a kineticism that takes over.. with suspense you have to be very, very particular.

EB: And you used this technique called the Shephard tone, which you'd originally used within the score of *The Prestige* if that's right? And something you adopted or approached with a narrative with this in terms of that suspense and the..

CN: Yeah, I had um, on *The Prestige* I had come across a bit of music that I couldn't understand how it kept going, up and up and up and so I called Dave Julian who did the music for *The Prestige* and I played it to him down the phone and I was like how does this work and can we do it? And he recognised it immediately as Shephard Tone and a Shephard Tone is, is sort of the audio equivalent of an optical illusion, um, and it's you know a series of tones that are being played so it appears to be continually rising, like a barber shop pole if you like, like a corkscrew effect, and Dave I think very brilliantly, we heard some of it earlier, layered that into a lot of the cues, most of the cues in *The Prestige* it was all based on this sense of, I wanted him to produce a sense of anticipation in the sort of ambience of the cue so it's always rising, it's always going somewhere, um, and I loved the way it worked and so we then incorporated it into all kinds of things in later films, including sound effects, so the other part of the sequence we showed from *The Dark Knight* the sound of the Batpod, is continually rising, and it's based on a Shephard chord, um, so it never downshifts, it's always going up. And in trying to figure out

how to approach *Dunkirk* as a suspense film, I decided what I wanted to try to do was to see if I could write that way, see if I could make the narrative do that by having multiple story strands and having one peak as the next one if beginning to build, and the other one is coming to a conclusion. So you have a continual series of peaks, so you're always, increasing in intensity through the whole, the whole film and then, you know, I asked Hans musically and rhythmically or whatever to reinforce that,to use those kind of ideas in the score.

EB: And in terms of shooting it, and I mean it's just it's incredible, especially in the planes, and how you were able to do that and you.. did you.. you got lenses, specifically made so that they could kind of fit within the plane? Or attached to the planes?

CN: Yeah, I mean the thing, the thing we wanted to do is, Hoyte, my director of photography and myself, we were determined to you know put the audience in the cockpit and we also knew that we needed to maintain the IMAX format through those scenes, um because it is such a wonderfully high resolution format but the camera, is enormous.. I mean it's, it's like a microwave oven with a lens on the front and, those cockpits are not large, so trying to figure out how to do that. We looked at various different options and in the end Hoyte, who's got a, he's got a real engineering brain actually, you know, he, he sort of mills things out of metal in his garage as a hobby. You know he's very technical he's has a CNC machine that he built himself, and what he figured out was that if you took the camera, and you oriented it this way, and you had a lens that had a right angle on it with a prism, you could gain more space that way and move it around in a different way, um, and you could mount it behind the pilot's head and have a lens that would put you a sort of mirror and prism arrangement that would give you a nodal point of view, that is to say you could pan around from the pilot's point of view. And, you know, he spent months and months with the guys from Panavision developing these lenses to be able to do that and it was his tenacity really because I think, you know, I certainly wanted to do it that way but there's a point where you're talking about avionics and borrowing airplanes and building lenses and whatever, and you go, you know is this really gonna happen? But, but he just stuck with it and he just made it happen and uh, in that way we were able to do an enormous amount in camera on IMAX, uh and really try and put the audience up in the cockpit. One of the other things that we were determined to do and wound up doing is, you know, when we looked at all the great sort of aerial sequences from other films, and there've been amazing ones in the history of filmmaking, uh, usually what let them down in terms of seeing the artifice were the cockpit shots. The shots of the pilots, of the actors, uh and so, our stunt coordinator, suggested that, there's an airplane we could buy, it's a Romanian plane called a Yak, that's about the same size and shape as a Spitfire, but it has two cockpits without being separated by a bulkhead, so what we were able to do is, dress the plane to be able to make it look more like a Spitfire, and build camera mounts on it, so that we could put the actor in the front of the plane, and the pilot in the rear cockpit actually flying the plane, and fly in formation with Spitfires and actually get the shots for real of the actor. And that, you know, took months and months. When you build a camera mount on a plane for a camera that big, you have to build it one little piece at a time and then test fly it and then balance it on the other wing and figure out the trims and everything so it took months and months to figure out but uh..

EB: And where are you while this is being shot?

CN: [Laughs] I, I was uh, standing down on the runway kind of looking at my watch and waiting, waiting for the plane to come back safely.. fretting.

EB: Cause there's no monitor..

CN: No, what we did is we sent, you know Jack Lowden, who played Collins, he would go up in the plane and the pilot Craig Hosking would have a stop/start button and he had a signal for Jack, because you can barely hear each other in these planes.

EB: Yes

CN: Uh, and he would let him know when he'd started filming and they would just run multiple takes. Which is not unlike the way you have to film driving scenes. So when you film driving scenes, um, you might have a headset on and a walkie-talkie, but unless there's room for you to go in the back seat, which sometimes there is , you generally have to leave the actors to it and say, okay can you just run it four or five

times? And then we'll look at the tape when you come back. And then the plane would come back down and, and I'd say how did it go and he'd say, well I think pretty well or whatever and we'd queue up the tape and have a look and say, yeah okay, can you do it again and they'd fly up again and um, you know that went on for a few days and stuff..

[Laughter]

CN: Uh, we had a good machine going round, a great aerial unit, because that was one platform that we had and the Craig, who also flew the helicopters, and flew his own aerostar, which was a plan which could keep up with the Spitfires, the real Spitfires, and there's this wonderful guy called Dan Friedkin who owns uh, I think he's got six Spitfires, he's a very successful business man in Texas, who now is producing movies very successfully actually this year he has several out.

EB: Using his money to good use

CN: Using his money to good use and I think in retrospect, cause I was, I won't say I was surprised that he was, he's a brilliant pilot, he landed the Spitfire on the beach for that sequence and that required him being on call and being a part of our unit for weeks on weeks, where he could have been off making huge deals or whatever it is he normally does! And you know, he very generously gave us his time and, and his planes which was an incredible thing. And of course now I realise he was really wanting to figure out the movie business which he has, which is pretty, pretty cool, but that's uh, that's Dan landing the plan on the beach for us, and now he's producing Ridley Scott's film and It's kind of a fun thing.

EB: Wow

CN: Uh, but so we had a lot of things that needed to come together like that, to, to help us out because, uh none of the stuff was easy.

EB: And we just get to enjoy it.

CN: Yeah.

EB: That's the wonderful thing! Right we have a couple of minutes for some audience questions. Woah! Um, okay, I'm gonna go with this young gentleman in the second row first.

Q: Hiya, thanks, hi Chris, thank you for everything you've done. Um, the way you spoke about Hoyte and the way you spoke about, the other DP..

CN: Wally.

Q: Wally, sorry, yeah..

CN: That's fine.

Q: Sorry, bit nervous, um, the way you spoke about the DP's very elegantly, and I'm very interested in the process a director has with their DP's. What is the one quality you'd put above others in a DP when you work with them? What would you say that is?

CN: I don't think it's possible to reduce it to individual qualities because I think really what you're looking for is, a connection, a collaboration, um, the way my movie sets run and I think it's fairly typical on larger films, uh and smaller films as well now I think about it, I don't know why I said larger films, it.. that relationship is the key creative relationship on the set, in terms of shaping the day and getting things done. So really what you're looking for is somebody who listens but has their own ideas, and can execute, and somebody who can work with autonomy and authority, if you have to step off set they can keep moving the things forward. But who will listen to you and who will, try their best to interpret what it is, what it is you want. But it's a vital relationship, um, as it is with an editor, you know and I was speaking about Lee Smith earlier but he's an editor I've had a long and productive relationship with, cause you're, you know you're in these very intense relationships with these crew members so it's important that you just have somebody who you can find the right fit with.

Q: Brilliant, thank you.

EB: Thank you, we've got a question up there?

Q: Um, you've done some quite exciting and a bit crazy things with some of your scenes, the truck flipping, the rotating room, the.. filming from the cockpit, are there any that you wanted to do that you weren't able to get into your films? Any sort of crazy ideas that didn't come into being?

CN: Um..

EB: Did Kip say 'that's not possible!' on *Interstellar*?

[Laughter]

CN: No Kip was very, he was an enabler, he was all for doing the crazier and crazier things. I think, I'm sure there are, it would be tough to immediately bring any to mind, um, because quite often things fall away for budgetary reasons, or you, you take the idea and you turn it into something else. Everything winds up being scaled down. The thing I will say about the truck flip is, you know, for months they would come to me with like a little, minivan and then like a slightly bigger van say we could flip this over there..

[Laughter]

CN: And every time I was like, no, no, we, it has to be.. you know, as it were, a truck, and so, I, I remember the times when I stuck to something and, and they sort of went.. Chris Corbould finally just went 'yeah, alright' and just went and figured it out um, but no, I mean, filmmaking is all intelligent compromises so honestly the truth is, everything you see is in some way a watered down version of what we all originally talked about, with the exception of that truck flip.. that is exactly.. exactly what I asked for so!

[Laughter]

EB: Uh, we've got a microphone up there, hello sir.

Q: Um, if you could talk a little bit about um, how you got the opportunity to make *Memento* which was your breakthrough film. Um because, obviously *Following* was your first feature, and then you broke into Hollywood, if you could talk about that journey please?

CN: Well I, I think in retrospect, what worked well about that journey, uh, I mean there, there's a lot of luck involved with all of these things. Uh and that always has to be said, but where I was fortunate is I'd already written the script for *Memento* before we played festivals and got distribution for *Following*, and that was, I didn't sort of plan it that was, it took us a long time to get anybody to pay any attention to our first film, um and so I wrote in the meantime. But in retrospect it was a really important thing because, you have that moment where somebody's seen something that you've done that has potential, that they like, that's at a festival or um, or what have you. And then it's like okay, well what do you want to do, what would you do if you had more money or whatever to be able to actually hand them a script and say, 'this is what I'm doing next', um that was actually very, very important, I think also, the structural ideas in *Memento* were reflected, they were echoing what was in *Following* as well, so people could look at that film and see the potential, how the other film would work. So I think that was a very powerful kind of one, two punch if you like, in terms of trying to break or leap over that barrier to getting your first kind of budgeted film done. Because I've, for people who don't know, with *Following* we made it for no money, I mean I just paid for it out of the money I was earning in the job I was doing, we shot on weekends, all of that so, it, it was a no budget film. So it was that leap to, to a budgeted film that we're talking about.

EB: We've got time for two more questions, this gentleman here is waving furiously with a lovely scarf on so he can have one, and then we've got one there. They'd better be good! I'm just saying!

[Laughter]

CN: No pressure!

Q: Congratulations on an amazing body of work, it's really fantastic,

CN: Thank you.

Q: It's going back to the uh, Hans Zimmer score for *Interstellar*, I'm interested to know how you actually, it's almost like the music, the sound design was incorporated into the music itself, like the rattling of the spaceships suddenly become notes and sounds like that. And also just quickly, the organ, was that in the original piece that he, gave you, that he worked on, on the day? I was fortunate enough to go to the Albert Hall and see the live orchestra. It was absolutely amazing and that organ was incredible so, could you talk a bit about that please?

CN: Sure, Um, I mean as far as the integration of music and sound goes, uh, we've always, I've always had the sound designers work very closely with the composers, so we were talking about Shepard Tones earlier and what Dave had done and what Richard King the sound

designer would do and, and, there's always been a back and forth. The other thing I've always done and that Hans had accommodated, was, and this was very much the case in *Interstellar*, we get many, many tracks, so it's not just like, here's a piece of music and you just figure out how loud you want it, um usually pretty loud..

[Laughter]

CN: It's really about, you know hundreds of tracks, in the case of *Dunkirk*, thousands of tracks, literally, and so you're able to integrate them with the sound effects in very particular ways and bring out particular sounds and strip everything away or, I mean, *Dunkirk's* fresher in my mind because we just made it, but um, like the boat engines are carried by the music track sometimes, and then other times, the sounds effects but they're always in rhythm and in perfect sync and everything. And so we've always tried for that integration, because the truth is you have a very limited amount of audio real estate in a film or in a mix, and so you can't have pounding music and pounding sound effects, they have to work in harmony. And so the scene we showed from *The Dark Knight* which is the truck flip, that whole car chase, that doesn't have any music on it. Uh and, because we needed a pause there and so we had Richard King, analyse the sound effects in terms of the low end elements being like drums and the high end elements being like violins or you know ticking sounds, or what have you. So we've always tried to view the soundtrack very holistically, as music and sound together, not as two separate elements, and pro-tools technology, which is what everybody uses on the stage, it really allows you to interweave these things and play around with that in a very careful and particular way. But you have to have composers who are willing to let you experiment with the elements, if, if, you know and I've never worked with a composer who is unduly precious about that, but that would make it much more difficult if it were sort of a complete piece of music. It's a lot more fun to get, you know what, um, I mean Hans would always refer to it as a Lego set, these sort of blocks that you can use and play around with. And on, on *Interstellar* the organ was not incorporated in the original track that he sent me, it was just something that I really wanted to do. I felt like it would be the right sound for the scale of film we were making, and there was something about the history of it that felt right to me in terms of, instead of, going in a science fiction direction or going in a modernist direction and he very much liked the idea of that and interestingly, even though Hans grew up, you know, he would play, he would experiment on the organ in the town where he grew up when he was very young, he'd actually never used an organ in any of his scores.. Um, surprisingly, and so it was a very, it was a unique and new challenge that he had to wrestle with, but I think it really inspired him actually.

EB: Last one's on you..

[Laughter]

Q: Okay, it's gonna be a good one, thanks for coming Chris is was great to have you here, um I have to say, I can't choose between all your films but probably *Inception* is the crème de la crème, I think.. personally, but..

CN: What's wrong with the others?

[Laughter]

Q: Nothing! They're amazing! It's like choosing your favourite child, they're all amazing but I think that one is…

EB: Leave it!

[Laughter]

Q: If there is an Everest, I think it's that one. But uh a two part question, first I wanted to talk to you about, and ask you about, the Howard Hughes script that you wrote but weren't able to make, and what attracted you to the character of Howard Hughes? And um, secondly, uh, the Character of Cobb has appeared in *The Following* and in *Inception*, and if I, I watched um recently, a screen test with Christian Bale as Batman. And, if I heard it correctly I think he talked about Cobb and I don't recall Cobb being in the *Batman* films unless I've missed it but who is Cobb, or what does he represent as an acronym, is there something behind Cobb?

EB: Corn on the Cob?

CN: No, nothing massively mysterious, it's just a name I use that I like the sound of, and so, coming up with names, as any of you who write know, it's just a pig, it's, it's tricky. And so when you have something that expresses

something, there's a feeling to it that seems right, you feel like, okay I can appropriate, I can steal from myself, so uh it's more on that level than anything too specific to be quite frank. Um was there another part?

Q: Yeah, Howard Hughes, the script and what attracted you to Howard?

CN: Well, I don't know, how much you know about Howard Hughes but he's sort of.. I mean he's just a fascinating character, his history is fascinating and he's, I mean, let me put it this way, a lot of what, I put into my Howard Hughes script, that I do hope to make one day so I don't want to say too much about it..

Q: Sure

CN: But a lot of what I found interesting about that character channelled it's way into Bruce Wayne very easily. You know as far as the eccentric billionaire characters go. His, his history is generally pretty fascinating. Um and you know one day I hope to do it because there are films that have addressed different aspects of the extraordinary life he led but not the whole thing.

Q: Thank you.

CN: Thank you.

EB: Thank you so much for your time, Sir, thank you guys for being here and for listening. The fabulous Christopher Nolan.

[Applause]

CN: Thank you.