



INTRODUCTION

Julia Ormond is an English actress. She made a strong debut playing the lead role *The Baby of Mâcon* in 1993, and performance alongside Brad Pitt in *Legends of the Fall* the following year. Since the 1990s, Ormond has appeared in indie films such as *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008), *My Week with Marilyn* (2011) and *Albatross* (2011). She also won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Miniseries or a Movie for her role in the HBO film *Temple Grandin* in 2010. In this interview she discusses influences in her childhood and early training, roles that felt personally and spiritually significant, and her service work in Africa.

PART I: BACKGROUND AND TRAINING

EARLY BIOGRAPHY

JW: What early life experiences formed you into an actor or brought you to acting?

JO: I was born ambidextrous, but culturally my grandmother was spooked by it, and urged my mother, who's left-handed to pass everything to my right hand. In secret I would practice left-handed writing; writing backwards and mirror writing, and for me somehow it has been a boon of more equal development of both sides of the brain. The physical challenge, and mental challenge of it then, I believe led me to do a weird (and highly controversial at the time) combination of art, science and math at A level (final two years at school in the UK). I was really only allowed to do it because I was convinced that I'd go into the arts – so no one got to stop it. I am still fascinated by

science; love the mechanism and explanation and the reality of it; combined with the observation side of creativity.

I moved toward art very early. On my father's side my grandparents painted landscapes. That Welsh countryside influenced me a lot. I was blessed with a grandfather who taught me to look at light and how it falls, taught me of Rembrandt and how he captures light, emotion, and scenes that tell a story, and taught me to constantly observe and try and unravel the story of a human's life, by observation of their current state. Our physical form and the sound we make are a direct result of our experience; figurative work and then by extension acting is playing forward and backwards through that.

I learned a lot from my training as a painter; much of it that was later applicable to my acting, and life. For example, if you make a mistake, that's your greatest gift. Go with it or create it into something else. Goldsworthy as an artist is wonderful to me; working with nature; sea, earth things that will die and never return; his passion and mix of giving it everything knowing it will go in reality but will be captured on film; it's like a great lesson in loving; not sexual love but real appreciation of form for form's sake; random and un-tamable; given over to universal rhythms that you can witness but not control and own. The gift is the experience of being part of it; you partake of it, you may not control it or keep it, but you keep the wealth of experience from passionately taking part. That's a birth and a death, and experiencing putting heart

and soul into something and having it “die” on you I found very maturing, and a true gift in art/acting and life, where in acting you are moving sculpture; captured through light, but have to trust and dive in and be something else using self as the clay.

I sometimes think that most celebrity is perhaps privately seen as an egotistical life; we have (and I count myself in there too obviously!!) this odd relationship to it, in all honesty a kind of envy; as if the person granted that life won the pools (lottery) through setting “being the center of attention” as their highest priority; and how shady, shallow a choice; isn’t acting about being good at lying? However in my experience the better you get as an actor (and I don’t believe I have ever gotten there – this is what I aspire to and strive for) it is about your physical body completely inviting another physicality to take over, while you use soul energy to play emotion, mirroring and using perhaps your own past equivalent, and controlling your spirit with a predetermined path (the script), heading full on into the traps and flaws, and human errors that are the characters; it is to strive for an absolute surrender of personal ego, in search of another person’s (writer’s) articulation of truth around the human experience, in order to illuminate what it is to be human for audience, under the constraints and pressures of reality (the work environment). I believe in acting or actors, there is somehow a pattern of a particular need to be seen, that originates from some past experience and becomes a perceived urgent need. But that doesn’t mean that all actors are extrovert, and ego-driven; we *all* have our moments, but we can also be a

shy and insecure bunch; something that I find often seems to disappoint the public, that seems to crave someone who has graduated to “complete confidence and happiness mode.”

In art, if you have done something that's not in balance, repeated process of getting rid of it and recreating it; teaches you to trust that you can recreate. Also, you learn to confront how much we project what we think is there, and that by confounding our thought process, we learn to be more accurate. As an exercise, if you take a picture of say a vase of flowers, copy it right way up but when you flip it upside down and copy it, the copy of it upside down will be better. Part of art is to draw what is there. Your analytical brain gets in the way and you try to draw what you think it looks like. The analytical thinking gets in the way, interrupts and judges. When you turn it upside down, the very simplistic analytical brain is given just enough to occupy itself to free the creative side.

I also learned lessons about diving in, having a starting point, having a sense of where you want to end up, but then see where it goes; also being able to let go of something that you spent an enormous time on. If I was to do an oil painting, I might get this foot fabulous and this face is fabulous but the stuff in between doesn't add up, I may have to scrub one of them. I had to trust that I could let it go and that I could recreate it. That acts as a model in terms of not freaking out as an actor. It happens where I do a take and nail it, but the focus was off; meaning it's unusable. That can be

a moment of messing up as an actor by letting doubt and judgment take hold, not being sure that I can do it again as an actor. If I start to get negative and freak out, I won't be able to do it again; you have to trust you can. The lessons I've learned in each has been transferable to the other. A helpful state I've found is to offer up whatever I do; it will be what it will be, I just need to stay open enough and rock up; be present and trust.

There is a lot of stuff we would do in art school. For example, think of an emotion and paint that emotion in an abstract way. When you are in that emotion, what color does that bring up in you? If you look at someone like Georgia O'Keeffe, she apparently loved music but was tone deaf. When she describes her work in color, there is a whole movement to color; colors evoke music and music evokes certain colors. So she was painting music. That way of seeing is very connected. If I work backwards and conjure up color that I imagine fills my physical body, my physical body will move towards embodying that emotion.

DRAMA SCHOOL

JW: What was your training as an actor?

JO: Drama school took over drawing and painting. I started to paint only very occasionally but it has come back to me now as a mother. Acting for me was much more fluid. I wasn't very free with my visual art. I attended drama school in England in the 80's. I was 22 or 23 at the time. For me, the process at drama school was that each of us had these mannerisms that we were unaware of. Same way that when we travel: we are not aware of our own culture but we can see it in other people. We're "normal," everyone else has "culture." That's right down to our accent. I don't have an accent. Someone from Australia or India has an accent. A lot of the work we did at drama school was physical. We did a lot of movement, dance, and yoga.

Our training was Stanislavski based but they also brought in a lot of improvisational work; that's connected to Stanislavski. Techniques involving studies in the movement in animals were also introduced. You take an animal and use that as part of your character.

I remember doing this exercise which was really hilarious. We all had to line up and then you had to walk in a circle to join the back of the line, in the mannerisms of the person behind you. Pretty much everyone in the line said afterwards that they recognized the walk of the person behind them and the shock of the person behind them, because we all thought we were totally normal. It was a way of showing us that as an actor that you have to get to neutral, like the use of Alexander Technique to get physically neutral. Also, then our voice work came to play. If you have perfect spinal

alignment, it's like a cello expanding with your chest and your chin, etc. That perfect physical alignment is what allows your voice to hit the back of the theater. It also gets rid of some blockages because your emotional power has to be a wave that goes through you. If you look at metaphysics and how everything is connected, the more you can powerhouse emotion and drive it out, the more it will affect people throughout the theater. I honestly felt in theatre, and in film to lesser degree, because people are concentrating on their essential job, not just experiencing as a theatre audience. But acting that flows can make your hair stand on end; captivate you in its flow, and when you're captivated in that way you're open to the power of story.

There is a big difference I've seen of the British training and what I've seen of the American training. Americans are very based on improvisation in total, whereas we were taught to improvise on the text. With classical texts like Shakespeare, you can't improv with the text, but you can improv within it. You know that the building blocks are cast, but you never quite signed off on how it gets played out. That's what gives it life/breath. The relaxation techniques are about liberating breath, which liberates voice and thought and soul.

Dialect work in film is absolutely fascinating as our sound is a replica of our experience, locality-driven. The dialect, for instance of the cockney comes from people avoiding inhaling smog; pollution, so they spoke with their teeth together – if you speak normally then close your teeth, your sound will go to cockney – teeth for

instance becomes “teef” because your tongue can’t move forward enough. So learning, over the years, a particular sound, in terms of speech patterns, shows life experience and its imprint of how we all present to the world.

The improvisation exercises on text that we did were interesting. They taught us that what you actually say as a person is probably 2% of the meaning communicated. Who you are as a person and what you communicate with your body, voice, and action carries far more meaning. In a classical text, there are much more layered secrets that the process of rehearsal will help you uncover. When a line isn’t coming together, it meant for me that I had to make five different choices earlier. Struggling with that one line wasn’t enough. Classical theatre demands a rigorous examination and constant revisiting; there isn’t a writer there to explain what it meant and spoon-feed you. My training also involved classical texts and also classical British speech training. My sound in British was slightly common, slightly London. Even my second film, which was a period piece, I had to have a dialect coach to make sure my English was pure enough.

My training taught me about being athletic, and getting the body to neutral in order that it can be a more receptive and more flexible tool. In terms of energy and meditative states; we did a lot of meditation and relaxation technique work in drama school. Our teachers would take us through guided practice. Meditation would get the body relaxed. Usually you would lay on your back rather than the more traditional sitting meditation posture. As an actor, you can feel when you are emotionally filling

up. If you play an angry person, through Stanislavsky and the Method, you connect through emotional recall. You use that as a springboard but in some ways, emotional energy is just emotional energy. Looking at someone full of emotion, different people might say, "she's feeling desire" or "she's that's anger" etc. You can't actually read what emotion it is; it's just full of emotion. As an actor, you can take your emotional fuel and push and guide it into any direction you want. You then bring out the physical; in comedy the energy goes up, and drama it tends to do down. Extrapolating that into life teaches you how much in relationship we bring to the table of our own judgment and baggage; we presume or project what the person's feeling, and get into trouble through that vs. really hearing what they articulate they're feeling.

Once you have the physical sorted out, the emotional has the capacity to flow. You make a conscious decision to guide it into a certain direction. You have to be more specific with how you act out physically so that it's not generalized when you are on stage. For example, in *The Godfather*, you look at Michael Corleone, you don't know what he is feeling, but there is one moment where he looks down at his hand and he isn't shaking. That's the choice of an actor playing ambiguity throughout a scene and then the director saying I now want to show that you aren't anxious through how I portray your physical life. You can take Alexander Payne's work. I can see in comedy, he has these moments where what someone is feeling is what they are physically wrapped up doing. In the movie *The Election* with Reese Witherspoon, when she hears

she wins, she does this crazy jumping up and down that you probably wouldn't get in a straight movie; it would be portrayed differently. You take the energy and move it into something larger, and somehow that delivers more for comedy. George Clooney's run in *The Descendants* when he finds out about his wife is done in such a way. If you look at *Sideways*, the run down the hill with the bottle of wine is comedic because the physical is amped up. Dustin Hoffman describes it as in a straight film you make love by being graceful going across the room whereas in a farce, you run across the bed. There's a connection between the emotions and how heightened they are in the physical enactment, but what choice you make for it physically depends on what genre you are in.

SPIRITUAL BACKGROUND

JO: Historically, I was brought up by the Church of England. As a tomboy, I extremely flippantly lost connection as I didn't want to be in a dress and go to church. I was very disconnected from it quite young. I lost my faith in the "God" when I was young because I kept adding on to the end of prayers, "please can I wake up blonde". I never did and figured it was a small thing to ask, so I thought, "Really, god can't manage even that?" so I got a tad disillusioned. And I didn't want to be in a dress... so the god of fashion and hair color didn't relate to me... (laughter). It amazes me looking back

that at that level, I honestly just wanted to be pretty. Of course I wanted to eradicate world poverty – but pretty first.

So, I became very disconnected from the church quite young through immature processing. But only much later in life did I question the core beliefs of Christianity; the crucifixion and the virgin birth. Probably, late teenage going, that's really quite weird, do I really believe; should I believe that and found out that I didn't. I found myself struggling, "does god exist, or is it more of spirituality" and meditation became more of a practice which delivered connection I could feel.

In terms of what kind of meditation practice I took up, I did something really basic. Acting and voice relaxation techniques brought me first to meditation. I had truly great teachers; and what fascinates me is that from purely working a relaxation technique in order to act better; tension/anxiety free; I first experienced that shifting from sensing my notion of defined physical body, into that disappearing and bleeding into a very freeing state of connectedness, relaxation and unity. That is also a very comforting and peaceful state that I can return to but have never graduated to being able to keep with eyes open and walking around!! When I did theater in London, I did meditation and preparation for theater. It really helped me, but I'm really terrible about implementing it in my regular daily life. I've had periods of my life that I did it more consistently and I reaped the benefits of it.

I think we have a predisposition to just know in our gut that “outside” or around us is something so much bigger than ourselves – it’s taken me a very long time to see or feel confidently that we are an absolute part of the thing that is around us – I perceive it as “around” and “outside” of me because I process it through the eye, from a minute perspective; however the greater reality is that there is no delineation. But as I grow older, spirituality is about everybody understanding their connectedness; and love being about respect and not seeing someone as different, as something to fear, or as less than.

The idea of ‘synchronicity’ has become a slightly freaky guide for me. I’ve had some major coincidences in my life. Now it’s almost like a Geiger counter. It gets faster and faster. Like if you write down someone’s name and they call you in an hour. I feel as if the universe is giving me signs. Ethnic cultures like Native Americans have really influenced me. In their culture, if you see an animal, it means something: a whale, a dolphin, a wolf. I’ll notice that more and more in my own life. I’ll notice see what a sign is saying, especially if it repeats; which it absolutely does in my experience if I chose to ignore it. Even clearing out my stuff, even clearing my wardrobe makes an impact. As hideously materialistic as it sounds when I have, the next thing I know, people are sending me free clothes. Old clothes block new stuff from coming in. It’s the same with dead scripts. Clear it. It’s all “blockage”.

I've gone to people who have done psychic or astrological readings and that sort of thing. The way that I use them, as I do have this pragmatic side to myself, is if someone does a reading, then six months later I will look back to see if it's been accurate. Some of them have been scarily so. It's almost scientific for me. I test the readings, see how accurate or helpful they are, and then I fine tune who I choose to go to. It's important or rather relevant, that I don't believe everything they tell me; it's a sounding board. The final decision on what to do is up to me. It's almost like someone interpreting a dream; my resonance with what they say is what matters. It's a tool to find what resonates to me. I think there is something in these tools; I don't know how to explain it. I've made some critical choices based on that sort of information.

I had some great Feng Shui experiences. I moved into a new apartment in London having made some money acting. Somebody as a gift gave me a Feng Shui visit. I laid out where everything was but I couldn't decide where to put my desk. I wanted to put it one spot and it turned out that was supposed to be the place for my love life. That has always been my ongoing struggle: between work and personal love relationship. So he suggested that I put a piano there rather than my desk. (laughter) And then the energetic location of the career was literally in the downstairs toilet. That's my career, it's in the toilet. I said "is that bad?", and he said, "I guess it depends on how much you flush it". (laughter) Just kept it moving. (laughter) And oddly enough I had just set up a production company called INDICAN 'In the Can' which was a play

on words for the term they use when you've captured a shot when working on a film. But being British, I didn't know culturally that for Americans it also meant, in the toilet. And historically that was a particularly difficult period for me; in that apartment. So, again, maybe not an exact science, but I've found some value in this examination of space and energy in where I live; and in this case it seemed intimately connected to my work.

PART 2: STORIES

SUGGESTIVE OF

SUPERNORMAL CAPACITIES

IN PROFESSIONAL ACTORS

FIRST KNIGHT

JW: What are the peak capacities you've developed as an actor? Can you give examples or stories about those when those skills were operating?

JO: The coincidence stuff was really interesting when I did this film called "*First Knight*". My dad had been brought up in Wales and part of the film was in Wales. I wasn't very comfortable in the hotel I was in and asked if I could move to a separate hotel. Somebody told me about a really beautiful hotel, but it was an hour away. I went to look at it and it was gorgeous. I felt really at home. I had taken my mom with me and as we were driving back to the rest of the film crew, we drove to the location the director had chosen as the valley of Lioness which is a significant location for the film. The director had looked all over Europe for this location. As we drove past the valley, my mom says "you know this valley, this is the valley where your father's parents would come and paint every year. These are the paintings of the valley that you saw as a child in our home; that influenced you to start painting."

I then found out from my mother's side of the family that the site the movie was going to use for Camelot in was in Wales and was a nuclear power station that was designed by my mother's side of the family. That felt like another odd coincidence; more than the average coincidences. Then, when I spoke to my Dad, he asked me where I stayed in Wales and I told him about it. He gave it its proper Welsh pronunciation and said, "That house used to be in the family. Your grandfather is buried a mile up the road and that's right next to the village where I was born and raised." Now, some people would right that off as chance or coincidence, but that to me felt like it spiritually had some weight to it; I had literally felt a coming home, before

knowing why. Then I found out more recently, that my father's side of the family had been located there for 800 years. And until that point I never really registered to me that my dad was pure Welsh.



Julia Ormond (Right) with Richard Gere (left) in First Knight in 1995

First Knight is a children's movie; not highbrow, but the experience of making it was profound for me because of those connections. I could definitely see how the

experience with Guinevere was transformative for me; especially if you looked at her relationship with her father and with Arthur. My paternal sense of self definitely grew from that point of view, and shifted and changed. Because I also dealt with personal demons through that process, it unlocked something; afterwards I was able to turn my energies to a more useful end; towards social causes. The process settled something in me that was blocking something personal. So you can take that energy that has been released personally and battle something more communal.

JW: Was the role significant to you? As an archetypal, is it so deep in the mythic genetic code for you?

JO: Oddly, I was kind of dismissive of the role at first. For me, I had always wanted to do comedy, but ended up doing drama. Once people discovered I could cry, I got more and more typecast. But I was a class clown, and everyone had thought I would be doing cheesy comedy; in all honesty, I'd still like to, see absolutely nothing wrong with it, and feel laughter is a real healing force; perhaps more artistic in how it creeps up on us. I reached a point where all the characters I was playing were very dark and I was starting to feel pigeon holed. It was rare that I would actually survive a role. I always got killed off, died of the plague, hung myself, ended up in bits, or whatever. I was becoming depressed and affected by it. When I would come off an intensive film, I

would practically sleep for a month. Not even unpack my suitcases. I would have a uniform of a t-shirt and jeans. I couldn't find/feel myself. I didn't feel reoriented for a long time. That period of transition out of character and back into real life is something I have got better at understanding as I've got older; it's ok to do that if you're single but a hard price for family who need you to be present, especially if you've intensely been absent. That period of re-grouping and detoxifying has always where I make my worst mistakes in terms of material. I would lose all sense of what projects I should do. I've worked with that, and now, as I work with agents and managers, I tell them, "I'm not going to make a good decision right now; I'm exhausted; too drained and empty." And it's understandable that I'm exhausted because (doing a lead especially) it drains you completely and it should; that's a sign that you've given yourself 1000 percent to the role. But First Knight was a light and easier project; the director is deliciously funny and loveable and it was a wonderful time for me.

JW: I can see how in so many ways you match up to the role.

JO: That's something the director saw as well, he'd wanted me to do it from early on. He just saw something clearly about me in that role, that maybe I didn't feel. That's one of the challenges as an actress for me is what you look like is not always what you are. For me as an individual, I see myself as very different from that. I can relate to

aspects of Guinevere in terms of social consciousness and stuff that I've done, but would NEVER say, yes, I'm her; I took a stab at it; I rocked up with what I could give it. But for me, the roles that are interesting are the more flawed ones. But there were still a lot of challenges in it that were fun. In a funny way, it was one of the harder characters to play because she's got such a clean moral background and then the fall is with Lancelot. And it was only through that project that I started to connect with my Celtic roots and with that valley and specifically with Camelot and that was all a bit strange. Spiritually confusing, exhilarating and compelling.

As an actor, I find it fascinating that you get to dive in, stand it up, and feel it in those characters. You take who you are and you bring out those colors and you can tell when it resonates. There is something that I think in the genetic coding that shifts or changes based on your lineage. It's something that you will recognize in terms of when you get back to your native habitat in climate and land and blood and culture, but also in terms of characters and scripts and language.

LEGENDS OF THE FALL

JW: Was there ever a role that was particularly fascinating that created a lot of dreams, a certain satisfaction creatively?

JO: When, I think in terms of spiritual connection, probably *Legends of the Fall*. Being around many Native Americans was something that came out of my involvement with that film. That led to interest in the animistic culture, mother earth, and finally environmental interests. It just so happened that even previous to this project, I had an interest in and history of exploring Native traditions. For me, *Legends* ended up being a lot about spending time with the little girl in the film. The grandmother to the little girl was a medicine woman who generously took everyone off to do a sweat lodge and a vision quest. That was another major meditational experience. It was silence for 48 hours, meditating for a long period of time, and also fast so your awareness changes and you're sensitivity to reading any earthy signals that come your way. And then you talk it through with the medicine woman and tie it into an emotional spiritual issue you're having at the time. Also, you give the medicine woman a possession that you are deeply attached to. I gave her my wedding ring which, two years after my first divorce, I couldn't remove. It was extremely profound in teaching me to let go. Among other things, it's a small act that challenges your attachment to possessions, and how possessions carry a power if we let them – that possession was trapping me, blocking me.



Julia Ormond (left) and Brad Pitt (right) in Legends of the Fall in 1994

JW: Can you tell your story with the vision quest itself?

JO: In my personal life, I had been divorced from my first marriage for two years at that point. I was still wearing the wedding ring. That became the thing I gave to the medicine woman. It was a profoundly breaking experience for me, and at the same time, one of my biggest growth periods. It was easier to do than I thought it would be, but I left my ring with her. I think the actual ritual of doing that around a very emotionally difficult time was cathartic and releasing and enabled me to really move on.

On my vision quest, I had decided that my spot would be near an ice cold river that I had to wade through. She interpreted that as me being too hard on myself and I had to relax that; I, after all chose the spot (ridiculous). I didn't see anything on the quest itself, other than ants and two birds. But then, on the day that I left the location something big happened. As background, it's important to know that the house that I was in had a cat. Every time I would come home, there was some offering of a dead mouse or bird. The night before I was to leave the location the cat had brought in a wren and it was still alive. I put it into a box and went to sleep. When I woke up, it had gotten out of the box and was bouncing off my head onto the window trying to get out. It allowed me to catch it. It was the first animal I had ever held that when I opened my hands it just fluttered and took flight. Then, when I came out the front door there was a female deer right outside of the door on the porch; like she was protecting me. To me both those encounters with animals felt significant; and gave me a deep sense of connection with nature; that there was some understanding and that nature had my back. In that heightened state of awareness that comes from a sweat lodge and vision quest you're sort of looking for those things. The actual vision quest itself was, for me, an experience of swaying from moments of peace and being settled to unbelievably discomfort, hunger, and intense anger; "What am I doing?! Why am I doing this?" I experienced a lot of frustration at not being able to turn off the chatter in my head.

SOCIAL CAUSES

JW: As a result of your service work in Africa and with human trafficking, have you connected to a transpersonal or collective pain that's fed back into your performing?

JO: I had this very intensive period of traveling around the world seeing slavery, child slavery. I completely underestimated the torment; because I heard all these unbelievably horrific stories. I somewhat blindly went into that, I had to subsequently deal with that, and still struggle emotionally because every time I then tell that story, it's traumatizing for me and I underestimated the power of that. In addition, it's really rare that I speak about my work (no matter what I speak) that someone doesn't end up in tears afterwards, right there, telling me their story. They often say, "I've never told anyone that; please don't tell anyone." I always respect people's anonymity, but I've found that I need to ask permission to channel this story or let this story pass on, in some form, so that it doesn't just lock in me, while preserving their anonymity.

But also, the side I love is to work towards strategic solutions to all this suffering, I have found that collective pain of those stories that I have contained in me can be transmuted into motivation for finding solutions. It becomes a fabulous turning point. That's where my storytelling strategy has gone to. I need to be conscious so that if I am taking on a sad story that I channel its energy out in some way. How do I shake it off

and morph it into something that's healthy. How do I, as a storyteller, take such sad information and give it form so that I can take people through it and give them an emotional turning point that engages them to think of something differently; to think of solutions. I don't just dump on them some sad tale. They would just freeze over. So instead, I say, "Okay, if you're moved by this, then here are some specific actions".

JW: That can invoke compassion and empathy, and motivate new action?

JO: For me, one of the meditations around performance is about ancestral connection through women and men, connecting historically through ancestors and then it is about giving it away. I gather myself through concentration and relaxation. Then for some reason I tap the bridge of my nose and then I offer it up. In the offering it up, it releases me from responsibility of what happens. I say to myself, "I've done my preparation, I've done my rehearsal. I've worked as hard as I could to get to this moment now. Now I have to relax and be free. I hope that it honors my ancestors and I give it out." Whatever happens is guilt free. I could completely fuck up... I could draw in, I could forget my lines. It releases me of this dread responsibility when I'm in the moment. And directors have occasionally asked me, "we've been watching the footage, and right before action you do this gesture. What are you doing?" And I say,

“That’s private; itchy nose...” I don’t want to share that process with them; it feels it would taint it somehow.

BABY OF MACON

JO: That I don’t believe in (even resent) using the word “God”. We brush it off by explaining “When I say God I mean both sexes” or that “it’s hermaphroditic” – that’s horseshit, and a big part of why women and the female energy is massively dismissed in our world; to horrific outcome. We balk at acknowledging the power of that language; it’s in “every man was created equal” – how am I to feel about that if I’m not mentioned? That messages to women and girls that we are not in that picture; thus less, thus we struggle falsely to regain a power, within the constraints we’ve been allowed; the box we’ve been put in.

I talk about this because my personal development and conclusions that I’ve come to, whether through art and figurative painting/drawing; which honors ALL form, all types, and especially those relaxed and accepting of their flaws, somehow shine more authentically; it’s an honoring of true human spirit, when done well, through honoring real body form. That for me continued through my work on Peter Greenaway’s “Baby of Macon”. I’m deeply grateful that that film was a starting point

for me; there was heaps of nudity, but for me his honoring of all form, was what protected it from being exploitative.

M O S T C U R R E N T

JW: When do you think you are or were at your absolute best as an actress?

JO: I'm at my best today, because it's a craft... I have a long experience that I can always keep learning. That was a revelation to me because I was raised that if you haven't got it by university, you're kind of done. But what I've learned since is that practice is what unfolds it for you. I think we can always keep learning anything that challenges us, regardless of age. As an actress, today I'm better and more at ease. I'm probably much more collaborative than I was as a result; painful to think back on how scared I was and wooden. I'm less fazed by anything on the set. I've probably got more to give. I'm not as fearful if something goes wrong. I land on my feet, it works out, and no one dies. If one door closed, it means something else is coming in. The more I think this way, the more I see. You look at situation, analyze it, and figure out what are the things that are blocking creative response. If I unpack those and deal with them, then everything starts to come in really fast.

I'm now really challenged, in the film industry, to deliver on both an artistic plea that we be honored in all our various forms, as soul and spirit beings, and being

healthy, and being under pressure to unhealthily deliver the un-realistic. I'm also fundamentally busy and lazy enough, and hungry enough and indulgent enough to get confused and succumb to justifying not taking care to achieve that state, but say "I am what I am, aging how I am, and if you don't like it don't hire me."



Julia Ormond in *Albatross* in 2011

But I've also learned that not being "put off" by the notion of failure is also a scientific thing. A scientist will go from one experiment to the next and objectively pull the information, and work out the next thing to do. You get frustrated by the things that you aren't able to do, so you quit but it helps to understand deeply that it's part of the process. The more experienced I've become as an actor, the more confidence I

have the more I am able to check out my ideas. I can bring them to the set and ask, "What about this and that" and the director can say, "No sorry, this, that and something else." As a young actor that would have really fazed me, because I would have been more attached and invested to my own idea. But now, I can just shift if and you can make it work.

One of the greatest lessons I learned in acting was to forget about myself. Do my homework and take care of the other person on stage. What you give them will be richer and not fear driven, it's accept and build, its improvisation... and that person will give you more back and that takes care of you; you literally do not have to focus on yourself; you will have such a joyous experience focusing on them. You get something much more rich and textured to respond to and so it plays like a much more fascinating game. I also want to say, that I've had the true gift of working with astonishing artists like Pinter, who spoke of just rocking up every day, and letting it flow through him; not knowing where it came from, but feeling it was a kind of channeling. All those people affected me profoundly and I'm ever so grateful.