This bulletin is divided into two parts: the first, segments of initial exchanges between artist Jumana Manna and Robert Wyatt over e-mail, and the second, a conversation in Wyatt and Alfie Benge's home in Louth, UK. It was originally assembled for the catalogue to the group exhibition *We Are Living on a Star* at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo, in 2014. This version has been lightly revised for the new context.

Robert Wyatt (Bristol, 1945) is a British musician and poet. He is one of the founding members of influential rock band, Soft Machine, in which he was a drummer and singer. In 1971 Soft Machine played two concerts at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter accompanied by liquid light shows by the artist duo Mark Boyle & Joan Hill, who used overhead projectors to create a psychedelic environment on the concert stage by visually amplifying chemical and physiological processes. In 1970 Wyatt stopped working with Soft Machine due to internal conflicts among the members and began his long and prolific solo career with the release of *The End of an Ear*. His music is admired for its playful, absurdist, almost childlike sense of wonder at the world. The interaction of words and sounds in his lyrics allows the songs to speak of subjects as diverse as the love for his wife, painter and songwriter Alfie, the geopolitical struggles in East Timor and Palestine, and the workers' unions in the UK.

Cover: Robert twice photographed in Louth by Jumana.

I.

Jumana, July 25, 2013

Dear Robert,

Like many, I have listened to and deeply admired your music for years. I was rather wondering if you'd be open for us to meet and talk about your work and about how you've thought about your role as a musician/artist who has been engaged in politics, but also what kind of new obstacles we are confronting today as artists, musicians, creators, in the face of a new economy and a different kind of politics from the one you knew when you began working as an artist in the '60s.

Maybe I should first tell you a few things about myself. I'm an artist, raised in Jerusalem, educated in Norway, and currently living in Berlin. I gather you've got an impression of what I do — mostly films and sculptures. My work often deals with questions of community, intimacy, history, ideas of modernity including the implications of these on the arts and nation building.

What encouraged me to get in touch is an upcoming show I have at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter (HOK), just outside Oslo, where you played together with Soft Machine in 1971. The context of the show at HOK is the question of normalcy and freedom that arose in Norway after the July 22 (2011) attacks by Anders Behring Breivik. My contribution will be a series of architectural casts from Høyblokka, the highrise governmental building in Oslo that was bombed on July 22. This quarter is famous for its brutalist architecture as well as the modernist art on its façades and interiors. Since the structure and most of the artworks were made out of concrete, they survived the attack, almost as a triumph of those very same values of socialism, simplicity, honesty and rationalism that the ethics of the building style stands for. Since you are a part of the history of HOK and have responded to similar issues of free will, socialist legacies, and rationalism vs. the absurd in your music, I thought this would be a fair excuse to get in touch and see if we can do something together.

Robert/Alfie, July 26, 2013

Great to (see) hear from you, Jumana.

I remember a saying, "The young stand on the shoulders of the old," which is rather ambiguous. It can make old people feel more reliably stable than we are. Sometimes I feel the reverse — that we are younger than our descendants, since we were born at an earlier time. I feel so much less um … sophisticated? … than the super smart young cookies I see around me. I feel more and more primitive, connected only as a ghost in the wrecked museum. Meanwhile, the best questions are the most innocent perhaps, and it don't matter how little you know of me. I have many relevant (?) interests, but I am not one of them.

Jumana, July 27, 2013

I have many questions, not sure if all are answerable or interesting for you, but I trust you will take and make what you want of them and I'll continue accordingly. Maybe it's best to start with the most essential question: how do you continue working from the heart? Excuse me if I'm treading on clichés, but how do you maintain such a genuine and engaged creation, not falling into cynicism or arrogance? Under what conditions, be they personal or political, do you feel that cynicism develops?

I wonder if there is a fundamental difference in our ability to respond with solidarity today, in comparison, let's say, to your generation. I wonder if our over-saturation of knowledge has made us feel less.

One of the things I struggle with is how not to resign from art as a place of resistance, but still not censor a possibility of abstraction, free association and poetry. I feel that this romantic idea of letting our minds loose and following our inner desire at times leads to reproducing the symptoms of the very same things I think I claim to resist. Maybe this is an unfounded worry or just an irresolvable aspect of the way our politics and economy are structured today.

How do you think of abstraction and poetry in relation to politics? And in continuation, can you say some words on how you relate to the question of commitment and art? How have you thought of your creation in relation to the world politics?

Robert/Alfie, July 28, 2013

I don't generate my music with any consciously predetermined attitude or framework. I root around like a pig looking for truffles. It's all instinct. My political concerns just slide in there, drift in and around. They have however frequently consumed my poor old brain, since I see the world from a perspective that seems to be identified as communistic, but I don't sit around thinking oh dear I must say "the right thing": I don't give a toss what that right thing (sez who?) might be. But neither am I confrontational. If people don't like what I do, they got plenty other entertainment available.

Robert/Alfie, July 29, 2013

Good morning Jumana, I thought I'd try a little bite-size chunk for the moment. There's a bit's been nagging awkwardly: the rather tortured-looking worries you expressed about the fear of not being able to reliably match your natural untamed feelings with what you think they ought to be. The thing is, I think people would find it totally endearing and funny and charming to see you struggling with this in your art. I can't imagine a serious left-wing sympathizer who'd disapprove, and if they did they're humorless bores and the left doesn't need them. And if as you imply it's rather more a case of you disapproving of aspects of yourself, well, that's poignant and honest. I wouldn't beat yourself up about being human …

Jumana, July 29, 2013

I've struggled with feeling comfortable with the role of the commissioned commentator in the context of this upcoming exhibition in Henie Onstad — being invited to reflect upon questions of normalcy, consensus and the act of terror committed by Breivik. Even though these are questions

that I find truly interesting and important, to be invited by an institutional body creates a certain discomfort that I have not been able to precisely pinpoint. Maybe because I believe the only valid comments or works of art about these issues will emerge out of necessity and not by invitation. What do you think about the artist playing the role of the commissioned commentator, the one who the nation turns to for reflection? I mean, if artists are the soul of the nation, what are the murderers, then, and what those in power?

Robert/Alfie, July 29, 2013

Well, I do think it's good they asked you. I mean, it's a thoughtful idea and if, as I think, art is descended from religion — in that both look to a kind of imagined alternative world … you could be a new kind of priestess!

A real person thought of you, suggested it to the others, and they thought yes. The institution is just the building you meet in. I think it's something to be grateful for. Being invited. I respond to you partly because you ask me stuff, and I'm grateful you do that. Alfie always remembers a suggestion offered to her: "Either do it as if there's a great weight on you or as part of the dance."

I am aware this does not yet lead to a coherent statement, Jumana, but it's good for me to be sort of speaking with a real person out there (that's you). I'd forgotten how hard it is to retrace my thinking. Like a penguin on land, the water I swim in is the music itself. But I will try for you.

Jumana, July 29, 2013

Thank you Robert. Here's one more for today. From what I understand you and Soft Machine toured and performed together with Mark Boyle and his partner Joan Hills for a number of years, with Mark and Joan doing their light shows in sync with your concerts. Henie Onstad Kunstsenter has a relatively large collection of Boyle's works, which I really love. Boyle speaks of a non-hierarchal relation to the

world, through the various castings he did on spots on the earth. In a catalogue from Henie Onstad, it is stated that his life's work is to be two-fold only — to see, to feel. I feel that times have changed and that this simple and beautiful claim would not pass today. The awareness of the role of the artist has been complicated, as have the economy and politics of the art world. Do you have any thoughts on the validity of Boyle's work today? What are your memories of working with them?

Robert/Alfie, July 30, 2013

Mark and his family were lovely people, rescued me for a while and allowed me stay in their house a while. Their work was everywhere of course, and the map for blind-dart throwing.[1] His family carries on the work in their own way. And yes, he made no attempt to bamboozle people intellectually. I remember when he would be asked to sit on judging panels. I asked if that was hard — to know what to look for in a work and he said o' no — I just ask myself, is it wonderful?

II.

August 8, 2013

I arrive to Louth, four hours north-east of London. Alfie picks me up at the train station and drives me to their home. What follows is the edited transcription of our conversation on August 8 and 9, 2013.

R: Anyway, this is what I've got to say about art: Art is a witness. An artist is a witness, intended to be so or not. And yes, you don't have to be combative just to be good. Most of the people I know are and I love them for it.

"Free Will and Testament" (1997)

Given free will but within certain limitations,
I cannot will myself to limitless mutations,
I cannot know what I would be if I were not me,
I can only guess me.

So when I say that I know me, how can I know that?
What kind of spider understands arachnophobia?
I have my senses and my sense of having senses.
Do I guide them? Or they me?

The weight of dust exceeds the weight of settled objects.
What can it mean, such gravity without a center?
Is there freedom to un-be?
Is there freedom from will-to-be?

Sheer momentum makes us act this way or that way.
We just invent or just assume a motivation.
I would disperse, be disconnected. Is this possible?
What are soldiers without a foe?

Be in the air, but not be air, be in the no air.
Be on the loose, neither compacted nor suspended.
Neither born nor left to die.

Had I been free, I could have chosen not to be me.
Demented forces push me madly round a treadmill.
Demented forces push me madly round a treadmill.
Let me off please, I am so tired.
Let me off please, I am so very tired.

R: "Free Will and Testament" is one of the few songs I wrote that I consciously had something to think out loud really. It came through a frustration, exasperation with things people say, that you kind of take on, and I think really? What's that? Being told in politics that I should be grateful because I got freedom of choice. Well yeah I thought, between what and what? You don't get to choose your own parents. Alfie had a wonderful thing in her fantasy political party, called The Saturday Night Party. Rule number one was: the right to choose your own ancestors, which I thought was fantastic. That's definitely a new kind of mental freedom.

So, it was against this smug idea that there is a thing called freedom of thought, and that there are some people who think freely and others are trapped in a box. I think everybody, every single person, is mad. And that socialization involves trimming the hedges so that your garden doesn't spill too much into the next person's. You pretend that you have more in common than you maybe do, for convenience, for everybody's convenience. You decide on some simple rules. In England, everyone drives on the left. "That's against my personal freedom! I demand the personal right to drive in the middle!" No, sorry. It's not a moral issue; it's not a personal freedom issue. But if you don't drive on the left there will be a lot of traffic accidents and people will be irritated and cross, and it's boring. I completely accept that. In that sense I don't need rebelliousness.

However, there are times when everything around you or the main things around are totally alien and stop you being able to function. There are things around you that don't mind their own business and at that point you are going to resist or go under. And I'm not looking for a fight, but they arrive, soon enough, you will be in one. So then, the thing is to try and be brave, remote from the physical front, it's all shadow boxing, hot air balloons. That's the nice thing of getting older; it's just a person in a room, making noises with their mouth. If that's as far as it goes, leave it. If it resonates beyond that, if it picks up mass, momentum, then you can be concerned about that, if it's something you really think will make life worse for other people. I have a lot of difficulty with courage. I don't know how brave I would be if I were to be pushed. So I have to be fairly humble about what people should or should not do, in terms of resistance.

I don't think you are in a position to lecture an oppressed person on how they should resist you. I don't think you have the grounds. If we've got a job here, it's to stop people being frightened of things that are not really hurtful; like the person behind you in the supermarket with a turban.

I've had several attempts at killing myself. Nothing dramatic or tragic. Sometimes I just say, I've had enough of this. Like you might leave a

party. Take another drink, go home, get run over, I don't care, I'm just tired. That is not fair, because if I do that, it'd seem like an insult to the people I've left behind. Alfie's younger brother Eddie worked on the railway, the loneliest job, and part of his job was picking up body parts from the railway. Cleaning railway lines with arms and heads and stuff. It doesn't happen every day but it happens. It's a very quick way to die. And if you kill yourself at home, someone will come and find you and you'll really spoil their day, at least their breakfast. You'll look very ugly. I wouldn't want to be put in that position. So I thought, it's not that I really want to die. I simply wonder how could I be happy if I never existed at all. Not be somewhere else, but nowhere. Not to exist. That's the choice I would make if I had it. I'm not allowed to do that. That's not allowed to happen. Those are my thoughts on freedom of choice.

J: What about the song "Age of Self"?

"Age of Self" (1984)

They say the working class is dead, we're all consumers now
They say that we have moved ahead — we're all just people now
There's people doing "frightfully well" there's others on the shelf
But never mind the second kind this is the age of self
They say we need new images to help our movement grow
They say that life is broader based as if we didn't know

While Martin J. and Robert M. play with printer's ink
The workers 'round the world still die for Rio Tinto Zinc
And it seems to me if we forget
Our roots and where we stand
The movement will disintegrate
Like castles built on sand

R: Yeah, let me go back through that in my head … That was almost commissioned, it was the time of the miners' strike, '83 or '84, I think. I hadn't got any money. So I was trying to do as much as I could on my own. I don't like making records where I can't pay people, unless

they are either very rich or very close friends, so there are a couple records where there is no one else on there. There was a kind of nonchalance in conservatism that there is at least as many losers as winners. And in fact almost by definition, the successful elite was much smaller in numbers than the unsuccessful non-elite. You don't have to be a communist to realize that's a bit dodgy.

"Age of Self" was a very simple thing really about how we are just trying to say, admit that this is what's happening. Conservatism is a return to a class system and after all the hoax of the Labour government in the '50s and late '40s, we are still back to a country being run by people from private schools and universities, with no work experience aside from that, telling the rest of us what to do what to think when to go to war and so on. And think by getting a few people to set up businesses that will replace all the main industries that England had when England was working. The hypocrisy of that is, it enables people who abandoned the left … it's not Dickens anymore … but where our businessmen have moved out to, it's still Dickens.

J: You've worked both solo and in bands. Do you miss being in a collective?

R: The jobs where I've felt most free and happy were jobs like washing up dishes. Work is just light as a feather when you are doing it with other people. So yeah, I really miss the momentum. That might be what slowed me down. I've tried to do some gigs with the accident;[2] I did some things in Italy with Henry Cow, lovely group. I was a guest with them. In London after recording Rock Bottom we did a live concert of it in Drury Lane in 1974. When listening to it now, I get teary, because it's got a vigorousness and chutzpah kind of momentum, one of the group taking over and I'm just one of them. It's very nostalgic for me.

If I could, I would have continued with that band. But it's a lot of responsibility to have a band. There's no way that Alfie and I could take it on. The good thing about working alone now is that bands that gather good material go on doing the same thing. I don't do that. I record a piece

and may make several versions, but then I have to come up with something new. This might be the reason why it seems like I've done more than I felt I was doing. Whereas other musicians have worked more, done more, but have been playing more or less the same thing every night they've been on tour.

I wasn't very good in a band, and the reasons are this: you either have to be a good follower or a good leader and I'm neither of those things. I can't take orders. I can't give them. So I have to work with people who just get what I'm doing or I just get what they are doing. Alfie and I don't really collaborate as in sitting swapping ideas. I write much more music than I do words and Alfie's words have helped me put more music out. So that's a team, that's a real team, and that's completely fulfilling.

J: What you did with Soft Machine is quite different than your own records.

R: It is. I regard my years with Soft Machine as my apprenticeship. I learnt about music, playing it for ten years. It is the cliché about one door closing and the other opening. I have to emphasize (again) that Alfie kind of rescued me. A lot of people left the hospital that I was in and just got completely lost, wrapped up in almost just being disabled. It can take up your whole life. Alfie really worked hard at getting me back to work, making sure I had instruments, dealing with contracts so I could get paid. I never got paid. All our managers were crooks and bastards. I only had five pounds when I had that accident. The rest, well, we got a check of 100 pounds from Ronnie Scott, 100 pounds from Alfie's stepfather and then Pink Floyd did a benefit concert and gave us 10,000 pounds. A friend of Alfie's, a model, gave Alfie a car, so Alfie learnt to drive, because we weren't going to be able to use public transport and Julie Christie, the actor, also Alfie's friend, bought us a flat.

J: So you had a lot of good will from your friends.

R: We did. But what was great was that about five years ago, Alfie said, we can pay Julie back. So we paid her back and when we did, she

cried, because she's always giving people money and people assume she's rich, but she's not. She doesn't do much work anymore; the last thing was a disaster. We didn't pay with interest, but just the sum of money she gave us then, which is of course worth less. So thank you Ronald, thank you Julie and the model, what was her name — Jean. Thank you very much.

J: And how long did it take you to get up and running again with your records?

R: Well, luckily I had started writing stuff in Alfie's flat before, in West London, where I had moved in with her. We had a cheap organ, which she had got me. I was sort of writing tunes for the next group I would have or something like that. I had done a bit of Matching Mole stuff and I couldn't decide with which musicians to work with, so I just thought I'd write some material.

So I had the basis of a record when I had the accident. In hospital, I just thought about that all the time. The thing about being disabled isn't that it's tragic, but it's incredibly boring. The tunes gave me something to think about. I had to memorize every idea I had and go over and over in my head. After three or four months I was allowed out of bed to try a wheelchair, one or two hours a day. You get completely dizzy after 20 minutes at the start, and then you go back to bed. In the visitor's room, which nobody used, there was an upright piano. I finished the writing there. So when I came out, I had a record in my head.

J: That's incredible. So you had composed everything in your head?

R: Well, when I got to the piano, I had started writing stuff down. In a very… I can't write music, so I have a very primitive system. I know that's a B-flat… [Plays some chords.] That's it.

I've been thinking of what you said about commitment. It is a tough one and I really had to think about it. It's difficult to impose, certainly on anyone else, but even on yourself. I find this is a very personal thing. All my stuff comes from just emotional empathy as a resilient guide.

But that doesn't mean you have to like people or like their culture, it is just the fact that you know what it's like being human, to eat, sleep, and want to raise a family. Whenever we have enemies who we must destroy, we give them names. We make films about them, which only shows this totally hostile picture. Whenever we talk about people in Islamic countries, we only talk about the men in turbans with guns. But it's also full of women and children, people with boyfriends and girlfriends, people who want to have food, want to have fun, want to have a life, want to be dentists. They want to be anything you like. They are the same as you, you idiot — so obvious.

So I do. I do consider myself a committed artist. I suppose where other people might have a religion … a sense of … it's not quite morality, but a kind of empathy or loyalty. I don't even know I'm going to until I see them in a conflict and I know. You just suddenly take sides, it's human nature, maybe, and I do take sides. It might seem lightweight, but I cannot honestly claim for sure that it's any deeper than that. I know if I were born into a Conservative family I would see things differently. I was born into a Labour-voting family at the end of World War II who just said, let's change things, let's get people into schools. My parents were so excited about this; it was such a wonderful feeling. They say the '50s was austere, but it's my childhood and it was magical to me.

People are very misunderstanding of a zeitgeist or the idea that things go in decades. This is my problem with history: you can look at the books, look at the photographs, but the spirit in the air is something nobody else will know except from the people who were there. That's why I get furious when I read these young historians writing about the '50s. You know nothing; you're just reading those horrible newspapers like the *Times*.

Remember how Rothko was pissed off at being bought by rich business-men. After the war all the Abstract Expressionists basically considered themselves left-wing and the fact that they were used as a flagship of U.S. freedom I think is infuriating, especially with Rothko. This is a humbling reminder, but there isn't much you can do really. I had a

real shock about that when I had a record of mine, which wasn't about anything specific, being played on a western propaganda radio. For a while there I thought, blimey — I want to make sure that the next records I do have something in them that will prevent them from being misused. I call it putting a spanner in the works so that no body would use my works. So that was a deliberate response to a situation.

J: Which album is that?

R: *Old Rottenhat* — although it's not about politics particularly. The music itself is just part of my search for beauty really. But all the spanners are in the words, I'm not offering you my aesthetics if you think horrible things that I don't agree with, I'm putting something here that'll stop you enjoying them. Write your own fucking tunes you bastards.

If we think there is something we should be dissident about, what exactly is it? Find out more, and so on. If you want to sing about that, sing about that. The more and more I got into the meaning of dissidence, which simply means sitting aside in Latin, my music got less and less demonstrative, less and less dramatic.

J: The music itself?

R: Yes, and I was influenced in part by a funny thing there. I noticed that the music of the Vietnamese soldiers or South American guerillas was often very gentle, quite sleepy, quite romantic. And the violent music was coming out of well-fed Northerners that were bored bourgeoisie. I thought: that's interesting. In America, the punk thing, which I never really got into, is too self important. It's alright, but it's kind of, woo, we're something different. No, you're not, you're bored, bored, bored in your boring, boring American suburbs. So yeah, the threat that might have been originally heard in the music disappeared from my music and went into my words. It just slipped inside there.

J: When we went for a walk earlier in town, you mentioned something interesting about normalcy being a historically determined matter.

R: Yes, people often say, well it's just human nature and forget just how enormously cultures shift. I mentioned how the English have changed so totally between the 18th and 20th centuries.

J: What stood on that metal plate was pretty brutal.

R: Yeah. "Hung, drawn, and quartered." This was the 16th-century way of stopping people from doing what you don't want them to do. You hung them, but did not kill them. Hanging doesn't kill you, that's the thing — it suffocates you, but it takes a long time to die from just hanging. It's interesting because people are always very horrified, rightly in a way, by the sheer scale of the French Revolution with the guillotine. But in fact it was a very humane invention at the time, just one chop, gone, like a shot to the head. It was the first non-torture execution to be devised.

There's another thing: people think that the Old Testament is just too primitive, but they don't understand the history of it. Was it Abraham who wanted to sacrifice his son and then God said to him at the last minute, just sacrifice a sheep? I think Abraham in that moment introduced the idea of sacrificing an animal instead. That was a humanitarian breakthrough. It's very difficult to capture the zeitgeist when you read about history.

Another thing about normalcy: the primacy of the male figure in families. This runs through the three monotheistic religions. The demonization of women came with the arrival of the male God. The multiple gods of the Greeks weren't meant to be exemplary; they were simply meant to illustrate human characteristics, good and bad. Then monotheism, a male god-ism, was imposed, and this is partly because there were goddesses who were extremely important in the ancient world, queens and goddesses. And the trouble with them, as far as men were concerned, was that you never knew who their babies were and so you didn't know if you were carrying on your line or that of the guy next door. The whole business of keeping women in their place and controlling the line stems from that monotheistic tradition. And if there are places where women are stronger — and they still exist — then women

have a say in who the next generation is. In other words, in who actually exists. In a totally male-dominated society, it's men who actually exist if they control which women have which babies. It's not normal. It's been going on a long time, and is ubiquitous, but it's not intrinsically human nature. It's characteristic of this culture, and has been for thousands of years, but it's not biologically normal. Some things really are natural occurrences. Like, for example, the year, to some extent the month, and the day, and the night. But the week, and the decade — these are artificial, an artificial social construct, a decision made.

J: How do you think being brought up by women affected your relationship to the world?

R: I think it probably has meant a great deal. I had a big brother, but he wasn't a father figure at all. My mother lived in a family with another family who had five girls, the youngest of whom was my age. And the husband was there, but he was a quiet scientist who sat in his study all the time. He was an educationalist and a scientist, an absolutely lovely man. And I think he went deaf, totally stone deaf fairly early, and everyone said he did it on purpose because of the noise. They did shout at each other, these women: the sisters at different ages shouting at each other for being in the bathroom. I was brought up with the youngest sister, Lindy. She was very quiet and we used to play together. My mother was the breadwinner; she was a journalist. I just got completely accustomed to the idea that women run things, earn money and do stuff. Men were strange little things in the background, treated with affection, but not as anything very important and certainly not anything central. I think that must have affected me. Like my record collection, I was lucky, I got educated early.

J: So Robert, who are your friends in this town?

R: Some of my most intimate relationships are with dead people whom I've never met off my records. As I say, they are my equivalent of family photos.

J: Those there?

R: Those, these, and those on the top. Yep. It's not all jazz. Flamenco also. Lots of black music. Jazz isn't all black, but most of the jazz I like is, even though it's not a rule. They've been with me all my life, but they don't, it doesn't matter … they are there for me, so … I'm pretty good on my own actually, to be honest.

J: You don't get lonely?

R: I do when Alfie's away. For a few days, when the cats are away, the mouse can play. I listen to stuff very loud and live strange hours. After about two days, I'm just eating stuff I shouldn't eat, frying things up at 4 o'clock in the morning.

J: And do you like that?

R: No, I don't like it, but I think it's good for me. I'm so full of regrets of mistakes I've made, things I wish I've never said or done.

J: To her?

R: No, just to the world — but to her certainly, too. And I like the feeling of just keeping out of that trouble. Trying to learn to behave. Yeah. I think I seem to require that. It seems to … it works, you know. I was brought by my parents to think that artists could behave however they wanted because they're artists. I behaved assuming that to be the case. And Alfie said, fuck off, that is NOT the case, you're just another person. I know what my parents were doing, like a lot of atheists; they deify the artist as a kind of priest. And I have some of that. Some of my jazz heroes are kind of priests. And when I was younger my painting heroes Pablo Picasso or Paul Klee were my high priests, superhumans, between men and Utopia they are floating somewhere. But Alfie brought me down to earth. That's just her job.

J: What philosopher would you like to live next door to?

R: Well, thank goodness I live next to a really good dentist, a good plumber, and a man over the street that knows how to fix windows. I'll do my own philosophizing.

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1. For more on the lifelong art project *Journey to the Surface of the Earth*, initiated in 1968–69 with a public invitation to throw darts while blindfolded to select random starting points on a world map, see www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/mark-boyle-797.

2. In 1973, Robert Wyatt fell out of a fourth-floor window and was paralyzed from the waist down.