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Kieran Connell: So I was going to ask, first, really to start, I guess, at the beginning really. I mean, what brought you to the centre in the first instance?

Rebecca O'Rourke: It was the Working Papers because I was doing English at Hull in 1973 to 76 and I came across the Working Papers in the library. I was very interested in them and, at the time, although I was in English, I was kind of doing a parallel study of sociology because most of my friends were all in sociology. I was excited by the notion of theorising literature which was a very ... it wasn't a common approach in those days. So, I was reading around Sociology of Literature, reading the Working Papers. I suppose I had three elements to my degree. One was the English degree at Hull the, kind of, informal sociology and then the other was the Worker's Education Association at Hull. When it came time to leave university there was a kind of assumption, possibly from me as well as my family, that I had done that and now I would get back on track and go off and be a nurse or something more appropriate to who I was and where I'd come from in class terms. I did apply to be a nurse and I did actually go for an interview at Birmingham, ironically. They'd just brought in a graduate entry scheme for nursing which was offered at four places and I got rejected outright for the three and I had this very strange interview at Birmingham. When I got back to Hull, my tutor said, 'Well, of course they rejected you. I made sure they would'. He'd written the reference. He said to me, and I kind of disagreed really with what he'd did and what he said, because he said something like, you know, 'It would have been a waste of your education and an insult to your intelligence to become a nurse. You should be doing research'. But I had no concept of what it was to do research or where to go or anything. One of the people in Sociology I was friendly with was Michèle Barrett, who was at her first job. She said, 'Oh, I think, you know, CCCS might be the sort of place to think about. You should apply there', so, I applied on the strength of this looks interesting but I think when I had been reading the work, the Working Papers, that there was a sort of disconnect of not thinking somebody like me could be part of it or contribute to it. I applied, had an interview, got accepted onto the MA and then, whilst I was there I got a DES grant to do a PhD.

Kieran Connell: What was the, kind of, initial appeal of the working papers (overspeaking)?

Rebecca O'Rourke: I think it was ... it was the politics. It was, really, that, that I'd come from a political activist background and this seemed to be the only place and, to be fair, also my tutor and some of the tutors of sociology, where it was legitimate to talk about the politics of intellectual life. And the fact that it was political, it was collaborative and it was interdisciplinary because I never wanted to be in one box, I always wanted to be making connections between history, literature, sociology, arts, sciences. So, it was that really that appealed and, certainly when I went for the interview, it was just the most, you know one of the most interesting conversations of my life really.

Kieran Connell: Was it, because I know that students often sat on interview panels, was it strange at first?

Rebecca O'Rourke: No, that came in later. I think I was part of the first year where students interviewed. I was interviewed by Richard and Michael and Paul.

Kieran Connell: And that would have been what year?

Rebecca O'Rourke: That was, that would be 1976.

Kieran Connell: So, how would you, kind of, what was your kind of, how did you kind of reflect on the atmosphere that you found at the centre? Did that reflect on what you kind of felt like you needed, like, intellectually and, basically, did they match?

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Rebecca O'Rourke: Well, that's a really difficult question to answer because I can't remember exactly, so, you know, it's all very mediated. But, I think, and also, it was a point, a point, of change and I know, in a sense, the centre was always changing, it was always in points of change but I think it was a point of change in that we were a bigger cohort than they'd had before for the Masters. But then, we weren't as big as the next year's cohort. There was this kind of old / new tension which was there throughout, all the time I was there. It was possibly there all the time actually because I'm sure it came back again when they started to do undergraduate work, this sense that there was, kind of, the real centre and you were on the margins and had to fight your way in. Some people were happy to have you and some people weren't happy to have you. I mean, not immediately with that. I think I'm probably talking more about the second year there. One of the things that was quite formative, in my experience, was that there were a group of us who were really interested in continuing to work on English studies and that was anathema to Stuart particularly who was kind of doing everything possible to disconnect with English and reposition cultural studies as something in its own right and, sort of, looking more to sociology. So, there was a lot of opposition when we set up the English studies group for instance.

Kieran Connell: So, did that, did the English studies group come around in 76 after you'd joined or?

Rebecca O'Rourke: No, that came more, sort of, 77/78. I don't think it, no, no I think it came later and, obviously, there was a lot of contestation around feminism, women's studies and really big arguments about, you know, whether feminism was a distraction from the, kind of, real politics of socialism and Marxism, so, there was those kinds of issues going on. Those were the kind of intellectual events and challenges and, I suppose, at a personal level, to be honest, it all felt a bit overwhelming initially. It's like, you know, 'What am I doing here with these people', and a sense of, kind of, excitement and frustration about trying to grapple with theory because, you know, I'd spent all my undergraduate time wanting to engage with theory and in particular the kind of continental theorists of Marxism. Then, but it isn't easy. It was like, 'Yes this is what you wanted but, actually, it's really quite hard', and, at a more personal level, there was a lot of, a lot of contestation within my family because, you know, going to university in the first place was just about alright. Going back for another four years was, you know, really not alright and the politics were different. Within my family there was a lot argument about the politics of what I was doing, I was getting opposition from a, sort of, more traditional kind of Labour trade union politics, you know?

Kieran Connell: To be the first person in your family to go to university?

Rebecca O'Rourke: No, my mum went to university but she went as a mature student through an adult education route but, other than that, yes, I was the first person.

Kieran Connell: And how did that, kind of, that background, did you feel, were there those (inaudible 00:09:27) similar background at the centre or did you feel?

Rebecca O'Rourke: Not, not immediately. One of the things that was, that was my perception initially, was lots of men who weren't terribly interested in women and women who, with the exception of Dorothy Hobson, were, kind of, quite middle class really and so although there was a kind of sense of solidarity and identification, actually, there wasn't really. Their lives were quite different and that was quite problematic so, sort of, class and gender were difficult in complicated ways I suppose.

Kieran Connell: Was it, you mean, when you arrived would you describe it as being quite a macho place?

Rebecca O'Rourke: No, not macho but male and, you probably want me to say what I mean by that and I don't quite know what I mean by that. But, no, I don't think it was macho or chauvinistic. I don't think it was a sexist environment. In fact, actually, quite a few men there were very actively working against that. But there were lots of men, there were lots of men; and there were lots and lots of middle class people and middle class values and assumptions and stuff. Then, I think it would be the 1977 intake, I think that was the year where students were involved in the interviews and I was one of the people involved in that and, by chance or design, people came like Janet Batsleer, like Roger Shannon where, it was kind of like, more my kind of people.

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Kieran Connell: Was it difficult, I mean, coming from, you know, coming from a working class background, was it difficult to initially operate in and, sort of, to feel at home in that environment of a male, slightly middle class environment to begin with?

Rebecca O'Rourke: Yeah, I think it probably was but I'm not sure I would have explained it in those terms at the time. It was just difficult, I mean, things like, really basic things like, finding somewhere to live was really hard and I was sleeping on people's floors and then I shared a house with Andy Lowe which was miles away - somewhere out in a bit of Birmingham where I don't think I ever went to again after I managed to get a room on Cambridge Road. It was kind of more, I sort of found my way in a bit more to the sort of friendship networks but, you know, it could just be any place you go on your own is tough because you haven't got the friendship networks and you don't have the resources to make your way in the world.

Kieran Connell: I was going to ask you then, just in a bit more general terms really, about the position of, the impact of feminism at the centre. I mean, was there a women's studies group prior to joining, it already existed or did you, was it your cohort that ended up setting it up?

Rebecca O'Rourke: There was certainly women doing feminist research and Angie was, Angela McRobbie was there, Janice Winship was there, Charlotte Brunsdon was there so, there was work on women going on and there was a very active women's centre and women's liberation group in the city which people from the centre were involved with. I think the formalisation of it as the women's studies group and the project around writing *Women Take Issue*, that was later but I can't remember. It's a blur really. I think that might have been 78ish but I'm not sure. Also, I think, the study groups, I'm trying to think about when the study group started. I think when I went to do the Masters, I did in one year, and you had the taught modules and then you had to choose a study group to belong to and I can't remember exactly what the options were but there weren't very many of those study groups. I think the following year and, certainly, by two years on, by 78, there was almost a problem of there being too many study groups and people would be in, you know, popular memory and English studies and media and, you know, race groups. That was partly because the numbers expanded. I think, in my year there were six of us doing the Masters and then I think it went to 12 the year after. So, the numbers did have an impact on the culture and there were lots of arguments about democratising the running of the centre.

Kieran Connell: At what point did you feel, as a student, that you had, or did you ever feel that you had ownership over that project?

Rebecca O'Rourke: Ownership as in thinking of myself as a CCCS person?

Kieran Connell: Yeah, or like, in terms of the, what the project, of what the cultural studies project should or could be about?

Rebecca O'Rourke: That's really interesting isn't it? It must have been during that Masters year because otherwise I wouldn't have stayed on for another three years. Certainly, during the last three years I felt totally identified and, you know, there was nothing beyond CCCS really. At some point during that first year there would have been a shift of seeing myself as part of and aligned with the Centre, even though there was contestation about it, and, I suppose, maybe some of it was about recognising that there was always going to be contestation. You know, kind of that even when you were with people that you share lots of values with, you're still going to have arguments and contestation.

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Kieran Connell: In terms of, going back to feminism at the centre, how did it impact personal relations and how did it impact how, you know, did the centre, kind of, interact with it?

Rebecca O'Rourke: I think, I mean, that's an interesting question. I think it was challenging in that there were some women who were, some women took a kind of stronger, almost anti-feminist line, than some of the men. I think, for all of us at that stage, all the women who were identifying with feminism, we

were active in feminism at the Marxist or socialist feminist end of the spectrum. There was no separatism, no, you know, kind of anti-men feeling. It wasn't a contradiction to have men identifying with and contributing to feminist projects. So, for instance, there was the National Women's Liberation Conference, the last one ever, which did implode around the issues of separatism in radical feminism and that took place in Birmingham. I can remember Michael and Tony and Roger (and probably other people who I can't remember), being part of the organising and the preparation. I remember us making, we did the catering, and I can remember, chopping vegetables to make rice salad with Tony Davies. I think some of the really bitter public arguments around feminism came later in the centre after I'd gone but I do remember we used to have centre meetings which were very long and very fiery. I can remember Stuart just kind of being driven beyond distraction and having a real go about us going on about feminism. He was arguing that he could go on about race and he didn't because there were more important things so we should stop going on about women because there were more important things. I remember that because, I didn't say it at the time, but I remember sitting there thinking, perhaps you should go on about race more. I didn't say it.

Kieran Connell: Of course, I mean, when time went on people, Paul's group or (inaudible 00:19:51).

Rebecca O'Rourke: Certainly, reading, Stuart's later writing about those arguments, he clearly felt it very strongly but, but the aggression or dismissal that's in some of his writing about feminism actually I didn't really experience it. It didn't, sort of, surface in day to day things but, it's also true that I spent more time with Richard and Michael than I ever did with Stuart. I wasn't ever in a working group with Stuart.

Kieran Connell: So, in a bit of a sense, that kind of, the key, one of the key arguments was a, was this notion of a wider political project? First is the (overspeaking).

Rebecca O'Rourke: That subsumes identity politics and difference and, I suppose, that was a more sophisticated version of arguments that were going on elsewhere on the left and trade union movement about feminism as a distraction or bourgeois undermining of the projects. It wasn't that. It was saying feminism is legitimate but it's just not as important as this work on the state or ...

Kieran Connell: What was your, what was your position, you know, at the time?

Rebecca O'Rourke: At the time? I think I probably, sort of, agreed with it at the time actually.

Kieran Connell: Agreed with the Stuart position or the?

Rebecca O'Rourke: With the Stuart position. I certainly didn't think feminism was a, kind of, you know, that it was a bourgeois pursuit. I felt it was legitimate but I suppose I felt that the class struggle was more important at the time. I probably did think that actually.

Kieran Connell: I mean, how did all these, there was a whole spectrum of politics at the centre at that time, you know, from across the left in terms of, you know, (inaudible 00:21:57) how did it all fit? I mean, of course, later with the anti-racist stuff and, of course, the feminist stuff as well, how did all that interlink together? Did it, kind of, cause divisions or was it, all kind of subsumed into the wider cultural studies project?

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Rebecca O'Rourke: I don't know really. There was always more going on than official version so there were always people within the centre and attached to the centre who seemed to just quietly get on with exploring UFOs or –

Kieran Connell: Loch Ness monsters?

Rebecca O'Rourke: Loch Ness monsters or fascist organisations, you know, so there wasn't one centre. There were lots of different centres and I think, look, where you're situated would affect what you saw as the project and its purpose. Those politics did become, I mean, they were quite tribal in a way that,

you know, there were people who, all they ever did was argue with each other or, kind of, not see each other, you know like cats passing. What we were talking about before you switched the recorder on - about living the politics. It sounds quite odd even talking about it in that way but it was really how things were. I suppose we had the time and the disposition, but we did live things politically. So, you know, you made decisions on the basis of the line on something or its implications and this notion of challenge was very dominant, tyou were constantly challenging people and challenging yourself and being challenged.

Kieran Connell: So the intellectual work?

Rebecca O'Rourke: So the intellectual and the political work were very hard to separate and this connection was foregrounded. You know, it was very foregrounded and so, it really did matter if you were pro or anti structuralism (inaudible 00:24:55) or you thought that, you know, Gramsci did have a better conception of the role of the intellectual than Marx. Things which now, I kind of, think, 'Oh really', but it was real at the time, Certainly later in the English studies group, it felt, we were challenging ourselves and others were challenging us about, the politics of what we were doing and the value of what we were doing but, with feminism, that wasn't, that didn't quite happen. I think that may have been because the wider centre, kind of, at some point decided to just let us get on with things. I think within the Women Studies group, although there probably were differences, I think the importance of having a, sort of, united front was perhaps strong so that whatever internal differences people might have had, they kind of, they didn't explore them because it was important to be seen to be the women's group. Again, I'm sure that will have changed later when separatism and revolutionary feminism became more prominent but when I was there, I think, the women's group was protecting it's territory by being –

Kieran Connell: By being kind of seen –

Rebecca O'Rourke: Yes, seen to be united. Because if you're seen to be divided amongst yourselves, particularly as women at that time, you're kind of living out a stereotype aren't you? You're kind of giving people ammunition, so, I suppose, the only, the only thing would be women who chose not to work in that group. Women who chose to be associated with it, but to work in other sub groups, even though they might be working with women as subjects and, in a sense, working with feminist analysis of things. They wouldn't necessarily, kind of, come and do that work in women's studies.

Kieran Connell: What were the, the benefits and also the disadvantages of group work, the group research group writing?

Rebecca O'Rourke: I think it depends whether you're answering that in the moment or retrospectively. Retrospectively, it was hugely disadvantageous to people who didn't also pursue an individual career, so, you know, people's collective work, collectively authored work, didn't have quite the same value if they were applying for jobs in academia and things. So, I think that's one disadvantage it had for people. People came to the end of really interesting times and thought, 'Hang on I haven't got that PhD or I haven't got that publication or', you know, 'I've done all this work but nothing to show for it'. But, at the time, I don't think people were very conscious of that actually. I don't think people would have perceived that as an issue at the time because you just ... it was what you signed up to. The collectivity, I think, for a lot of people was precisely what attracted them. I think it was the fact that you were not working individually. That was certainly one of the things that I really valued at the time and subsequently it's almost like, you know, one of the disadvantages really because if you've had that experience, it spoils you for the rest of your life. Because unless you can recreate it, you're forever going to be disappointed by not having it, you know, because of the intensity, the capacity, you know, the ability to produce something greater and more powerful than any one of you individually could have produced. Those are really important things. I suppose the disadvantage is that you get, you get maybe, an inflated sense of your own importance as a group. You know, the group talks itself up and maybe you didn't make the difference you think you made, or, you weren't as important as you think you were. I think that might have happened.

[00:29:52]

Kieran Connell: Is that something that you feel happened?

Rebecca O'Rourke: Well, I don't think it did. I think I'm saying it could, that you get so involved in the group that you don't see what's going on around you. I can't remember what the exact context was now but when I was putting the archive papers together for you, I just came across something in passing which was a comment from Michael about work that was going on somewhere else and he had said something like: 'We think we're pioneering here but, actually, we've got some catching up to do', you know, other people are ahead of us.

Kieran Connell: In terms of outside the centre?

Rebecca O'Rourke: Yeah, so, you know, maybe we were aware of those things but, I know certainly people at the time, and certainly people subsequently, if they weren't part of CCS, but were working in similar fields, I think they felt that we were very up ourselves and we had a very overinflated sense of our own self importance in our contribution.

Kieran Connell: What's the relationships between, you know, similar like minded people? I mean, I remember you saying before (inaudible 00:31:10) recorded about you inviting speakers.

Rebecca O'Rourke: Yeah, we did, I mean, we, we had links with the Literature Teaching Politics group who did conferences and journals - Maggie Humm, Peter Widdowson and people like that. We had contact with, what was the other one we had, that was the main I think, oh NATE, National Association of Teachers of English. So, you know, they were kind of other little pockets of work going on that we, kind of, connected with. So, I suppose that's it. I suppose I'm just thinking of your question of advantages and disadvantages. I think the advantages far outweighed any disadvantages myself.

Kieran Connell: In terms of the energy that (inaudible 00:32:18)?

Rebecca O'Rourke: The energy and just ... it was an unusual idea to have, I mean now, higher education research, it's all about developing big research teams and, you know, kind of, ten year plans for research projects; having that kind of sense of size and impact of momentum but, it was a very unusual thing at the time. Then the traditional model was an individual who would work pretty much in isolation and then, you know, produce an individual piece. It's the idea that you had teams or groups of work and that you had a, sort of, project that was bigger than an individual's research capacity. It was quite an unusual idea and it had a lot to recommend it because you get a, kind of, power factor in there and, I suppose the group, the intersection between intellectual and political work, the group kind of sustained that as well. You had lots of connections out into politics and you worked politically as well as intellectually with people.

[00:33:38]

Kieran Connell: I was going to ask about those connections. I mean, you know, I know that you were involved in the writers' group, sort of, the feminist groups that would have taken in place in the Birmingham Women's Centre. What were they and what was the relationship between the intellectual and politic work you were doing at the centre with the, kind of, political or other work doing, you know, outside the centre in Birmingham?

Rebecca O'Rourke: I think it was kind of expected that you would do it, you know, I think it would have been ... I mean, there may have been people who weren't involved in the political life of the city but I can't think who they would be, because I think it was kind of an expectation that you would do both. The notion of the public intellectual, that Gramscian notion, was very strong. I think it was a bit of an idealisation because sometimes the community, as it were, were less receptive and less interested in things than the intellectuals were but, having said that, there were really powerful interventions in the life of the city that you can track back to what was happening in the Muirhead Tower.

Kieran Connell: You mean like, what would be the ones (inaudible 00:35:06)?

Rebecca O'Rourke: Well, I mean, I wasn't involved with it but I think the setting up of the Art Centre is a, kind of, classic one. That initiative came from an earlier generation of CCS people to myself. For my

generation, it was a lot around working with either the women's group or the Workers' Education Association and the spaces between those things and more formal politics like the trades' councils, The Anti-Racist and Anti-Fascism League. And there were other people who were involved with the Birmingham Six campaign and as well as people who were members of the Labour party or the Communist Party or IS or Socialist Worker or IMG, whatever it was, so those networks and crossovers happened. I don't think I made the kind of separation that I might now between doing intellectual work and doing that sort of work. There was a kind of seamlessness about it to me.

Kieran Connell: So, I mean, I met Patricia McCabe and she talked about, it was like a, an occupation of a, of a big, big building on Priory Road which became a women's refuge for people or victims of domestic violence. That was, I think, she said that was the late 70s it might have been. Things like that, sort of for you, were and for, perhaps kind of being seen as being, what is one of the same as the intellectual work (inaudible 00:36:55). It kind of fitted everything together.

Rebecca O'Rourke: Yeah, I mean, certainly the work that I did with your mum, I shouldn't refer to her as your mum, should I? (inaudible 00:37:07) where we set up the writing activities and were involved in festivals for Balsall Heath, Reclaim the Night activities, that was all part and parcel of work at the Centre. They all ran together in a way that, you know, might be problematic now. I mean, Reclaim the Night would be very problematic now but it wasn't then.

Kieran Connell: So what was the, what was the writers' group. What was the aim and scopes of?

Rebecca O'Rourke: With the writers' groups, the work we did with English studies was about dis-establishing literature and challenging a notion that literature was irredeemably elitist and bourgeois and individualist. We were trying to democratise access to writing and seeing it as a form of self-realisation and of struggle really. There was a grouping that began in Liverpool and London around the trade union movement and the rent strikes where working people came together and wrote about and published their lives. That was partly countering of the stories that are told about us, telling our own story and that was happening in tandem with the challenge to publishing from women. It is quite hard, if you think about it now, where writing, publishing and reading are almost over-feminised. It's quite difficult to imagine a world where the notion of a woman writer or women writing was an incongruent thing because it's very dominantly a female activity now. That was at a time when you were getting feminist publishing houses established, the kind of challenge to the canon of literature of women's writing being more than a few isolated mad women and, so, there was an alignment between the liberation movement and self actualisation of women and writing, the cultural, as a way that you would do that. So, we set up the group to bring local women together and get them to share writing and ideas and discussion about their lives.

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Kieran Connell: So the group was made up of the people, (inaudible 00:40:02) didn't have anything to do with the university or?

Rebecca O'Rourke: Oh totally.

Kieran Connell: So it was locally-based people?

Rebecca O'Rourke: Yeah, totally. It wasn't university people at all and, you know, I think, there is also a kind of tradition, tradition but, with some people there was a kind of move to, work in the adult education movement more general. So, you would take the ideas that you were being exposed to in the university and you would make those available in adult education classes through extramural or the Workers' Education Association. That was helped, in part, because the tutor organiser, the WEA in Balsall Heath was Stuart Daniels who'd been a centre person. So, there was a network of people and ideas. It also linked to that as well. I had been teaching for the extramural department for some time before we did the WEA thing and, also, I think Myra had been doing something in Leicester before she came to Birmingham. She had some connections with the adult education stuff there.

Kieran Connell: So, how did the group, how did they, kind of, how did it work, I mean, what was your experience of how it actually worked and did you find that it was a process of, kind of, making the intellectual practice that was going on at the centre available (inaudible 00:41:36)?

Rebecca O'Rourke: I think it probably made some of it available. I don't think it made all of it available. I mean, with Women and Words, we got that off the ground, sort of, 78/79 and then I left Birmingham so I was there for the first year of it. It was really Myra who made it happen and took it through it's process, because it did become part of this wider federation as an independent group. So I knew about it and was in touch with it through the federation [of worker writers and community publishers] and as a member of that through the early 80s. I suppose, it's like any of those community initiatives. They never do achieve quite as much as you want them to. They never achieve quite as much as you sometimes claim they have achieved. They do achieve some of what you set out to do. They do make a difference to people and they do bring together people who, otherwise, wouldn't be in the same space and they create opportunities for connections and conversation and actions that, otherwise, would not have happened. There was an evaluation Paul Willis did some years ago of arts work with young people and he talked about its role in the process of becoming human, human-being-ness and I think that's a really powerful concept. In later research, I went on to use ideas from Habermas, about life world and system and I think it's about creating life world; and legitimising life world against system. So, even though you're only working with, you know, a few people and you're making tiny changes and some of the changes, actually, have a kind of popular conservative impact, rather than a popular radical impact, you're still in that space of life world rather than system. And the more system encroaches on people, the more important it is that there are opportunities for those sorts of challenges to the kind of people a certain person might be, you know. There was a mixture of age, of nationality, of occupation, of sexuality [in the group] and, you know, a tiny little chipping away but, in a world where dominant normative discourses are quite unhelpful, that becomes a radical project. They were not incidental or a distraction but, I think, they probably don't have the impact we claimed for them at the time. You know, if I look back on things I said and wrote about that whole area, because I went on to work both in paid and unpaid ways with the worker-writer and community publishing movement and the adult literacy movement for a long time, and, you know, I had the rhetoric but, you know, it wasn't, it wasn't *that* important but, that's not to say it was unimportant.

[00:45:25]

Kieran Connell: And, I don't want to take up too much time today, I've got to head off in a bit, but, I wanted to kind of bring it back to the centre and I wanted to ask about, we talked a bit before about the collectivisation and the collective (inaudible 00:45:36) and the disadvantages and advantages of that. I was wondering what role the staff members had in that collective process, like, when you would have been there I guess it was Stuart, Richard and Michael and Paul as a research fellow.

Rebecca O'Rourke: Yeah, Paul was a research fellow and –

Kieran Connell: Maureen came a bit later.

Rebecca O'Rourke: Maureen came just as I was leaving.

Kieran Connell: What was the relationship, I mean, in terms of the intellectual, you know, work that was being done, the politics of the place and how did that collective commitment relate to their role as lecturers and directors?

Rebecca O'Rourke: I think they, I mean, I think they lead from the front with it. You know, they kind of lived it and supported and encouraged us to do it and, I think, they were ... they had great forbearance actually because we - the student body - gave them a very rough ride. I think we had little insight or compassion for the kind of battles they were fighting with the institution. So, I don't think we understood it at the time and, they, it was mostly Richard and Michael that I worked with and I worked more closely with Michael than Richard. I think they really did, they modelled it and they modelled the rigour, they modelled generosity, they modelled the politics, the lived politics in ways that were very powerful. And they also modelled the pedagogy as well. I didn't go into teaching, I kind of followed a different route, and only came into university teaching some years later and it

wasn't until I started working in a university that I realised quite how far out on a limb they went. How their conceptions of the co-construction of knowledge, the importance of learning from as well as teaching your students, the importance of trust, respect, all those things, that was so unusual and it sort of becomes an aspirant thing that you want to try and teach like they taught or supervise like they did. So, I think that was really powerful as well as wanting to, kind of, think ... well, not think like them because certainly with Richard, you know, he's up there. I couldn't get there but you know that the pedagogic practices were very powerful and I think particularly with Michael, who I think really prioritised teaching, you know, the value of teaching over and above research, and the value of putting that respect for relationship at the heart of teaching. I think that's something that I wouldn't have got without being there. And just trusting the students, you know, sometimes they were probably wrong to trust us because we did wild and mad, dangerous and stupid things, like the interfaculty elective teaching, you know, but they still did it. They were prepared to be challenged, you know, really to be challenged by the ideas and to develop the ideas together. It was fantastic. It was a fantastic experience (overspeaking).

Kieran Connell: So, you, do you think they acted as, almost like, (inaudible 00:49:35) in terms of the relationships with, relationship with the wider university? Did you get an insight into any of that?

Rebecca O'Rourke: No, not really. I mean we organised campaigns against the cuts and the University Grants Committee cuts in 78/79. We did that kind of student politics stuff but the constant attrition on the centre as a centre from the institution they shielded us from that totally. They just took all that.

Kieran Connell: So, you left in 1980?

Rebecca O'Rourke: I left in 1980.

[00:50:17]

Kieran Connell: What, what was the kind of, I mean, it might be a difficult question to answer really, but what was the, how do you kind of like assess the significance of the time in the centre on your subsequent, you know, intellectual, political development?

Rebecca O'Rourke: I think it was, I think it was hugely, hugely, hugely, hugely formative and for me very positive. I could say it was the high point but, actually, that would be wrong because that suggests it's been downhill ever since and it's not. I think it gave me a map and a territory; and a set of practices and a set of values that still shape what I do, actually. I think that's partly because it was a very powerful experience and a very positive experience for me at the time and, partly because I picked up my PhD registration later, so I had contact with the centre through the 90s when I was working on completing, finally completing, my PhD. So, I would say really powerful in that way and, and, probably more so as an activist than an academic because I don't really embrace the academic identity of working in a university. I haven't, I haven't carved out or wanted to carve out that, sort of, academic career trajectory and a research based trajectory. It's been much more about, you know, an adult educator's, a community educator's, a community activist's sort of role and, I think, that absolutely came from the centre. I think that's often an overlooked legacy of the centre. When people are talking about the centre's legacy it is very much in terms of it's contribution to the discipline of cultural studies and it's contribution to the academy and, you know, how many professors did it produce. And that's definitely part of what it set out to do and did do; but sometimes it constructs the people who went off and worked in, you know, the BFI like Roger Shannon did or worked in youth and community work like Tricia and Janet did as, somehow, kind of (inaudible 00:52:59) less significant. Whereas I think those impacts are just as important, if not more so, the spirit of that kind of organic intellectual, kind of, public intellectual drive.

Kieran Connell: And, just finally, this is a really important question. What about, what do you think were the, kind of, was the conditions or the structure, if you like, that enables the kind of practices that we've just been talking about? To function in the way they did whilst they were there and I know it's hopelessly broad so don't feel like you have to, kind of, list them all but, does anything stick out in particular of particular importance?

Rebecca O'Rourke: I think it's a really difficult question to ask because, because it's almost like: what was it about that conjuncture that was different? You know, ten years before, ten years after it would be another time, another place ... I don't like to ascribe history to individuals or the makings of history to individuals but there was something about the willingness of, for me when I was there, Stuart, Richard and Michael to try and relinquish power. Whether they were doing that consciously or effectively or fully or for the right reasons or the wrong reasons; that created the space for those relationships to be rearranged and once you started to rearrange the concept of what it is that a research centre does or what it is a research student does or what the relationship between a teacher and a student is then you create all sorts of possibilities. So, it was partly that they were open to that, or, wanted to do that or didn't resist that happening. And, partly, it was the fact that there was a much more public left culture. It was before the fragments, as it were. And so there were these ways of meeting, recognising, working together as leftists, I suppose, as left wing people, and the eclecticism was part of the mix as well. Some of the energy and innovation came because such a variety of different people were coming up against each other. I think it was possibly that but I don't really know; I'm just very glad that I was there.

Kieran Connell: Thanks very much. Thank you.

[End of Transcript]