

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: I was going to kind of begin really by asking you about your arrival at what was then the Department -

Respondent: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Could one 'yes' be used here and in other places?

Interviewer: Of Cultural Studies and Sociology in 1989, is that right?

Respondent: It was, the Department of Cultural Studies then, yeah, in '89. It was before it took on the Sociology label.

Interviewer: But they had some sociologists?

Respondent: Yes they did.

Interviewer: Could have been(?) 1986 they moved to the department.

Respondent: That's it, yes so it was, it was the move from the College of Arts, or the Faculty of Arts, yes. So the, the people who were there, Michael Green and Maureen McNeil and Richard Johnson, moved, and their amalgamation was with the sociologists, because Birmingham closed Sociology on, in some time in the 80s.

Interviewer: For, for the first time.

Respondent: Yeah, for the first time, exactly.

Interviewer: Numerous other ones since.

Respondent: Yes, exactly. And I was appointed in '89, I'd just finished my PhD that year, I'd just finished the, the work and -

Interviewer: Where was that?

Respondent: That was at York with Andrew Tudor, who was my supervisor. And I just produced the stuff on the video recorder, you know, it was a kind of semi-ethnographic account of kind of audience, but media in everyday life kind of thing. So I was looking for a, looking for a job, as you do. And there was a, a one year post at Birmingham, which was created because Maureen McNeil had got a year in the States, so it was cover for her. So I got that, that one year post. So it was, it was quite a tough call, actually, going into that unit, and it took me a while to realise how relatively new it was in its, in its then form, people hadn't really worked together much. And there was also a very, very strong ethos that was brought from the Cultural Studies group, Michael, especially, but, and Maureen wasn't there in that first year. Michael and Richard were very committed, obviously still, to the ethos of the Centre. Jorge Larrain was the Head of Department when I went there, and a guy called John Gabriel, who had taught in Sociology. And they were both extremely good colleagues, and very interesting, and work was interesting and complimentary, really, to Cultural Studies.

Interviewer: What was your kind of intellectual, like, baggage if you like, I mean were you drawn to Birmingham because of the, the Centre?

Respondent: Yes. Yes, very much. I did my degree, my undergraduate degree as a mature student, and it was in Communication Studies at Leeds, and I didn't know anything about the Birmingham Centre. I knew about Richard Hoggart, because he came from Leeds, and I was born in Leeds... And I think it, I was in my second year of my undergraduate degree, and I started to find the, the stuff that was coming out of the Centre, and I was really interested in it.

[0:03:26]

Interviewer: That would have been roughly when?

Respondent: '79, '80. But funnily enough, before I did my degree I was an administrator in a college in Leeds, and Stuart Hall was an external examiner there. And I actually met Stuart before I started doing my degree, and didn't really make much of the connection about it, but I was impressed by him. So I started to look at the, the Birmingham work, and I found it so exciting, I mean partly because it was about working class cultures, but also it had, it, it was interesting in terms of its methods, the range of subjects, the feminist work was really interesting and important. And it was, it was more exciting than anything on the curriculum at that time, you know, it was –

Interviewer: What made it appeal to you? I mean, was it, coming from Leeds is it, was it a class thing, the fact that?

Respondent: I think it was class, it had quite a strong class dimension to it. And certainly an interest I had, and, and have had in everyday life and how you make sense of that, how you can critique it and, and so on. And I found the, the critical theory side of it too extremely important, so it kind of gave me a, that something to aim for, really. But after I finished my undergraduate degree I did a, an MA at Leeds in the Social History of Art, because I got very interesting in theorising and Marxist theory in particular. And that was with Griselda Pollock and John Tagg, and it was an extremely interesting course, it was great. And then I got the PhD and the bursary at York, and went right back into kind of thinking about everyday life and media, influenced by Charlotte's work, Charlotte Brunsdon, Dorothy Hobson, Paul Willis, especially with his work on ethnography and research methods. And then I met up with Dave Morley when I was about two years into my PhD, and he happened to be working on his family television, so we found that we were doing quite similar work. So I had a very strong, and I had thought actually, when I, before I did my Social History MA, I thought, shall I go to Birmingham? Because that would, you know, I would have been really interested in that, but because of domestic, various domestic reasons I, I couldn't move down there at that point, so I did the Leeds one.

Interviewer: Was that connection that you had to the Centre a help or a hindrance to your, to your arrival? I mean, at Birmingham in 1989?

Respondent: Well I found it was a help, because I was so very positive about it, and I, I did feel very, very familiar with the work, which was still informing the agenda very much. So at the, you know, my first year there was really covering for Maureen, she taught the gender, the gender course on the undergraduate programme. And '89 was the first year that we taught the single Honours for undergraduate students, so that was actually quite a challenge, a challenging year for us all. And it, it was called Media, Culture and Society, and so we were all kind of working on it for the first time. And what I found was really great at that time was that everybody worked together, they, there was that collegial atmosphere, and working on the courses we worked in teams really, which, you know, I was really, as I said in that article that you, you read, (Cultural Studies I was really pleasantly surprised by how importantly they took teaching and questions of pedagogy, and the politics of education which was really striking. And, because of my background, I suppose I was very keen on adult learners, mature students, you know, as, the nonconventional kind of intake. And again, they were committed to that kind of mix of students and admissions and so on. So I felt very much at home there, and that was partly because I was so, you know, interested and keen on the work that had been done, but also that the atmosphere was extremely welcoming and good. It was hard, but you certainly felt that it was worthwhile.

Interviewer: So your, you were made permanent, at some point you were kind of, you were, your time there was clearly ended?

[0:08:27]

Respondent: Yes, at the end of that first year they managed to get a post as, it was always a struggle to get extra staff, and the, the first year applications had been extremely strong, I mean we always got high numbers of applicants for the undergraduate degree. And, you know, we simply didn't have enough staff to, to deliver that. So I, I applied and was given a permanent post.

- Interviewer: I mean, so how would you kind of describe the nature of Cultural Studies at, at Birmingham when you, in that period that you were there? And how, how would you relate that to the Cultural Studies that you came into contact with as an undergraduate and then as a postgraduate in terms of that intellectual formation? Were there, what were the similar, similarities and what were the differences?
- Respondent: Mmmm, mmmm, mmmm. Well there was definitely a very strong feeling of inheriting what was, what had already been, and this was partly the image, obviously, that's from, from the outside, so everybody thought that it was the same place. So there was that, and that became... difficult I think, really... partly because we were trying to live up to something that was, that had been established in a very different kind of context, you know, we were, we were a teaching department. And, and because we were so successful at getting students in, you know, the, the School of Social Science loved it, because you know, we were a very strong recruiter really. And I guess, you know, '89 is one of the key periods, I mean going into the '90s when student numbers started to rise, really, and we had a very attractive course that attracted strong students and good students. So it was difficult to find our feet, I think, in, in terms of intellectually we, you know, there was a shared, that there was always a kind of discussions at staff meetings about the project, which was part of the old CCCS. Anyway, it was, do we still have a project, can we still have a project? And as we started recruiting new members of staff, they came not necessarily from the kind of Cultural Studies tradition, we didn't really want to kind of just, you know, recruit people who are like us all the time. So there were some quite interesting debates and differences about whether there should be a project or whether Cultural Studies now was much more diverse, and whether we could actually maintain that kind of, I suppose, research type culture that had been so much part of the old CCCS.
- Interviewer: And was it, was it, was that kind of made more apparent in terms of the fact that you had members of staff who were, like Michael was at, connected to the Centre in its very, very early stages?
- Respondent: Yeah, yeah.
- Interviewer: And Richard came from the early '70s?
- Respondent: Yeah, Richard's, and, and Maureen too, she was very committed, yes.
- Interviewer: Came in the late '70s, so you had members of staff who encompassed that whole period.
- Respondent: Absolutely, lived it.
- Interviewer: Alongside new members of staff, and then you, yourself, in a sense kind of came, in a, a foot in both camps if you like, in, in one way.
- Respondent: Yes, yes, that's right.
- Interviewer: Kind of a new, but also very much familiar from –
- Respondent: Yes.
- Interviewer: So was that kind of, did that add to the kind of difficult?
- Respondent: It did really, I mean I, I think I was a great sort of supporter of the Centre, because it had been so important to my own intellectual formation really, in a way that it probably hadn't been in others, and they felt much more distant from it. And I was also very committed to their ways of working as well, kind of the, the kind of collaborative, the working groups and so on, I thought that was, it's probably kind of romanticising it a bit, you know, but it had a very strong appeal to me. And I think those kinds of elements of it didn't really work too well once we started to grow and, you know, once the sort of pressures of delivering teaching and courses moved along, it, it was quite difficult to hold on to that. The MA was always, was very good, because what happened in '89, I think it's my, you know, dates are a bit, but '89 to '90 we started, Richard Johnson and the team started working on building a, an MA programme. It, there hadn't really been a, a sort of taught course, it was all very kind of come along and, you know –

[0:13:33]

Interviewer: We can discuss it (laughing)?

Respondent: Yes, exactly, exactly. And for various reasons, partly because we were kind of getting more people in, we started to think about what we, what we should do for an MA and a taught MA, the institution was pressurising us to conform to, you know, the, a properly delivered programme, which I suppose is understandable. But that was symptomatic of the kind of changes that our, the institution placed on us, which always kind of, there was quite a bit of conflict with the former practice and what we were required to do. And also what the students expected when they came. So we always had... probably around 10 people enrolling for an MA, a, a taught MA that first year I was there. And I think it was Richard Johnson who called it the fought programme and not the taught programme (laughing) because it, we had a very, a very lively group of students in that year who came with their agendas and, you know, they wanted to fight, they didn't want to go back into their kind of history of intellectual formation, they wanted to work with kind of cutting edge theory. So it was quite a struggle actually, and again that was, I suppose working through things like that together or, you know, in conflict was, was quite a good process really of us trying to get to know each other and find ways of working that would, that would suit us. And then, and Maureen came back, so that, that gave us, you know, another person and another dimension. So I think those, those kinds of things were, it was, it was a very, very difficult process, I think those, those few years into the mid '90s.

Interviewer: Well I mean, I was going to ask a bit about the kind of, the, a bit about the working practices really.

Respondent: Yeah. Mmmm.

Interviewer: Of the, of, of the department when you were there.

Respondent: Mmmm.

Interviewer: I mean, you talked a little bit about the, you know, one of the things that appealed was the, there was still that emphasis of group collaboration.

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: You know, was that, was that in terms of teaching, research, were you writing, researching, writing together, everyone? Was it teaching?

Respondent: It was mostly teaching, it was mostly around teaching. There wasn't a great,...there was a resistance to the classic sort of lone scholar. So, you know, you, it, it wasn't quite the right thing to, to do, you know, to kind of disappear and do your own book... But I guess people of, you know, my generation coming in knew that that's what you had to do, really, you know, you had to kind of publish and you had to get going, and it, there was quite a bit of resistance to that. And that was partly because we filled our time, you know, teaching, and it wasn't just that there were few of us, but we, we almost reinvented the wheel every year, you know, the, the courses were updated constantly, which is what we thought was really important.

Interviewer: In, was that, would that be in conjunction, in collaboration with the students, or would that be amongst the staff? I mean, how much of a say did the students have, and?

[0:17:15]

Respondent: Yes, the involvement with the students was actually quite interesting, because there was, there were the postgraduate students, and some of them had seen the changeover almost, you know, they, they'd been kind of involved. And they were very much in the early sort of couple of years they were on the, the staff committee, the staff department committee, and they did have quite a lot of say in development of the curriculum. Quite a number of them were teaching as postgrad teaching assistants. The undergraduate students - we had a very strong staff student group, which we took very seriously, we had a, a mature students group. So we put a lot of time into working with the

students, and we did take seriously their feedback from courses. Before we had to, you know, there's, it's now absolutely compulsory that, you know, questionnaires and all of that, but we had, you know, regular meetings and feedback with the students at the end of each year. So we did, we did update the thing, but it was always the need to provide new material particularly on courses like, you know, we had a course called Media Today, which sounds ridiculous now, it, and Gender, and Michael's famous West Midlands course. All of which had, you know, new material, new work, so we were working really hard to, you know, we would have frowned upon actually teaching the same thing over and over again, which is now much more the norm. So it, you know, it, it was demanding, and it took us, took a lot of our time doing that. So the research, the research element, I mean it really had to... it had to be fought over. And, on the one hand, we had to encourage ourselves to, to do it, but it wasn't really as much part of the overall ethos as perhaps you might think of a department, a university department now.

Interviewer: I mean that's good, but one of the ironies of the Centre I guess is that although that culture of not, you know, isolated ivory tower scholars clearly something that they were trying to move beyond in the Centre.

Respondent: Mmmm, yeah. Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: But at the same time they were, there was an incredible output of academic, like books, journals, and then of course the stencil papers.

Respondent: Mmmm, yeah.

Interviewer: So, you know, by the time you had arrived and in, into the '90s, was there kind of a, given that the field, you know, field that was now established, whereas in, in, in an early, in previous, in the '70s it was all about trying to become, put a marker in the, you know, a marker in the sand sort of thing?

Respondent: Yes, yeah, I'm sure, I'm sure.

Interviewer: So was, was there not so much an emphasis on kind of getting the, the department as it then was known in the same way the Centre wanted to become known?

Respondent: Not really.

Interviewer: No?

Respondent: But, no, not really. I think we were keen to, I think we were very, very student focussed... and that has a great value, which is again what I wrote about in the, in the, in the Cultural Studies piece, and it was important for the students. And I think the person who took the lead of that was Michael, he, he was very, very committed to students, and demanded the same from everyone. So there wasn't that kind of, you know, let's think about what research themes we identify ourselves with, you know, that kind of thing. We knew the areas that, and, you know, strict, there's still a strong interest in race and ethnicity and gender, feminist work in media studies and so on. So we, but very often our, our recruitment strategy was about the teaching, what we needed for the, for the programme.

Interviewer: Which is kind of the kind of polar opposite of where we're at today?

Respondent: Yeah, yes, it is, it is. Sadie Plant came in to teach theory after Richard Johnson left.  
[0:22:07]

Interviewer: But was there pressure at that time from, not within the department but from the uni, were there, were you, was that a growing?

Respondent: Yes, it was beginning, it hadn't actually really struck hard home then, and we did quite well in the, in the assessment that, in the '92 or '93 or whenever it was, we did well. We, we were surprised actually, that, that we did well because that, that was literally not, not very long since we'd all kind of arrived and amalgamated and that, put that things together. Then we started to move into the area of Sociology, which we did, we were, we were sociologically leaning unit I think, you know, and it was

important to us. And we made a some good appointments in Sociology, Les Back, David Parker, Jo VanEvery and Mark Erikson. We were offering joint Honours, Sociology with Politics and Economic History I think. And there was a point... at which the, the School of Social Science, and I can't remember exactly what triggered this, it's strange and, and I know that, I have a feeling that people will have recorded this in their archives, but there was talk about us being split up, and the race and gender people should go to Arts, should go back to Arts. So, and then there's, and the sociologists would stay in the School of Social Science. So we faced that sort of split, which we were all very much against, actually, and we were all quite unified in wanting to keep the unit together, we'd put a lot of investment in it. And I thought we reflected the really interesting developments within Cultural Studies and Sociology, I think Sociology had really taken on the cultural –

Interviewer: I was going to say, I mean the department became more sociological, but that, in a sense you could also say that, but more broadly, sociology became more Cultural Studies.

Respondent: More cultural, yes, it did.

Interviewer: So I guess that would have been reflected with the kind of, the broader discipline, the, the developments within the discipline?

Respondent: Yes, exactly, the, the development and, yes, and we felt, we felt quite comfortable with that. So we fought to stay together, and that's when it became the Department of Cultural Studies and Sociology. Which, you know, on the outside it looked a bit strange but we were fighting to survive as a team really. Anyway, we stayed in that unit together, and then we launched a full, a full single Honours in Sociology. So that again was quite a lot of work.

Interviewer: So it's almost like a kind of period of every year almost kind of?

Respondent: Hiatus, always. And it was always a battle, I mean, I don't want to moan on, but, you know, they were really antagonistic, the –

Interviewer: You mean (inaudible 00:26:34.3) one of the phrases that stuck out in the article was that it was constant justification for existence.

[0:26:36]

Respondent: It was, it was. And they didn't like our methods, they didn't like our work, they didn't understand what we were doing. They didn't know anything about its reputation outside of the, of Birmingham really, very few people, though we had some, to use that old term fellow travellers, definitely in the, in the university who understood or knew the history of it. But it was, you know, it was constantly having to justify your existence.

Interviewer: And in a sense did that, I mean your, your time in Birmingham, '89 to 2003, 2002.

Respondent: Yes. 2002.

Interviewer: Does that, I mean you talked about the audit, the onset of audit culture in the output.

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Did you really see that, it, did that, did that period at Birmingham, for you, was that the period where it really became ever, ever increasing more like that?

Respondent: Yes it did. And I think the RAE at that time when we missed the target... really brought it home, because, I mean it was a complicated setup really, but it was a, it was a new management team came in, a new Vice Chancellor, and I think they were out to make their point and flex their muscles and they were quite ruthless regarding the targets what, that we should meet. But certainly, over that sort of last few years, there was much more emphasis on income generation, which was the beginning of that, but also... meeting targets of different kinds. Decisions being made on, you know,

over the top of the academics, much more managerialistic it's, in its approach, and I think that that was, you know, that, that was the lead up, really, to, to the end of the department.

Interviewer: I mean it's interesting, because it, you know, in, on the one hand this and, there, there are quite, you talked about quite a few characteristics of the department that were kind of, that retained the, the spirit at least of the, the, the project, in inverted commas.

Respondent: Mmmm. Yes.

Interviewer: You know, you talked in the article about the course on there, the ballroom(?) The Bullring and see, and seeing in 1968 that Hoggart had run the same course, and it talked about the, the collective work as well.

Respondent: Yes. Mmmm.

Interviewer: And there's also, I, in the archive, I think from the early, the early 90s there's an edition of cultural, I think a journal or, or an annual, Cultural Studies at Birmingham.

Respondent: Yes, Cultural Studies Birmingham, we did set that up and worked on that.

Interviewer: Which is a, I mean looking through that and very, very, has a very university manner(?) characteristics to a lot of the work, working papers and sort of, you know, annual report.

Respondent: Yeah. Yes.

Interviewer: It kind of comes, a combination of the annual reports and the working papers in Cultural Studies.

Respondent: That's right, yes, yes. I think that was good, that we managed to do that. The editorial team included students.

Interviewer: So on the one hand for this, at least, at the very least kind of like retaining that, so it's the kind of, a kind of certain spirit of the original project?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: But on the other hand this creeping, the, the, the like, the system, the university in which the, which the, the department's operating is obviously becoming like a very different place, the world's becoming a very different place.

[0:30:05]

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: I mean, how did that, I was just wondering, for you how did that kind of, you know, fit together really, and especially with people like Michael and Richard, Richard left in the early '90s didn't he?

Respondent: Yeah, Richard left in the, about '93 I think, yes.

Interviewer: So how were they kind of, how, what was your perception of how they were dealing with all the, these, these changes?

Respondent: Well I think it got too much really, So it was... it was challenging, but, to go back to Michael's role in this, he had such energy and, you know, powerful personality, and he never stopped believing in the, in, well not the project as such, but what we were doing, you know, in the importance of it and the significance of Cultural Studies, the importance of [inaudible] and so on. So he kept that, that going really, although, you know, towards the end he was on very much a part time contract... but we did then get a Professor of Sociology, Frank Webster came in, and that gave the, I suppose really, the kind of emphasis, which shifted from what the department was, was about and how it was, how it might be going forward, what it prioritised. The institution wanted to appoint a Chair in Sociology and

we really had no choice in the matter. We started to get people in who were, well, people who were good at attracting money, we thought, you know, the, so there's all the kind of, you know, the criteria for appointments, what we were looking for started to, started to change, definitely.

Interviewer: Was it a politics, did the department, whilst you were there?

Respondent: Well certainly, yes. In the early, you know, the, I suppose we're coming up to the mid to late '90s, we were all very, I think very, we were critical theorists, that's what we, that's what we were. And, in our different fields, we all were that, whatever it was we were interested in, you know, whether it was gender or ethnicity, or looking at media, critical analysis in media. And I think that's what united us really, and we had that kind of approach, definitely and I, I don't think we appointed anybody who didn't have that kind of approach. I think when the new appointment was made in Sociology, that was actually quite, that was a, that was a major turning point, and I, I don't, I'm not talking about individuals particularly, but the investment that the university chose to make in a chair in Sociology rather than a chair in Cultural Studies was mystifying, really. And I think, I think there were big politics going on outside of the department, you know, within our school, faculty and the university generally, that it really didn't, you know, it wanted Sociology. And they decided that, having closed Sociology in the '80s, they had a School of Social Science without Sociology, so they thought yes, this is rather odd, as indeed it is. And I think that was the first, you know, that was, that was the first building block really towards thinking about Sociology. But Frank Webster had very much a kind of Cultural Studies feel to him, view, approach.

Interviewer: And what, what about the politic, politics in a broader sense, beyond the, the confines of the, the eighth floor of the unit, the Muirhead and beyond the confines of campus even, I mean my, I know in my kind of off and on relationship with the Labour Party, which is CND -

Respondent: Yes, we all did (laughing) we all do.

Interviewer: I mean what, did you have time for that, or was it, was it, was it, was, was your time increasingly being taken up in these internal political battles?

[0:34:51]

Respondent: It was very difficult to get out, I mean really. And I think that was one of the criticisms I had with the place really, that it did, it was all-consuming. And we had some, several years where the students, very, very strong students, really politically engaged, but politically engaged with the eighth floor, you know, that, so a lot of the, the, the differences, particularly in relation to identity politics, you know, which was very much part of the 1990s, it, it all seemed to happen there, you know, it seemed as if we, we had to kind of be the site where it was played out. So I think that that was actually quite hard, so it was, became really quite, often quite a hothouse of debate, and not often, not always productive, you know, it could be actually exhausting and time consuming.

Interviewer: Which again is an, another tradition inherited from the Centre?

Respondent: Yes, that's right. I mean, Michael was always in, engaged in the wider community, and he encouraged his students to be, particularly the undergraduate students, who really did kind of engage in it. But I think, I think a number of us actually, probably for self-preservation or something, decided to do our own, our own things, you know, and whatever we were involved in outside, it was our, you know, that was what we did kind of thing. So there was much less of a kind of collective feel about that. I mean, other than the obvious things, like engaging with, you know, the idea of schools curriculum, the debates around education, which Richard Johnson was always very keen on, particularly in relation to mature students, to access students, who were all, we, we were all engaged in that kind of... you know, we had strong links with the, the collages, particularly when mature students took their first qualifications. And they gradually disappeared, of course, then became something else. So I think that's, probably would be our strong, shared concern, I think, politically.

Interviewer: And the students themselves, I mean you talked in the article about maintaining the tradition of the creating, sort of, students from the West Midlands and mature students, like those, those that are underrepresented traditionally at universities.

Respondent: Yeah, that's right.

Interviewer: Did they arrive, I mean you've mentioned this a little bit, but did, did, did they arrive with a kind of, I haven't talked about identity politics, but did they arrive politically, with a political kind of, strong political sensibility?

Respondent: Yeah, mmmm. They do, yes, they did.

Interviewer: Or, were there difference between the undergraduates and the postgrads and, you know?

Respondent: Yeah, the postgrads were always much more fully formed (laughing). And that was why they kept to Birmingham, a lot of them, and we, we began to get an increasing number of international students, which were quite interesting, very interesting, in fact. But from a very wide range, I mean globally, Chinese students and Korean students, Japanese and then quite a number of South American, Latin American students came to do the MA, and then some stayed on to do PhD. So we had a kind of, more of a, a quite a, a big range, really, of interests, and people challenging the, the frameworks in Media and Cultural Studies, quite rightly, and you know, looking for new ways of, of working on their topics and their areas. The undergraduate students, the mature students were often were quite rightly very demanding, they had different kinds of needs I think. We, we did try to cater for that, but it was, that was an important part of the place, I think, that it, and it had a lively, a lively group definitely, always.

Interviewer: And I mean, did the, the influx of, you know, increasing numbers of international students, I mean, how did, how did that change the, the discipline? I mean I, I mean I suppose as it had become by that point in a sense, I mean, how did that, what areas did they veer off to?

Respondent: Well quite a number of them were interested in identity, and also, coming from different, different parts of the globe, different geographical, political geographical locations, had, brought different questions really to, to the work. And that had a lot of challenges, really, for everyone, so I think we were, and you know, a lot of new work was being done in the post-colonial theories, sexuality and so on. So those challenges were, were quite interesting, and I think the, the mix of students that we got were, reflected the changes and the development, but they still were, they still thought Birmingham was the place to come, which is quite interesting in itself really.

[0:40:19]

Interviewer: And challenging, I guess, for, for the staff?

Respondent: Yeah, mmmm, but, you know, as, as it should be.

Interviewer: And, you know, by 2000, was that when Crossroads came to Birmingham?

Respondent: Yeah, that was 2000.

Interviewer: 2000, Stuart Hall had received an honorary Doctorate?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And your student satisfaction ratings were going through the –

Respondent: Was wonderful, we had a lot of students, we had –

Interviewer: So, by 2000, I mean, did, did, were you still feeling under, were, in 2000, were you kind of feeling slightly more secure, given that context?

Respondent: Yes, yes, it was, we felt it was a very good place to be, and that we could actually sort of use that as a kind of development of our work, we had some good people there. So we were looking forward to that really.

Interviewer: Did that make the kind of, the events of the next couple of years even more difficult to, to deal with?

Respondent: It was, yes, it was, it was difficult to understand. And again, looking at it from the outside, I think it made it very difficult to understand, hence the responses that came from the closure.

Interviewer: Then I was going to ask about the campaign, because you touched on it briefly.

Respondent: Mmmm, yeah.

Interviewer: Can you, what are your reflections of it? I mean, who was the kind of, who were the kind of key movers?

Respondent: Because we (the staff) were in a very difficult position because our jobs were under threat, we were, actually submitting endless proposals for our survival to the school and the faculty and. So we were, we were working hard on doing that, and we had to be very careful in what we said about what was going on, because they, they weren't clear, they, they didn't actually, sort of, finally decide until the very end of 2002 academic year. But the people, we did say we had to tell the students, we had to tell, particularly the postgraduate students, because, we couldn't hand on heart say, see you next year (laughing), and they were the ones who actually started the campaign. So it was, it was the postgraduate students that were taught Masters there, but there were, I'd, I think there were around, certainly up to 40, PhD students registered at the time. And, you know, there were people from, as I've said, Latin America, you know, people who'd come over to study with individuals, and, and we didn't know what would happen to them if the place closed down. So they really started, started the campaign. And people like Matthew was involved, and a number of people who were alumni of the, of, of CCCS, started together. Richard Johnson, because he was no longer part of the department then, a number of people who graduated from, as, you know, PhDs from the department. And it, it gathered momentum, and the Members of Parliament, I think, got to hear of it.

[0:43:44]

Interviewer: Lynne Jones?

Respondent: Lynne Jones, yes. Had a very good, we had a very good union rep on our side, who I think was Lynne Jones' husband, actually. And he informed her, and the MP for Edgbaston, who is, I can't remember her name now, German woman –

Interviewer: Oh, she's now in Harborne, I think.

Respondent: Gisela –

Interviewer: Gisela Stuart?

Respondent: Yes, Gisela Stuart, that's right, she's the one. But Lynne, Lynne Jones really took up the issue, really, she was terrific, and she was a great friend to us. And just trying to find out from the university why they were planning to close this department, it was, you know, in every way, it was very successful, it had a lot of students there and, and could they deliver the courses as, you know, they'd, they'd taken on applicants for the following year. We, she contacted HEFCE, as it then was, and they said, we can't interfere with the management of the university, even though we pointed out this was public money here. So the, the campaign was good, but I think the staff had to decide what we were going to do, and we all wanted to go, so we did, that's what, that's what happened. Once we knew that actually it wasn't going to continue. And that, the only way, we had to reapply for, I think, four posts out of something like 15. And they made it pretty clear that they didn't really want, you know, the, most of the people who were there, so I think, really, we had no choice but to, but to go. And, you know, it was demoralising for everyone, everybody who's, really thought they were in, working in a, a good department and a, a department with a lot of life, and then just, you know, for it to be ditched was very demoralising for everyone.

- Interviewer: Did it make you, kind of, some people or yourself question, you know, whether you wanted to carry on working in, in higher education(?)?
- Respondent: Yeah, I mean, yes it did, and, I think two colleagues, I think I again mentioned it in the article, thought that they wouldn't continue in education in fact. I think one did go completely outside education, but not, not for a while. But it was, it was very, very painful experience for, particularly more junior colleagues, you know, who... you know, found it very difficult to deal with really, and very, you know, you, it's, it's, it's really bad to have all your, kind of, expectations of tough management confirmed in such a, such a, a clear way. And, you know, the way it was handled was just –
- Interviewer: Do you think it says something about the broader structures within British society, the, the, the, the change in the space that they recorded(?) to speak(?) to you, working in, in a, the department, from, well, from '89, when you joined, but, you know, the, the, the Centre as well? The change from the structures in British society, politically as well, from the '70s to, to 2000?
- Respondent: Mmmm, I suppose it does, but I'd, I think it says more about university systems really (laughing), just, than anything else, and the, and the decline in public support for universities, I think. And I suppose you can think about that as a broader social issue, definitely, but I think it's, it was a very, sort of, I think it was a very telling story, case study, I think, for, for what can happen, actually.
- Interviewer: I was just, finally, I was going to ask about this notion of the, the brand, and the Birmingham, the Birmingham School brand.
- Respondent: Mmmm, yes, yeah.
- Interviewer: And you men, you discuss it a bit in the, in the piece again, you know, the irony, you know, the point where, in, I think, I think it was the late '90s when there was this idea of having this –
- [0:48:25]
- Respondent: Brand.
- Interviewer: This brand.
- Respondent: Yes.
- Interviewer: And then, of course, the closure of the department, in one sense, showed the, the ignorance towards, towards that –
- Respondent: Mmmm, yeah.
- Interviewer: What had gone on before it. Do you think that, in fact, the, the closure, if you like, in, in the last ten years, has actually contributed for, even more to the kind of, the brand?
- Respondent: Possibly.
- Interviewer: And the kind of, notoriety's the wrong word –
- Respondent: Yeah, mmmm, mmmm.
- Interviewer: But the, the nostalgia, if you like, for the Centre?
- Respondent: Yeah, or the kind of mythology.
- Interviewer: Mythology, that's it, that's a good word, that's a better word.
- Respondent: It's kind of interesting really, I think it probably has. And I think we... we, you can probably imagine that we were quite reluctant to think about it as a brand, well for obvious reasons, really, but we were willing to go along with it. And I think we could have, and we did propose, a very, I think a very

strong, case for a research centre that we could have, we could have worked on, and we could have exploited the brand a bit further. But I do think it fits very uncomfortably in the idea of a brand, and it's something that we were trying to resist a long time, I remember when somebody first used the term the Birmingham School, and it, the book I read it in was Brantlinger's, in Crusoe's Footsteps, who is an American writer. And he wrote about the Birmingham School, and everybody was laughing about it and saying, oh, did you know we're in the Birmingham School?. So we tried to resist that and, and tried to think about the, maintain the complexity of what it is, you know, because it's not a fixed one, kind of, with one identity at all. So we tried not to think of ourselves in that kind of way, and tried to think of ourselves as much more open in, in what we were doing. So we were, we were resistant, but I think we would have, you know, taken the opportunity and, I suppose, you know, used it for our own projects and what we wanted to do with it, and we could have done it, I think. But whether Birmingham was ready for it, I, I doubt, because, you know, post 2002, it's had a, quite a rough time anyway, with its, what, what followed.

Interviewer: And, I mean, do, what do you think, just generally, what do you think, is the kind of, because, I mean, like, I guess, the Birmingham School, as a term, has taken, has become a, overseas, at least, anyway, has become a kind of a brand and hasn't, you know, has, around the world –

Respondent: Yeah, yes, yeah.

Interviewer: Birmingham certainly is known for, if not the Birmingham School, then the Centre and Cultural Studies.

Respondent: Mmmm, mmmm.

Interviewer: What, what do you, kind of, attribute the, I guess my project would –

[0:51:37]

Respondent: The continuity.

Interviewer: You know, like, there's still, kind of, a, an interest and a fascination with the work.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Do you have any, sort of, kind of, perceptions on that?

Respondent: Well, it's interesting that, I mean, my sort of... I, I edit, with colleagues, the, European Journal of Cultural Studies, and it's quite interesting, that, sort of, negotiation with the idea of the, the Birmingham School, and it's always there, you know, it's always there. But what I've found more recently, in the last sort of five or six years, I've been to Beijing, I've been to a number of former Eastern European countries, and this year, I've been to Mongolia as an international scholar linked up with a student in Mongolia. And the interest in Cultural Studies, and particularly the Birmingham work, is amazing, and that's, I think that's really intrigue, interesting. And talking about it, it's, interesting about societies in transition, you know, of whatever historical moment that is. I think what the CCCS captured was something of that, you know, the change, the post war change, and the work that they did, was about that, those, those kinds of changes. And I think there's something that speaks to societies in transition, whether it's around consumer culture, developing identity, gender, these pieces that were written actually –

Interviewer: Speak, speak to the –

Respondent: Have something to say about, which is, I think is a really fascinating part of it, which says something about the significance of grounded work. But, you know, that kind of work that is, is, sort of contingent on, on looking at something very specific, particular. Which you might this, oh well, it, that was the West Midlands in the 1970s, well, yeah, but, you know, it will say, it's actually managed to say something that, that speaks to a different culture at a different time. So I think it's really, there's something about that in the work that was done. And I think it, it, it can't be taken directly or uncritically, but it, it does provide really useful starting points, I think.

Interviewer: Well, thank you very much.

Respondent: That's okay.

[End of Transcript]