

[0:00:00]

Kieran Connell: So I was going to ask Bill first of all like about your arrival. What brought you to the Centre in the first instance?

Bill Schwarz: Well I remember that quite clearly (Kieran laughs). I was an Undergraduate at York University and I studied English and History and I'd spent pretty much the first couple of years doing mainly English and I love reading the books; but I didn't know why I was reading them, I didn't know what I was meant to be doing. So – and it just happened that in the latter part of my time, I spent more time doing History and I was taught by this very serious, very charismatic, kind of crazed Historian called Gwyn Alf Williams, who was a kind of tornado, you know? And he made History matter and so I thought, "Whoa!" and he was well into (inaudible 0:01:07) long before anyone was interested -

Kieran Connell: What year was that then?

Bill Schwarz: This will be 1972/73 and I did a special subject on the Crisis in European Socialism: 1917 to 1923. So it was serious political debate – historical political debate and it was very good. At the same time, I had all these kind of cultural interests that I was particularly interested in – I don't quite know how this happened but Italian film and Pasolini – I was a big kind of Pasolini freak! (Both laugh). So I started trying to read a little bit about Semiotics. Pasolini wrote a thing on Semiotics which was really badly translated and impossible to understand in English and I kind of struggled through this. And I didn't get any of it, but I kind of thought it was important, you know? And then this friend of mine, Pete Osborne, who ended up being very close to Dick in fact, he had bought a copy of "The Working Paper on Cultural Studies" – I can't remember, number two maybe. I think he'd just bought it in the University bookshop which is extraordinary if you think now that these things get round like that. And on the cover it had, "Bikers –" presumably (inaudible 0:02:30) bikers, and then "Semiotics", I guess I don't know – Ian Chambers or someone on Semiotics. I thought, "Bikers and Semiotics?! What's going on?" (Kieran laughs) and I was really touched by that. And the – my interest in Italian films, partly also by Gramsci and how that political culture had its kind of cinematic dimension really. So I went down for interview and it was the most embarrassing thing in my life. I remember I went to the Birmingham refectory – you know the one under – down underneath and I had Welsh Rarebit and it was the most disgusting Welsh Rarebit I'd ever had. And Birmingham – I just couldn't believe that Birmingham existed; it was just – I thought, "What is this place?!" (Laughs)

Kieran Connell: The city or the university?

Bill Schwarz: The city, the city and then the university was something else – Blimey! And this was a time – what was this? This was – this would have been '74 I think, the early months of '74. This was a time when the interviews were conducted by the students.

Kieran Connell: So who was on your panel then? Can you remember?

Bill Schwarz: Pam Taylor was... Tony Jefferson, Ian Connell and Stuart. There may be one or two others; so quite a big – I went in. I cannot believe this – I went in, I was nervous as anything. I went in with my political theses already typed out, you know stapled together – pages of the bloody stuff and I kind of read it out, you know? I thought – looking back I blush, it was ridiculous! And of course they didn't really have that much to say. I remember Ian Connell, he... he asked me a question and Ian had a reputation for being very, very verbose and opaque at the same time and this question went on and on and on and I knew that I didn't understand what he was saying. And I just kind of blanked out; you know, I thought, "I can't understand it, I'll leave it" and then his voice rose and I could feel him turning to look at me. I couldn't think of anything – I could not think of a single thing to say, so I thought, "Blimey!" And he stopped and he looked at me and there was a smile on his face and I said, "Can you repeat the question?" (Both laugh) Which of course he did at greater length! And then I just blanked out, I withdrew, I wasn't there – some part of me – my body was there but I certainly wasn't there. But then I was brought back because I (inaudible 0:05:40) I thought, "What can I do? What can I do?" So he stopped, raised his eyebrows and Stuart intervened and he said – before I could say anything, he said, "Bill I think what you were going to answer was this, wasn't it?" And then he

said some very persuasive elegant beautiful thing and I'm said, "I'm sure that's what you were going to say wasn't it?" And all I could say was, "Yes" (both laugh). So he kind of saved my bacon and I liked that very, very much.

Kieran Connell: Was it intimidating the fact that there was like sort of your peers on the panel or was it the opposite?

Bill Schwarz: It must have been I think. I can't remember – I think I was just – I mean I was very, very nervous in those kind of situations in any case, so I'd have been intimidated whoever had been there I think. And then I said, "Well one thing is that I don't know any Sociology" because this was – I had in the back of my mind – do you know the Perry Anderson piece components of the National Culture? Where he said, "The problem of English intellectual culture is no Marxism, no Sociology, no totalising..." so I don't know any Sociology. But I had talked about Gramsci and Stuart just smiled and he said, "Well... I wouldn't worry about the Sociology". And I think it was simply that I uttered the word "Gramsci" and the name "Gramsci" in the interview. And this was – I mean you'll know better than me, but this was early '74 and I guess it was when the Centre was just getting into Structuralist Semiotics and Levi-Strauss and (inaudible 0:07:20) and I think for someone to come in from a Gramscian perspective, Stuart would have been very pleased and probably other people as well, I don't know. So that's how I – that's how I did it.

[0:07:40]

Kieran Connell: What was the – kind of what are your memories of the atmosphere when you finally started studying there and did that atmosphere kind of match with your – I don't know, with your preconceptions or with your – also with your intellectual kind of needs?

Bill Schwarz: I found it really exciting. I mean there was no doubt that – I had to be re-interviewed because I was going travelling for a year, so I had to come back and have another interview and I can't quite remember who was interviewing. And I applied – I had applied just to do the MA, but they said – it is unbelievable that such times existed, but they said, "Oh well, why don't you come for three years and we'll give you money?" And I thought, "Well Okay!" I didn't really want to do an MA but yeah – three years! (Both laugh) I cannot believe that such times existed. And I had a kind of sense of the intellectual excitement and its sense – and the Centre's kind of idea that there was the politics out there. So even though – even though there was never a (scented?) political position on anything, what – how it did work was that the books we read and how we read them were worldly; they were made to be worldly, we were out in the world and that's not in an organised political way, but we did – we did try to work through why these things mattered and you know whatever you were doing, whether it was doing (soaps?) or history of charters and something or movies or – whatever, you know? It was just – and it was very good. And so I was excited by all that and at the same time rather like you, I was – I was very excited but none of my interests quite ever were central to the rest of the Centre, because I was – I just loved History and I wanted to do History and this was a Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (laughs). You know I was interested in the "Culture" bit and half – much of my life I was interested in "Contemporary", but intellectually I knew that for me what excited me and what really fired me up was thinking about History and doing History. And at the time, I was interested in the History of the Left of course (laughs) and I started – well before I came, I immersed myself in Thomson and Hill and the Marxist Historians and just as I got to the Centre, I arrived in the Autumn of 1975. That summer of '75 I went to my first History Workshop Meeting where Raphael Samuel was launching History Workshop General in the most Raphael Samuel Evangelical way you can imagine. Before every session he would address the masses saying, "This brilliant journal is going to come out, it's going to belong to all of us, it is going to be the pioneer socialist history journal. You must subscribe". And people got very frustrated with him because he just wouldn't back down. So I was leading this kind of – it felt like a double existence in a way that there were 10,000 members – I remember I joined the History Group and the State Group. The State Group was kind of much heavier, you know – mostly but not exclusively blokes, and that's where we worked through – we began, I remember the first session – Lenin and Gramsci and Althusser and Polansis you know? (Laughs) That's how I began. And I just learnt so much from that – so much.

Kieran Connell: What was that like – I mean what was that process - ? Because obviously the Centre was – one of the many ways the Centre was different from kind of the (Mecca?) we know today, is that it was doing this – the boundaries between staff and students were kind of opened up a little bit. And what

was that – I was interested to know what that process of group research and group learning and group work really was like in the sub groups and what-have-you?

Bill Schwarz: Yeah... well I was just going to finish off something which I want to say before I forget and then I'll come back to them. And the other thing which – this came from Richard Johnston, that he was very keen indeed that I – every once a week, I can't remember what day – Wednesday or Thursday or something, travelled to Warwick University to the Social History Centre, which was then founded by Thomson but now – then run by (Royden?) Harrison. And they just – you know as I mentioned I didn't think they'd have weekly Historians... And Richard was keen that we kind of built up relations between the Social History Centre at Warwick and the Cultural Studies Centre at Birmingham. It never really happened, but you know that's I think probably the only time I've seen Christopher Hill was when he gave a paper there and so it was very good for me. How did they operate? Well I remember them – I remember the History Group – I mean the State Group was rather different; it was bigger, it was the – was it the last bit? Is this fair? I was going to say it was the last bit of kind of high theory in the Centre; maybe it wasn't, I don't know.

[0:13:54]

Kieran Connell: Was Stuart in that - ? Stuart would have been in that wouldn't he?

Bill Schwarz: Stuart was – it was – it came out of "Policing the Crisis" or began with the last phases of "Policing the Crisis" and it was certainly male in its preoccupations. And there was – it turned out – that I think turned out to be kind of an informal reading group. So I don't know how long it lasted; maybe two or three years? I can't remember.

Kieran Connell: It was certainly there in the late – in the sort of late 70s, 1978 – there's an archive from there.

Bill Schwarz: Okay, right well I can't remember... The History Group was different; I remember there was basically Richard – Richard Johnson, Greg (McKilan?), myself and then we – we realised that there weren't any women so we kind of prevailed upon some women to come and talk about the Suffragettes (laughs). And I remember being really moved by it and excited because it was the time of the (Artisanian? Directs?) where Althusser versus Historicism and they looked to us as if we had to break down that idea of Historicism or find out what it was and find out what good History could – Marxist – good Marxist History, a good non-Historicist History looked like. So in some ways, in a curious way, the History Group was more central to the debates going on than I think we realised at the time. And we read the Marxist Histories – the Marxist Histories on it and we learnt a lot or at least I learnt a lot and I'm sure the rest of us... But it didn't really begin to function as a kind of collaborative, collective way of working until we began working on the published volume "Making Histories". And then we really did get into – or at least my memory is into kind of collective writing. Although we each wrote our own chapters, they were commented on, edited and I remember Greg and I particularly editing, editing, editing stuff, trying to work through exactly what we were saying and so on. And I learnt a lot from Richard who was a very generous, beautiful figure. But I also learnt tonnes from working like that, particularly with Greg McLennon. There was Dave Sutton and he came a year later and I remember particularly with Greg that we'd just sit and edit stuff and so it wasn't just you know the epistemologies of History which I was kind of interested in. But also I think that's why I began to learn how to write because I don't think I could really a syntactical sentence before I went to the Centre. [Laughs] I don't think this is a common experience, but I learnt how to write it at the Centre and I learnt, through the process of collaborative editing. We'd look at sentences and think, "Well that doesn't work..." and I'd try to work out why it doesn't work and then we'd do it again and we'd kind of get there. So it's not something which I think is common. I've not heard people say – you know Paul Willis might say that because Paul really – he was always much more concerned in the quality of his writing than kind of the rigour of his theory. Rigorous theory didn't kind of preoccupy him; the quality of his writing really did and it shows in "Learning to Labour" is a great book; it's absolutely a great book. But I think that was true in my case.

Kieran Connell: What was the relationship between those sub groups and the Centre General Meeting? Do you have any memories of those meetings and what they were like and - ?

Bill Schwarz: Yeah I do... I think a lot of us used to – well a lot of us who had the time, I was funded so I was one of the ones with time – a lot of us would just sit in on other sub groups. I can't remember the protocols, whether you had to kind of knock on the door and say, "Would it be all right - ?" or whether we just turned up, I can't remember. But I remember going to the Women's Group and to the Literature Group and I guess various others – the (inaudible 0:18:35)... and it was just a wonderful experience to be able to listen to all of that stuff. But they all had – the Groups all had their particular dispositions, both intellectually and politically and emotionally. So when they came together there could be a lot of miscommunication and a lot of people talking at crossed purposes. But the – you know the meetings were – those General Meetings – on Mondays I think they were, were they? (Laughs) Sometimes they were charged, sometimes I guess it was the narcissism of a small group that you – we'd hold our corner or something. But on the whole I think I remember them as being rather serious attempts at you know democratically governing our little space and they had all the travails of – you know all the virtues and all the travails of democracy in that sense. I enjoyed them, I thought they were – I never remember leaving any of those meetings feeling absolutely devastated or deflated or something, because I think – you know I hadn't thought of this necessarily until now, but I guess I probably or I think we probably had a degree of trust. Now that wouldn't have been universal, because there really were schisms where there was no trust between certain groups. But I'm not certain that was a – that would have been the common experience. I don't think it would have been. And outside the formal working environment we all went out together at night; we'd go drinking or we'd go and see bands or whatever, go to the movies. And it made no difference. Of course those differences which existed inside the Centre about, "Which Sub Group are you in?" But it didn't – they had no purchase that - we kind of forgot. We just got on and did stuff.

[0:21:10]

Kieran Connell: Did you see it as a collective at the time, that you were part of?

Bill Schwarz: I think I did, yeah. I think I did and I think I – I liked that and... I suspect that I went there wanting to be part of that collective and wanting to make it work, I guess.

Kieran Connell: So were you – I mean what was your kind of – before you arrived, what was your politics before you arrived? Were you sort of on the Left?

Bill Schwarz: Yeah I was on the Left. I mean I – I'd never joined a political party but I remember in 1972, at the beginning of 1972 then right through that calendar year, my world kind of changed and – yeah and I became more aggressively identified with a kind of Radical Socialism I guess and the Centre gave some space where these things can be talked through and discussed and so it was good; I liked that.

Kieran Connell: I was going to ask a bit more about like this – the collectivisation of things and where the staff fitted in in all that? So obviously when you were there it would have been Stuart, Michael and Richard –

Bill Schwarz: Yeah.

Kieran Connell: - you know there was commitment it seems to break down those formal relationships between the staff and the students, but what was the staff's role within all that and you talked about Stuart's eloquence and what-have-you. How did it – in practice, was there a sense still that the staff were kind of leading?

Bill Schwarz: Yeah well of course there was! (Laughs) There was an intellectual sense that they were more intellectually experienced than any of us in there – Stuart, Richard and Michael in their different ways were much more intellectually experienced. But I think they – again, in their different ways, were valiant at trying to divest themselves of that authority. You know none of them wished to maintain the authority of being an intellectual figurehead really. If they were – I'm sure they would have been happy to be thought of as a teacher but the teacher as a kind of collaborative dialogical process. I'm sure they'd have been happy with "teacher", but I think they – yeah looking back on it from institutional life at the beginning of the 21st Century, I think what they did was remarkable actually. So we could never forget, I could never forget, maybe some people could but I could never forget that they were the teachers and we were the students. But that didn't prevent degrees of intimacy and friendship and then along with degrees – those emotions of friendship and intimacy there of

course – there are times you got pissed off with, as you get pissed off with your friends. And of course it was inflected because they were the teachers and so on, but maybe I've just got a rosy memory of it! I don't know. Sometimes I read about the Centre as if – as if it was just constituted on kind of permanent schisms; it didn't feel like that actually a lot of the time. It didn't. You know they were there, of course they were there... but they didn't – there were other dimensions too, yeah? That's all I can say.

Kieran Connell: I was going to ask you about – we talked a little bit about it before, like there was nobody obviously with a formal political position within the Centre, but the politics did presumably come in in some form. People have different political affiliations outside the Centre and you know presumably some of that fed in. What are your reflections of how, if at all, politics did come in?

Bill Schwarz: Well they did... and sometimes there'd be... there'd be sharp disagreements because the range of political positions was enormously wide. But I don't remember a moment – I mean you'll have a better idea because you've talked to so many people, but I don't – I don't think of a moment... when those political positions actually became irreconcilable, you know that – I'm talking about external political debate, you know, "What shall we do in this Election?" or, "This strike?" or whatever it was or – you know, for those – they were discussed and people came to different conclusions but I think it was very rare for big political divergences to exist inside the Centre in a kind of unhandleable way. I mean Feminism would be – well people have talked a lot about that and then maybe later Race was certainly – certainly opened – as Feminism did, opened up, you know Black Politics opened up real problems and disagreements and anxieties. You know how, "What does this mean and how do we deal with it?" And you know initially having to persuade people you know – and I was one of the ones who had to be persuaded that Race is an issue and it has to be dealt with. So those processes of re-education of course they're painful.

[0:28:00]

Kieran Connell: Did Feminism affect – you know had you encountered Feminism prior to the Centre or was that - ?

Bill Schwarz: I had. I mean it would have been impossible (laughs) – impossible not to. But there was something particular – there was something particular about Feminism in the Centre; there were two things. For me – I don't know, I'm talking autobiographically; one is I hadn't really met Feminism in my place of work as part of an intellectual issue, that was the first thing. And the second thing, it felt like there was an active cohort – yeah and indeed there was an active cohort, so it wasn't just you know one or two voices saying, "Oh what about this? What about that?" You know there was what we would call now a kind of "critical mass" and that made the difference and it was a very good difference. But there was – you know, there were times when I was uncomfortable and there were times when I was bemused and I thought, "Oh what is all this?" you know? (Laughs)

Kieran Connell: And I want to ask about the relationship – I mean between the Centre and the wider University, you know, did you see yourself as a student of the University or as a student of the Centre?

Bill Schwarz: I don't think I had any identification with Birmingham University. I don't think any at all, so...

Kieran Connell: Were you aware of the Centre's relationship to the University and - ?

Bill Schwarz: Yeah I was. Stuart was still talking quite regularly at times about the aftereffects of the '68 occupation and his role and so it was – I think all of us were aware that institutionally, the Centre was in a delicate position. Despite all its fame and the money it had attracted and the people it had attracted and the stream of visitors the whole time, institutionally it was always vulnerable and Stuart had to keep on fighting that battle. And a lot of that, although we didn't quite – maybe we didn't know it at the time, fell on to his shoulders because he was the Director and all that. But my knowledge of the rest of the University – you know I used the library, we wouldn't socialise in the University. We'd go and eat at lunchtime but that was about it. The only – the only difference, the only – what was distinct was there were some attempts to establish connections with the History Department and this affected me particularly. So Richard had come from the History Department and was certainly keen to establish connections. And there was a time when I made a habit of going to the History Department Seminars – the weekly seminar, which was run by Dorothy Thompson (laughs) and she

– how can I put this? I don't think she was very welcoming or she was very suspicious of, "What are these Cultural Studies people doing with History? Why don't they just get on with their stuff and leave it alone?" That's kind of my sense. And I remember – it could have been when Gareth (Stupporn-Jones?) came or Eugene Genovese – one of these, I can't remember, but at the end of the seminar Dorothy Thompson said, "Well we'll be going out for dinner now". I think she said, "We'll be going to the Danish restaurant" which was the kind of priciest restaurant in Birmingham – it was just by the railway station, where McDonalds is now. And I wrote to her afterwards and I said, "Do you realise that you're kind of disenfranchising students who just can't afford to go there?" She wasn't having any of it (laughs). So I think that probably put pay to my relationship with the History Department but no, so far as I was concerned, maybe there were – maybe Mike (Court?) had relations with the English Department and maybe there were relations with the German Department, with (inaudible 0:32:40) Van der Ville or something. What I find interesting – and I don't really know enough about this and Stuart is probably the only person who would be able to tell us now, that in the early 60s, there was this little cluster of Central European immigrants. There's Roy Pascale – I think he was British but worked in Germany and then there was (inaudible 0:33:16) brother or something wasn't there?

[0:33:20]

Kieran Connell: I don't know.

Bill Schwarz: I've lost the story now, but there was – there are – and I think there was a kind of Marxist Chemist or something who had been – the Secret Services had been on to him or something.

Kieran Connell: There was a cluster.

Bill Schwarz: There was a little cluster of kind of – most of them I think – there weren't a lot – it was a handful of émigré dissident Marxists. There was Rodney Hilton of course and I think these people were rather keen to see what was happening in the Centre. They kept their distance in the early days, but I think – you know I think Pascal was very – was very supportive. And then also in Birmingham – I mean this is going off, but it is a story which should be remembered I think. There was this guy Alfred (inaudible 0:34:16), have you come across him? He was an old man and he'd been living in Birmingham for a long time; an émigré from Frankfurt and he'd just been sitting in – I don't know, some suburb, writing these works of Marxist Philosophy, which suddenly in the 70s became known you know partly as a result of the student occupations and student movement in Germany. He became kind of a rather revered figure and there was – I liked him, I got on well with him and he and his wife Jona, there were some connections; he'd come to the Centre at times and that was good, it was nice.

Kieran Connell: I'd have to look into that.

Bill Schwarz: And then he just – I think he left his wife and decided to move back to Germany and live with a young Revolutionary I think! (Laughs)

Kieran Connell: As you do!

Bill Schwarz: But it was important then.

Kieran Connell: I was going to ask you about – a bit more about the role of History in the Centre, because obviously if you personally come from your background and your interests, you know History and Cultural Studies, it was very important for you kind of in your own intellectual development –

Bill Schwarz: Yeah, yeah.

Kieran Connell: - but what was its, in terms of its wider position in the Centre, what – how did that happen?

Bill Schwarz: Well I think you know there was Richard there. I remember when Richard was appointed – I mean I wasn't there then because I arrived I think the year after him, they were going to appoint – the idea was to appoint either an Anthropologist or a Historian, is that right?

Kieran Connell: Yeah.

Bill Schwarz: And in the end it was a Historian. And we were all very evangelical about the importance of History; this little group of us, you know? But I'm not sure if we found a way of explaining why people should be doing History and I wonder now, looking back on it, as if we had a rather empiricist sense of what History was; like dealing with the past (laughs) rather in relation – but we didn't have that or we didn't formally have that. We knew all the arguments against that. We were mobilising the arguments against that. But maybe there was a bit of that. And what I find really striking now is that many of the people who are my contemporaries in Birmingham write what I regard now as absolutely History-History, you know? You look at Frank Moore, you look at Charlotte Branson, you look at all this stuff and this is – this is historical work coming out. You know I wouldn't have thought so at the time, but I think there was a strong historical sensibility in Dick Hebdige's work, you know? That he talks about – in "Subcultures" he talks about the various Black subcultures and their White counterparts, as a kind of phantom history and he was writing – he does write phantom histories. And I'm – I think maybe there was those who were dedicated to History couldn't quite see the ways in which actually a lot of the work being done was quite historical.

[0:38:06]

Kieran Connell: Does that relate to the broader context of what was emerging in these debates around Empiricist History and Theory and Althusserian Theory and obviously – which all came to a head in '79 at Ruskin?

Bill Schwarz: Yeah...

Kieran Connell: You know do you have any recollections of that, because obviously you were clearly influenced by both of those strands?

Bill Schwarz: Yeah I was, well yeah we all were; that was why poor old Richard got absolutely slaughtered at Ruskin because he – we – he couldn't, didn't want to dispense with the more structural arguments and I'm still sympathetic to that position. I think Thompson wrote absolutely extraordinary, beautiful histories which in some ways are more structural than either we were prepared to concede at the time and certainly a million times more than he was ever prepared to conceive (both laugh). No it was devastating; it was the end – I mean the debate had by then become rather formalist you know? Historicist or Structuralist although that wasn't any way of discussing it and my recollection – I haven't read the stuff for years and years but it was that neither Stuart nor Richard subscribed to that dichotomy particularly. They were trying to think round it and (inaudible 0:39:34) but also it was a strange – it was a very strange political moment because it was almost – well it was when Thatcherism was just beginning and these debates in that situation kind of seemed not really to the point. And I think – is this right? That the Ruskin Conference must have been early December or November was it?

Kieran Connell: Yeah.

Bill Schwarz: Early in December 1979?

Kieran Connell: Yeah.

Bill Schwarz: And then I think in the Christmas Edition of the New Statesman which was then going through one of its radical moments under Bruce Page, that Thompson wrote this piece on cruise missiles, so I think it was within two or three weeks of that extraordinary and absolutely distressing Oxford occasion – Ruskin occasion, that he decided to give it all up and that was the beginning of his new – of the last political phase of his life, you know? So it was a strange moment.

Kieran Connell: Do you remember what were your feelings on leaving that event? I mean do you still remember what you felt like at the time?

Bill Schwarz: Yeah I felt... (inaudible 0:41:00) on behalf of Richard and Stuart to some extent; I just saw – I felt uneasy, I felt a bit ill and I wondered, “What was the political purpose of it? What was the intellectual purpose of it? What was – ?” And I remember going up to Stuart just as he was walking down from the... and I kind of – I think I kind of said, “Well I don’t know, you didn’t – “ I can’t remember, I said something and all he could say was, “It’s a disaster. It’s a disaster”. So you know I remember there being difficulties between him and Thompson before and they’d been increasing you know? But it did mark a moment where their kind of shared political history just vanished. It was tough.

Kieran Connell: I mean just finally I was going to ask about – kind of a very broad question really; I mean pretty much impossible to answer in a couple of sentences, but just for your reflections really on the conjuncture, to use that phrase that was so popular. What was it about the conjuncture of the period whilst you were there at the Centre, you know mid 1970s that allowed it to flourish and to operate in the way that it did? I mean you talked about universities and the differences now and that might be one example, but...

Bill Schwarz: Well I don’t know... I don’t know if my views are representative of other people; I’m sure it isn’t. But I talked to you before about 1972 and my own biography being an absolutely key – it began with, it didn’t begin with this – but in my memory (laughs) it began with Bloody Sunday, which it kind of did begin with Bloody Sunday. Then it went through the Dockers and the Miners Strikes and so on and at the end of the year, it finished with the jailing of the Angry Brigade. Now I was never – you know my politics was never associated with the Angry Brigade but I remember reading a piece, I think in the Daily Mirror would you believe it, after they were sentenced saying, “Oh well they lived on this farm in Essex somewhere and they all had to – “ I don’t know... bite of a chicken’s head with their mouth or some – just – it was – it felt like being back in kind of a pure fascist moment. And I – I was only 16 in 1968 so I hadn’t quite experienced the euphoria of those periods, so I came to political life in a sense, as the counter moment – the other ‘68 was gaining (hegemony?). So I was – that dominated my sensibility I think or it certainly did – it certainly did in retrospect, of my time before the Centre, choosing to go to the Centre and then being at the Centre, that it never really seemed as if despite the occasional flourish (both laugh), it never really seemed as if we were on a revolutionary or radical wave, “We’re going to be doing this” and so on... And I got to Birmingham just after the – was it the Mulberry Bush? The pub where the – the Irish pub which had been – or the pub –

[0:44:50]

Kieran Connell: Oh yeah, must have been around the same time, yeah.

Bill Schwarz: Yeah and people were really – I remember Irish people in Birmingham being very, very uneasy and then a bit later there was you know – the National Front began to be a presence and then in 1979 Mrs Thatcher won the election in May and Stuart of course had been central in analysing that and bringing it to public consciousness and seeing her for what she kind of was in a way, which no one was quite saying. So that was my – if you ask about conjuncture, for me it would go back to – I’m speaking very autobiographically here, but back to 1972, through to 1979/80 and 81 you know? And that’s partly why – I mean I never – I never made a decision to do this, but I think it’s partly why I’m interested in Enoch Powell and I begin my History with Enoch Powell and – because it was Powell who anticipated this moment or this conjuncture or Powellism I think. I mean other people wouldn’t have had that experience. If you talk to the people in Big Flame, they might have had a more optimistic reading of what was happening.

Kieran Connell: So in a sense then the conjuncture that was a part of your biography personally speaking, like the – you know the euphoria of ‘68 was not really ever a part of your formation in a sense?

Bill Schwarz: No it wasn’t, it wasn’t. No. I did go to Paris in ‘68 in the summer and just caught the dregs of it really, but I didn’t identify – well maybe I did mentally, but I didn’t think of myself in any way as a kind of participant. I wasn’t a participant; I wasn’t at all. So it was a strange conjuncture and the story is told in “Policing the Crisis” – that story.

Kieran Connell: Yeah.

Bill Schwarz: And then in the stuff on Thatcherism.

Kieran Connell: Well thanks very much for your –

Bill Schwarz: Is that it?

Kieran Connell: Yeah, thank you.

[End of Transcript]