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Kieran Connell: So what brought you to the centre in the first place?

Christine Hardy: I think to explain that I would need to go back to my first degree. So I went to a new university, University of East Anglia, in 1973 when I was 22. And I went to do – I did a degree in comparative literature. And what distinguished that course from other literature degrees was an emphasis on theory. So I remember modules on Marxism and literary theory, psycho analysis and literary theory semiotics. Alongside that and doing a foreign language, we could choose a subsidiary subject, and I chose intellectual history. So, by the time of my year abroad where we wrote a 12,000 word dissertation-

Kieran Connell: So what year was that?

Christine Hardy: So, when I went abroad would have been 75, so I was reading Roland Barthes and I came across the work of Renee Balibar and Denise Laporte giving a Marxist analysis of formation of French national language and literature. So, through my first degree I was in a theoretical year and I enjoyed that. The other major thing was the unit on Marxist literary criticism introduced me to Marxism. I had no political consciousness whatsoever until that seminar, and it was like an old Russian movie. I read Marxism and I could see the world. So all of that, I think, was a forerunner to choosing CCCS.

Kieran Connell: Had you heard of the CCCS whilst you were an undergraduate?

Christine Hardy: Not then. So I was invited to stay on and do research but I had the feeling of wanting to get out of the ivory tower. And I went up to Leeds, carried on reading Marxism, oh no before that I went and squatted in an IMG squat in London and went to Trotsky meetings and so on.

Kieran Connell: Were you a member of-?

Christine Hardy: I never joined.

Kieran Connell: Never joined.

Christine Hardy: Never joined. But, you know, the talks by Rob – Trotsky as left, Robin Blackburn to Harry Kelly and so. Then I went to Leeds; I taught in a school in adult education and further education. And, at that time, Ralph Miliband was setting up something called a centre for Marxist education, so I went to things there. And I also went to a lot of meetings at the trades council and that's where I first came across Stuart Hall. So I think it's very interesting that at that period when he was directing the centre, he was going up and talking to trade union audiences, he talked about the national front, it was absolutely gripping, absolutely gripping. And then, at the same time, through a personal contact I saw a copy of working papers in contemporary cultural studies, so I was living in Leeds but being aware of the centre.

Kieran Connell: So through the talk that Stuart gave-

Christine Hardy: That was my first contact.

Kieran Connell: And then through coming into the working papers in cultural studies.

Christine Hardy: Yeah. And I think that's very interesting that people with that – outside a university context could access the centre's work and were interested in it. So people in that left network in Leeds were reading working papers. So after about six years, I missed literary research and I went to Warwick to do an MA.

Kieran Connell: So that would have been in the early eighties?

Christine Hardy: So, Warwick was... no, Warwick was '78, I think. And that MA was practically self-taught. So, again, I carried on looking at Marxism psycho analysis, literary criticism, came across the work of Althusser and it was then that I decided the next stage had to be CCCS for interdisciplinary work and for its political culture.

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Kieran Connell: So did you become more politicised as you went through adult education then to do-?

Christine Hardy: Well, from the Marxism degree... unit in my first degree had politicised me and everything I did after that was politicised; going to teach in a technical college to teach working class students and so on and so forth. So I got to CCCS in '79, yeah.

Kieran Connell: Did you have an interview or...?

Christine Hardy: Yeah, I had an interview.

Kieran Connell: Can you remember who was on the panel?

Christine Hardy: Yeah, Michael Green, Lucy Bland, Bob Lumley and three others. So how different could that be to anything I'd ever come across before? And I remember Bob Lumley had an earring in and a torn T-shirt. So it should have been terrifying to be interviewed by five people but it was fabulous. But I came out feeling absolutely sure that I wouldn't get in. I woke up, walked up to New Street Station swearing out loud.

Kieran Connell: Why did you think that?

Christine Hardy: I think I'd fluffed it. But I did get in, yeah.

Kieran Connell: What was it – had you ever experienced anything like that before previously-?

Christine Hardy: Never.

Kieran Connell: In terms of students taking a massive role.

Christine Hardy: Nothing like it. Nothing like it at all. And then my first day of arriving at CCCS it was a whole day of welcome, and then a party at Roger Channon's flat in Alcester Road in the evening. And that summed up my years at CCCS. It was – people worked really hard and there were a lot of parties. I'm quite an introverted person, I don't get on with everybody, I've never gelled with so many people. There was just so much in common, a kind of shared mind-set, and so people were happy to work together all day and then celebrate in the evening. And, like, I lived in a shared house at Grove Avenue, Henry Miller's house, with a number of other centre members; Neil Gramp, Frank Mort, Andrew Tolson. When Andrew Tolson left, John Burn came in. So you were just in dialogue all the time over at the centre and then lots of other centre people lived in Moseley. So working together but also celebrating together; lots of parties.

Kieran Connell: At what point did you – to what extent did you feel as a student that you had ownership over the project of the centre? How long did that take?

Christine Hardy: From the start. From the start. It was then a post-graduate only entrance and I think in my cohort there were a number of people like myself who had worked before they got there, arrived there in their thirties, worked before they had got there, been through political movements before they had got there, and chose the centre for the centre work they were already familiar with. They came to further that work. Does that make sense?

Kieran Connell: Yeah.

Christine Hardy: It felt like a shared project from the start, and the way the centre was run, inviting you – I didn't do the taught MA but I could sit in on any MA topic. You were invited to go to sub-groups you

wanted to go to. You were invited to contribute to administrative work. Students wrote the agendas for the general meeting. So from day one it felt like a shared project.

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Kieran Connell: Did you have any recollections of what the general meeting was like, the atmosphere within those centre wide meetings?

Christine Hardy: Just looking back – my memories are positive. I don't know if it could have been. And all my memories are of meetings that were packed, so people obviously wanted to be there. And, also, I remember for general meetings, for meetings with visiting speakers and there were a lot of those, you got the people who were there, the staff, the students, you also got ex-centre members who were still in the city would come in, so they were vibrant meetings.

Kieran Connell: And were you – which sub-groups did you gravitate towards then when you were there?

Christine Hardy: I went to English studies. I went to local stayed. I must have gone to ones around gender. And I was – I don't know, can't remember all the terms, sub-convenor of the stencil papers group so got involved in editing stencil papers.

Kieran Connell: I was going to ask about the stencil papers. What was the – a lot of people I've spoken to have said there wasn't really an atmosphere of academic careerism, it wasn't about having an academic career, so what was the motivations behind people wanting to produce things like stencil papers and then Hutchinson edited collections?

Christine Hardy: It was that feeling of being part of a collective project, and being very keen. People were very keen on the topics they chose. You chose your topic and then you just drew on the centre research to inform it. So people were very keen on what they did. And as they completed research, the next stage was obviously to publish it. And I can't remember the change from the original journals to the working papers, it might have been financial, I don't know what, might have been a way of getting research out quickly. I just found that so interesting. Anyone could buy a stencil paper, you didn't have to be in the university or a university. And when I left, I was always giving my students the address and they would just send off for whatever stencil paper took their fancy. So it was part of that collective ethos and of getting the research out there.

Kieran Connell: Was that relationship with getting the research out there and also you mentioned external speakers. Was it quite open to people outside the centre coming in and sharing ideas and...?

Christine Hardy: Yes.

Kieran Connell: Can you remember any of the speakers that came off the top of your head?

Christine Hardy: I wished I could remember more, but I do remember... I remember – I enjoyed the porous nature of CCCS. You could be active in the centre 24/7 but a lot of the students and staff were also active outside. And, also, anyone could suggest a centre meeting that somebody be invited in to talk about a campaign or a city issue. So when I was reflecting back, I couldn't always remember what I had discovered in the centre and what I'd discovered out. Like I arrived just as Birmingham had lost thousands of manufacturing jobs and the city was forced to reinvent itself headed by Albert Ball, that turned it into a city of culture. And I was really gripped by that. So, I remember speakers speaking about that. Did I hear them outside? Did I hear them inside? But I know that people did come to the centre and talk about issues around the privatisation of the city, who would have access to the new shopping malls and so on. So I do think the centre was involved in city life in that way.

Kieran Connell: And what about politically, there's obviously a broad spectrum of the left politics that were active in the centre, how did they all fit together in your – do you have any recollections of tensions or did it all fit quite neatly with Trotsky, Big Flame, IMG, IS?

Christine Hardy: There was no – I was familiar with political meetings where I saw IMG would stand up and spout. There was none of that in the period I was there, there was none of it, no.

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Kieran Connell: Were people quite open about their political affiliations?

Christine Hardy: Yeah. And like, for example, at the time I went, feminism loomed large but there was the energy of our positional cultural movements fed the centre. Most of the people there were involved in political movements and that energy was the energy of CCCS.

Kieran Connell: And what do you think the impact was of feminism within the centre whilst you were there? Did you notice what was the effect of it?

Christine Hardy: Well, it was fabulous. What do I remember? Well, I remember that Lucy Bland lived round the corner and we ran round Highbury Park every morning, that my reconcile in Janice Winship lived down the road, and I just remember cycling off with Janice, Myra, Lucy to events all over the city, and we had come through feminism with its non-hierarchical forms. And so that supported the non-hierarchical forms of CCCS practice.

Kieran Connell: Were you involved in any feminist groups outside of the centre?

Christine Hardy: I was involved – when I was in Leeds I got involved in the nascent women's health movement and I was involved in a women's health group in the city. We met meekly, we built up an archive, we gave lecturers to women's groups and girl's groups, and through Tricia McCabe I squatted for women's aid.

Kieran Connell: Was that-?

Christine Hardy: It was, yeah.

Kieran Connell: And, for you, was that political feminist side of things and the intellectual work that was going on within the centre, did you distinguish between them or were they one and the same?

Christine Hardy: They were one and the same. Well, I suppose – I finished my PhD ten years later because I went in several directions. But, to me, they all seemed part of the same thing.

Kieran Connell: In terms of the squat, because Tricia has talked about that as well to me, what was the – what are your memories of that? What were the motivations behind it?

Christine Hardy: Well, it just seemed a natural thing to do. I'd just had years in the women's movement before I'd got there, so things like rape crisis centres women's aid were so important, and so, of course, of course, you would go out of the centre and down to the squat. It was second nature to do that, I think.

Kieran Connell: Do you think that the men in the centre were able to engage with feminism?

Christine Hardy: Oh gosh... I don't have any sense of not engaging with it, but mainly... I think of the band of women that were there that I did work with, yeah. But gender did come, and that's really important. There were moments of class, gender, race and age and I think that's a superb contribution of the centre project, because as I went out and started to do field work you couldn't just draw on one. You had to consider class, gender, race and age to make an analysis. And by the time I was at the centre, that it what was happening.

Kieran Connell: Was class important for your formation?

Christine Hardy: It was for me, yeah. And, eventually, I switched my project. I got research money to do theories of reading but I spent a long time reading Christova, Julia Christova, and I decided it was an intellectual cul-de-sac. And after a year I made a total switch, and I looked at arts interventions in working class areas. So class was central for me, but once I started to look at those projects women

were the main participants, so the work I did on gender was crucial; would have been impossible to do that research without looking at gender, class, race when it came up.

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Kieran Connell: So you were, kind of – you came from quite a theoretical originally background and then began doing the field work which was much more rooted in practice.

Christine Hardy: Yes. And the field work was impossible without what I encountered at the centre. I found the work of Dorothy Hobson and Paul Willis really excellent. And essays by Willis about combining theoretical work with field work. I thought it was superb. And it just gave so much to the field I went into, arts intervention in working class area, it meant you could really take theoretical insight in there, not just opinionisms or ideals.

Kieran Connell: The centre had, at some point, at various points, this emphasis on the Gramscian notion of the organic intellectual. Did you affiliate yourself to that or not so much?

Christine Hardy: I wasn't an organic intellectual. Doing three degrees, I moved far away from my working class community. But, obviously, that origin was important to me which is why I went back into working class communities to do research. So I wasn't an organic intellectual but you could take your class motivations into CCCS and work theoretically and practically with them.

Kieran Connell: What do you think were the benefits and were there any disadvantages in terms of group work and collaborative work at the centre?

Christine Hardy: I think they were motivating and there was an energy out of dialogue. You did have to take that personal moment of writing and, interestingly, I did that when I left.

Kieran Connell: When did you leave? What year did you leave?

Christine Hardy: I think I left after about two years, two years of full time money.

Kieran Connell: And it was after leaving that you actually began to be more-?

Christine Hardy: I used to call it my knitting. I got out my research every summer vacation. But then there must have been a deadline and I wrote it up, and that was a solitary moment of writing up. But I gained through all the collective work, the seminars, the discussions and so on.

Kieran Connell: You talked about the centre having this emphasis on breaking down those conventional relationships between students and staff members-

Christine Hardy: Yeah.

Kieran Connell: I want to ask you a bit more about the role of the staff when you were there, because when you arrived Stuart left, I guess.

Christine Hardy: Yes. I admit it. I went to the centre to work with Stuart Hall and darn it, he left just before I arrived. But he was still around. That's interesting as well. Stuart was out there when he was director and like he gave talks at the Star Club which was the Communist party venue in the city. But in terms of staff, when I thought about this interview I sat down and what I thought was could it possibly be true that when I arrived in '79 there were only two full time members of staff; Michael Green and Richard Johnson with Paul Willis full time research associate. And I thought about it, and I thought for that first year there was only those two. And I just thought what a colossal amount of work they did, really colossal. And my memories of staff student relationships were completely positive. I think in my cohort there were a lot of mature students, and so that must have made a difference in staff student relationships.

Kieran Connell: And then Maureen would have arrived-

Christine Hardy: And then Maureen arrived after a year, and they were all committed. They were campaigners, they worked incredibly hard, and they were available.

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Kieran Connell: Did you think that particular students gravitated towards particular staff depending on interests or...?

Christine Hardy: Well, your research interest took you to a particular member of staff, so Michael was my supervisor, and very generous with his time, very enthusiastic. Well I think you know how enthusiastic Michael can be and how giving and... yeah.

Kieran Connell: As a student, did you have any perception or were you aware of the centre's relationship with the wider University of Birmingham?

Christine Hardy: Every few months we worried that the university would close us down. That was a regular topic of conversation. I remember there were certain people from other departments, Tony Davis from English department, I think some people who were in CRUS can't remember what CRUS stands for, so there were individual people, and I think individuals from other departments would come to open sessions when there were visiting speakers.

Kieran Connell: And in terms of your concerns and anxieties about every few months you might get closed down, did that come from staff worrying about things?

Christine Hardy: Yeah, it must have gone from the staff liaising with the university hierarchy, those anxieties were there. It was a small department. As I said, nobody could believe when foreign students came in or visiting speakers they would say, 'Oh, is this it? Is this one floor?' Because of the work that went out and was known internationally. But, it had that international reputation but it was a small department with two members of staff; it must have felt itself vulnerable. And it was political and known to be political and oppositional.

Kieran Connell: So you left in '81/'80?

Christine Hardy: Yeah.

Kieran Connell: What did you go on to do after that?

Christine Hardy: I still carried on doing research and I became involved in the organisations I researched in. I was on the management board of Jubilee Arts in West Bromwich for quite a while. I kept in touch with the projects. Ian Paul Farnen in Sheffield. While at the centre I did some extra moral teaching with Myra and then, eventually, I began to teach at the polytechnic that then became...

Kieran Connell: Birmingham City University.

Christine Hardy: Yes, it went through a few changes of names. And that's where my full time job went.

Kieran Connell: So where was the extra moral teaching that you were doing?

Christine Hardy: We did it at Birmingham University the extra moral, yeah.

Kieran Connell: So that would have been in cultural studies or...?

Christine Hardy: It came out of cultural studies, yeah. Rebecca O'Rourke did it and then she passed it on to me. And I think it was typical of that period that I asked Myra if she would like to do it as well. We didn't get double pay; it was just that feeling that you enjoyed doing work together.

Kieran Connell: So did you – when you were teaching at Birmingham City University that now is Birmingham Polytechnic, did your time at the centre influence your teaching at-?

Christine Hardy: Totally. Totally.

Christine Hardy

Kieran Connell: In what ways?

[0:27:27]

Christine Hardy: Well, I got there originally to teach – before I went to the centre, I developed interactive forms of teaching and learning. It was a really big thing for me. And then when I left the centre I got even more force behind that. So I was employed originally to do one class around gender. And, really, there was, at that time, a thirst for centre work. I took a gender studies course and, at the end of it, the students sat in and refused to leave the room unless they could do that gender studies in the third year, in their final year. And it was like that until I left six years ago, five years ago. There was a perpetual demand from other departments, for occasional departments, for a cultural studies input.

Kieran Connell: Why do you think that demand has remained so strong?

Christine Hardy: Because it was the centre for contemporary cultural studies. So, really, the research was on what was happening outside of the window. It was continually examining new political and cultural forms. And, therefore, students and heads of departments wanted their students to know what was the context in which they would have a vocational project. But, also, students responded to it because within those examinations of gender, race and class their own identity was recognised, perhaps recognised in a way that the rest of the institution didn't do. So I think that was the power of cultural studies for a lot of people.

Kieran Connell: And, also, is it something specific about the so-called Birmingham school, became recognised internationally, I guess, and do you think that's important as well the fact it had that kind of reputation?

Christine Hardy: Yeah, I think it did.

Kieran Connell: Worldwide.

Christine Hardy: I think it was important. It just gave the people there a lot of confidence, yeah. And you had that behind you wherever you went, I think.

Kieran Connell: And then, just finally, I wanted to ask about – it's a very broad question, really, but what do you think what were the structures that made the centre what it was whilst you were there in that period, the late seventies and early eighties, both within the university structures and also more broadly in terms of British society at that time?

Christine Hardy: I think I would want to go back to when the centre was originated by Hoggart. Thinking back, I just became quite interested in what made the centre possible and what changed between the moment when it was – when Hoggart founded it to the moment when it was closed. And what I thought about was, like, Hoggart founded the centre I think it was '64, wasn't it, and what happened in '63 was an expansion of higher education and the founding of the new universities. East Anglia was founded in '63 and the motto was, 'Do Different.' So the expectation in those new universities was that they would do different. They would introduce new knowledge, not they would keep on doing. So when the centre was founded, that was in the intellectual climate in the country, if you like, and that allowed it to flourish. Innovation, radicalism was welcomed. And then you got – what did you get? In the fifties you got managed migration to Britain from the colonies to get workers to staff the expanding industries, so you got racism and you got anti-racism. Then in the sixties you got the women's movement, so you got massive cultural shifts and you got a desire for those cultural shifts to be interpreted. And that was what cultural studies did.

Kieran Connell: And then compared to 2002-

Christine Hardy: And then, what happened then, was the new managerialism which hit every university, I felt it at the university I was teaching in, it was measuring things, progress by results, it was completely different.

Kieran Connell: What was it like to work in for you?

Christine Hardy: Well, I left – well, for example, there was an introduction of new contracts, there was change to university terms. Like, for example, when I went there, the modules went through the year so on those gender studies modules I would teach two semesters and then say, 'What shall we do in the third semester?' And they knew enough to say what they wanted to do next. And the students would invite speakers in, it had to be speakers that would come in and paid, so that was fabulous. That was real interactive learning. But then we had to cut the modules to thirteen weeks, we had to examine at the end of every thirteen weeks or something like that, so can you see the shift?

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Kieran Connell: Yeah.

Christine Hardy: Yeah.

Kieran Connell: So do you think that made it – I mean, ultimately, so much more stifling to be able to operate in a creative way.

Christine Hardy: Yeah, that's right.

Kieran Connell: Do you have any recollections of the closure, the kind of campaigns around the closure of the centre...?

Christine Hardy: Oh yes. There was a sense of disbelief, I think, and there were articles in *The Guardian*, there were articles in the major press, there were articles in international press. I think there were questions in Parliament, and certainly the local MP in (inaudible 0:34:10) was really heavily involved. There was a disbelief and I just have to stop myself swearing at this point.

Kieran Connell: Thank you very much. Thanks.

[Break in Recording]

Kieran Connell: So, Andrew Tolson, was...

Christine Hardy: Yeah, like earlier on I said I can't remember the men in the centre on gender. What an omission! What an omission! Andrew Tolson wrote *Limits of Masculinity* and I just remember endless dialogues with Andrew Tolson at Grove Avenue, and then when I came to teach gender studies I just leant out that book so many times I had had two copies; people borrowed it and dropped it in the bath and stuff like that. So Andrew's work around gender was really, really central.

Kieran Connell: Can you remember anything about those endless dialogues that you had with him?

Christine Hardy: Well, it was a desire. Before it had been like the women question, and Andrew put the question around masculinity. And it was like a fabulous interest in to that world which had been the taken for granted world. And now it was saying let's look at what is the basis of masculinity.

Kieran Connell: Quite brave.

Christine Hardy: There were men's groups at that time within Birmingham, and Andrew was instrumental in that, yeah.

Kieran Connell: It must have been – within the centre, it must be quite brave to do that because I know that a few years previously the women's studies group was established.

Christine Hardy: Oh right.

Kieran Connell: And it was women's only.

Christine Hardy: Right.

Kieran Connell: And I know that caused some friction probably before you got there but I guess Andrew's work was a way of bridging some of that-

Christine Hardy: Making a new departure, yeah, I think it must have been. It must have had that role.

Kieran Connell: Okay.

Christine Hardy: Yeah.

[End of Transcript]