

[0:00:00]

Kieran Connell: I was hoping you could start first of all just with your memories of how you ended up at the centre in 1978.

Dave Batchelor: Yeah. Well, I remember it quite well. I had been at Art school in Nottingham, and got involved in conceptual art and not making much work, but you know writing stuff and doing little polemical pieces and vaguely political tracts of one kind or another. And at the end of the three year degree course, I hadn't got a clue what to do. I knew I was interested in politics and culture and art, but I didn't have a portfolio, which you would normally have if you go and do an MA at art school. So the options were: unemployment, which was a prominent option at the time; an MA at an art college, which wasn't an option because I didn't have a portfolio; teaching training, which was like a kind of death, so I didn't want to do that; the college-y(?) people did that. And then that was it and someone, one of my few half-conscious teachers there, said, "There's this place in Birmingham called Cultural Studies and you may find that interesting. Why don't you find out about it?" And that was all it was, and I did, so I made an application and went for an interview, and to my surprise got on to the course; on to the MA course. I think I know why now, which is that there was certain concern at the centre at the time that they weren't really touching on visual culture very much. So this kid from an art school rolls up with his (Park Drive accent? 00:01:48) and (inaudible) maybe that's going to work. So yeah, I got the place. I did the course part-time because I couldn't get a grant. That was another issue in itself. So I was there for two years.

Kieran Connell: Did you arrive with a sense of a political commitment?

Dave Batchelor: Yeah, kind of, I mean everyone did in those days. I mean it was a shadow of a counter-culture; every college, I felt, every course I'd been on, there was some sense that you had to have some sense of your relationship to the sort of left political culture, whether that was joining the CP or the IS at the time, or not, which I didn't do. But a lot of the reading, when I was at art school, was Marx and Mau(?), and stuff like that.

Kieran Connell: So you had a bit of a grounding in -

Dave Batchelor: Yeah, absolutely.

Kieran Connell: - Marxist kind of...

Dave Batchelor: Yeah, no, totally. We were taught by... I mean that came through conceptual art. Conceptual art in the 70s was much more politicised and less sort of philosophical than it was in the 60s, so we were being fed... One of the first things I was taught originally when I first went to art school was the Communist Manifesto, which I thought, "Great; I didn't know what the hell I was doing or why I was reading it. So that, yeah, from the day I went to art school, which was originally in '73 you had to... You know at the least the people who were interested the wide broader culture, you had to negotiate your relationship with some sense of political position or tendency or whatever you call it. And that for me was... It meant more just reading Marx and Gramsci and everyone else; Mau, weirdly, a bit of Walter Benjamin, but you know fairly randomly. It wasn't systematic in any way at all. I mean art, the conceptual artists I knew, they weren't systematically involved in politics, but that wasn't high up on the reading list.

Kieran Connell: So was that part of the appeal? I mean apart from being at a bit of a loose end, did you choose to kind of stay in this place? Did you know anything about the centre, other than what the tutor had told you?

Dave Batchelor: No; nothing. I remember I went to a talk somewhere in Nottingham and Stuart Hall was going to be talking there and I said to my teacher, "So how will I know which one's Stuart Hall?" He said, "Well, he'll be the only black guy". "That book(?) is black?" [Laughs]. I had absolutely no idea. So I was pretty... By the time I finished art school I was fairly disillusioned with art, and I couldn't

imagine... I mean no one could make a living out of art in those days, and I couldn't, and you know I thought it had probably... The interest I had I felt might have ended.

[00:04:48]

Dave Batchelor: And you know I was sort of shifting more to sort of cultural politics than to art. So it made really good sense to go there. And, given the lack of anything else to do, it also was a good reason for doing it.

Kieran Connell: Do you have any memories of your initial impressions in the first few weeks, when you arrived?

Dave Batchelor: Yeah. I didn't know what was going on. I vaguely(?) remember(?) when I went for my interview, which seemed to go fine, you know -

Kieran Connell: Was that with students on the panel?

Dave Batchelor: Yeah, very much so.

Kieran Connell: Can you remember the other -

Dave Batchelor: Yes. I think Hazel Carby. Have you seen her? I've not -

Kieran Connell: She lives in America now, so I've not been able to talk to her, but I'm in touch.

Dave Batchelor: No, Hazel Downing -

Kieran Connell: Downing (inaudible).

Dave Batchelor: Hazel Carby was on the course with me.

Kieran Connell: Oh, okay.

Dave Batchelor: She married Mike Denning, who I lived with. He did the MA the same year as me. We shared a flat together, for the first year I think, before he hooked up with Hazel. And there's another guy... I've forgotten his name for the moment.

Kieran Connell: I'm sure it will come back to you.

Dave Batchelor: Yeah. I remember he asked me lots of questions about art, and when I saw him, when I went on to the course, I said, "Oh you know, you were asking about that Jasper Johns show; did you see it?" and he went, "Oh God, I've never seen it". He just sort of did it as a difficult question to ask, and I was slightly disillusioned that he wasn't actually interested in what he was (inaudible word). Michael Green was on the interview panel, and again there was certainly a couple of students; there must have been four people on the panel, but I just don't quite remember them.

Kieran Connell: Was that a bit of a shock; to see student's kind of having such a prominent say in...?

Dave Batchelor: Yeah, in a way. I mean [loud bang] (inaudible 00:06:39) our college you'd have students on interview panels, but we'd always see our position there to be as to check the staff, rather than to be a junior member of staff, so I found that a little bit odd. But you know it was no big deal. I was simply happy to get on the course and having something to do for the next year. Once I found I couldn't get a grant that became quite difficult; to figure out practically how I was going to live.

Kieran Connell: So did your experiences at the centre kind of live up to what you were hoping for?

Dave Batchelor: [Laughs]

Kieran Connell: Or does it kind of go beyond it or you don't know?

Dave Batchelor: I had no idea what was going to happen there, what I was going to do.

Dave Batchelor

[00:07:21]

Dave Batchelor: What I... It was immensely confusing. I mean I think it was useful, it was good to do it, I knew I was probably doing the right thing, I didn't know I was going to survive in the first(?) place; you know doing two years without a grant part-time and having to negotiate doing that with, what I came to do, which was teaching in a technical college part-time, the same... That's when I first met Roger Shannon, when we started teaching in the same tech college.

Kieran Connell: Which college was that? Can you remember?

Dave Batchelor: Yeah; it was Brooklyn College of Technology, in Great Barr.

Kieran Connell: So you were teaching what would now be called General Studies -

Dave Batchelor: General Studies, to Craft apprentices.

Kieran Connell: How did that actually work?

Dave Batchelor: I've no idea whether it worked. I don't suppose it would happen these days. I had not a single minute's experience of teaching and I was stuck into a classroom, with, I don't know, 15 or 20, 16-year old working class kids who didn't want to be there. I mean I had no idea what I was doing. And I always felt that the deal was that if you could leave that classroom with no more damage done to it than when you arrived, you were basically okay. So you were policing it; policing the classroom basically. And I remember the book that was going round at that time and everyone was reading was Wilt; Tom Sharpe book, about teaching craft apprentices in a technical college, and it was a brilliant book because it made it seem not quite as insane. But what it meant was I was doing a day a week in Birmingham, sorry at the centre, so I was doing... In the mornings it was Stuart; did his Series of Culture -

Kieran Connell: Was that like a general -

Dave Batchelor: That was the general MA course, so Stuart did a Series of Culture course in the morning, and Michael Green and/or Richard Johnson did a kind of history. I think it was mainly Richard actually that did a history course in the afternoon. So that was basically a day a week that you had to be there, yeah of course I'd probably be there most of the rest of the week, but then one or two days a week I was then also teaching at this technical college. And the irony was that quite often talk at the centre was about working-class culture, at least one aspect of it, and there I was teaching working-class kids. But I didn't find there was any way in which I could use the knowledge from one, I was getting from one, to apply to the other, either way round. I didn't feel as though I could talk about my experiences at the technical college at the centre, not in that sort of formal setting, even though there was talk about working-class culture, it was series of working-class culture, it was anything to do with practical issues. And I didn't, you know, [laughs]... There was certainly nothing I was... You know, reading Althusser and ideological state apparatuses at the centre wasn't going to equip me to do much teaching obviously at the college. So I found that relationship really hard. And I was completely broke, and that wasn't so easy. I remember once Stuart said, when I was doing the second year of the part-time course, he said, he didn't know how I was going on surviving. He said he was really happy that I had, and he... Stuart was very, as well as being obviously, everyone will have said this; as well as being very brilliant he was very kind. And he just found some part-time work for me to do which was slightly less alienating than teaching at college; doing bits of research and writing for sort of some sociologists, and I ended up going round football grounds, all around England and Scotland, surveying these sort of community groups who were using the ground, and weird stuff like that. But anyway, so -

Kieran Connell: How did you find the theoretical kind of...? I mean obviously you had some grounding in the theory; you read a bit of Marx and such like?

Dave Batchelor: Yeah.

Kieran Connell: What was it like at the centre?
[00:11:29]

Dave Batchelor: A bit overwhelming. There was so much to read every week. I mean it was a very, very intensive... And I'm not sure how anyone... You know you find yourself sitting on the toilet trying to read Marcuse or something. It was a bit too much and I couldn't keep up. I read some stuff and found it very useful but I felt I missed a lot, particularly the sort of the history, sociology, (inaudible 00:11:55 due to loud noise in background). I never got anywhere with that. And I struggled with Althusser and the sort of Structuralist Marxism. I always had slightly more anarchist sympathies I think. I started reading Henry Lefebvre at the time, partly as a sort of, because it seemed like the antithesis of Althusser. But again I didn't really know what to do with it. That wasn't on the curriculum at the time. The other thing I did during the course which I found immensely useful, weirdly, was... because a couple of my friends who I'd been at art school with, were doing teacher training courses at the art school in Birmingham, and I met up with them one evening, and we were flicking through a WEA brochure, Works Education & Association brochure, and we noticed in the WEA in Stourbridge there were a series of talks coming up on William Blake. I've always had a sort of fascination with Blake, and we turned up at these talks, it was just at a primary school, in Stourbridge. There were ten people at this talk, and the talks were being given by E. P. Thompson, which was astonishing, and... Because he lived in the area, and he'd just finished... He was just finishing a manuscript, a book about Blake, so he did a series of ten sessions, I think, just to sort of work through the manuscript and talk it through. They were brilliant. But the weird thing was at the time Thompson had also just published *The Poverty of Theory*, which was a hardly-veiled attack on Structuralist Marxism in general; Althusser in particular, and by implication cultural studies. So I never told anyone that I was going to these talks -

Kieran Connell: By this point Thompson's name at the centre was kind of -

Dave Batchelor: Yeah, he was a bad guy. He was the anti-Christ. He was genuine... And he had... There'd been a conference -

Kieran Connell: This was in Ruskin in Oxford, where Thompson attacked Stuart -

Dave Batchelor: And he absolutely laid into Richard. I wasn't there. Until then I wouldn't... I don't think I had ever been to a conference. But I remember everyone sort of... People were bus'd down to this conference, and they came back shell-shocked, and then Richard in particular who wasn't, who never had the...

Kieran Connell: Charisma.

Dave Batchelor: Charisma; exactly, or someone like Stuart. He was knocked sideways by this. I never knew exactly what happened, but Thompson's name became dirt.

Kieran Connell: It caused quite a big... I mean it was quite a big... That event was quite a big deal.

Dave Batchelor: It was the biggest thing that happened that year, and it was kind of... And I felt completely weird about it because I was turning up at these talks, because... I never said to Thompson that I was at the centre. It wasn't relevant in a way you know, it was... And I certainly never told anyone at the centre, not even Stuart, that I was going to these talks that Thompson gave. I must say though I found Thompson's talks on Blake, which were both about the politics of 18th century London, and about the poetry and relationship between history and poetry and politics. I found them utterly brilliant.

Kieran Connell: Did you find that approach, in a strange way, more in line with your thinking perhaps then; what was going on?

Dave Batchelor: In the end I did. I wasn't... I didn't know that I would. I wasn't expecting to, but I realised that I found them very vivid. I mean Thompson was, you know he's as charismatic as Stuart, in his own way, and I found... It made me realise that there was something missing for me, and what that was, was the poetic, which you weren't getting [laughs] much of by reading Althusser.

[00:15:55]

Dave Batchelor: And it was the first time I realised I was actually really missing art. I needed something of that kind in my life that I wasn't getting from an academic course. And so it was incredibly important for me, so even though probably a year later when I finished and I went back to live in Nottingham, and then I started making drawings and pictures again. And it was largely down to the Thompson talks.

Kieran Connell: They kind of inspired you to go that -

Dave Batchelor: Yeah; totally, totally amazing. It was just that there was a, there was a spark there that I really needed and you know I was just very lucky that -

Kieran Connell: They(?) kind of lit it?

Dave Batchelor: Yeah, totally. I mean I was... I've always been pretty lucky in that turning up at places which happen to have had one of the brilliant teachers; Stuart, Thompson, and the guy who taught me when I first went to art college. So yeah; that's strange stuff.

Kieran Connell: How did class function in terms of... because we talked a little bit about the irony of like the emphasis on working-class culture then going to teach working-class kids and that kind of mismatch?

Dave Batchelor: Yeah.

Kieran Connell: Do you have any reflections of how class functioned within the centre?

Dave Batchelor: Yeah. I remember... Well first thing I remember is that everyone smoked, and the walls were just thick, including me, the rooms were just thick with smoke, and there was just... And I remember one person came to the class, somehow who had, someone more grown up and she objected to people smoking in the room, and we just thought, "This is a joke". Okay; things change. I remember there being, 10 or 12 of us, you know we'd do these... We'd sit round in the room in Muirhead Tower, presumably(?) you know the room?

Kieran Connell: Yeah. The room's(?) completely changed; a massive refurbishment.

Dave Batchelor: Is that right?

Kieran Connell: But interestingly the archive, the physical archive where it's being kept is now on the ground, like the Cadbury Research Library is now in the basement of the Muirhead Tower.

Dave Batchelor: I've not been back to Birmingham University since I finished -

Kieran Connell: Well, you'll have to come back. You'll be interested to know there's actually even a blue plaque on the Muirhead Tower.

Dave Batchelor: Is there really? For Stuart or for -

Kieran Connell: For (inaudible 00:17:59 'the centre?') in general.

Dave Batchelor: Oh shit [laughs].

Kieran Connell: It's quite ironic, (00:18:05 because many lived near Oxford).

Dave Batchelor: My impression... I'll go back to your question; my impression at the time was that the centre only survived because Stuart could run riot through the administration, and was so much cleverer and also much more charismatic that... It was you know an overtly left-wing department in an overtly right-wing university, you know it was a strange situation.

Kieran Connell: Really strange, yeah.
[00:18:29]

Dave Batchelor: And I remember, yeah, we'd all sit round having probably not read all the stuff we were meant to have read and you know I essentially just listened to Stuart, and he was so... He spoke so beautifully and so brilliant and with such clarity that I was you know... I would sit and listen. I found the afternoon sessions, if that's the way round it was; I can't quite remember now, I found them, you know, to be honest, Michael and Richard's, less compelling. I mean interesting and valuable but not... They didn't have that dynamism that Stuart... You know everyone knew that Stuart... And I remember there was a bit of a conflict occurred in these classes that some people started saying they were undemocratic, because you know they were being led by Stuart, and... We got a chance to speak obviously, but that they were essentially undemocratic, and that the class should be... You know everyone should be able to speak equally, which I don't think struck me as particularly a good idea, partly because I thought you know Stuart had a lot more to say than us. But I remember for a couple of weeks there were... Stuart came and said, "Okay; what do you want to do?" And he refused to do a talk as I recall, and he said, "Okay; what do you want to talk about? How are you going to do this?" And it kind of felt odd, it was -

Kieran Connell: (And there was one 00:19:58) on contradictions. Do you remember that? Was that around the time (you was there?)? It was like a debate around this kind of issue of who's going to lead, who leads what, whether there should be leaders and how democratic the (inaudible 00:20:12).

Dave Batchelor: I guess it was. I wasn't aware there was sort of a... It was actually formalised into any papers or anything like that, but it was a big issue, both with the leftist politics which are obviously a part of that, but also with... You know, there was very strong emotional feminism at that time, and for some of the radical feminists you, take(?)... The problem with Stuart was that he was a man. So I think there's always a tension about whether... You know, of race, gender and class, of you know which... what the hierarchy of those were, and I guess it had been class very strongly, and it was becoming gender.

Kieran Connell: And (inaudible 00:20:55, possibly 'race') would come in slightly, perhaps support you (inaudible 00:20:57, possibly 'in the race or the politics group).

Dave Batchelor: Yeah, I guess so, yeah. Obviously I was less sort of -

Kieran Connell: Involved.

Dave Batchelor: - involved in that at all.

Kieran Connell: Had you had much experience with feminism prior to the centre or was that -

Dave Batchelor: Yeah, at art school. I mean there were some women artists who were... And you know there was... Yeah; for sure, you know in rather not such a theorised way perhaps. But certainly issues about, I mean some of the sort of in a way they're sort of more, even sort of slightly trivial end to it, like not using gender swear words and so forth, which you know when I first went to art school, was cool(?). I mean (inaudible 00:21:35) can say that and you pick it up and you learn. But yeah, no, obviously feminism was prominent in art college but very prominent at the centre.

Kieran Connell: How did it affect you know your everyday kind of relations?

Dave Batchelor: [Laughs] I remember once... I was quite lonely when I was there, you know, because I had a bust-up(?) with my girlfriend, in Nottingham, and I didn't feel much, both... If I had been someone like Roger, and Mary Langan who became very good friends... I felt pretty isolated. And maybe everyone did you know... But the women's group was a very strong group and I remember one lunchtime I just happened to be in the, I don't know, the main refectory area, in the main building on the campus and I saw a couple of the women from near the centre, and I said, "Oh sorry (inaudible 00:22:25 I've had my lunch)" and they just looked at me like [laughs] and they said, "Women's Forum". "Oops, okay" and I walked off and sat on my own, and felt a bit dismal to be honest.

Kieran Connell: Yeah.
[00:22:36]

Dave Batchelor: And then a men's group was set up, which I declined to join, not for very well thought out reasons, it just seemed a bit... I didn't think I could probably stand it, but yeah, no, I mean, I remember... Yeah, there were... I think I went to my first dinner party when I was in Birmingham, and obviously you know the sub-groups, the other significant part of the structure of the place, and when I arrived, they immediately talked about setting up a visual arts group, which we did immediately. And then the big question became, "What are we going to call it?" and I said, "How about we call it the Art Sub-Group" and that was declined and it became, "The Visual Ideology Sub-Group" which [laughs] I just thought was rubbish.

Kieran Connell: But obviously a lot more kind of early political history of art?

Dave Batchelor: Yeah, and it actually there was an essay which was current at the time by a left-wing(?) historian called Nicos Hadjinicolaou, called Art History And Class Struggle, and he used this phrase "Visual Ideologies" but I never really bought it, and I never really... I always had a sort of slightly inchoate scepticism of some of the fine talk that went on there. Anyway, so I always felt a bit awkward and a bit out of touch and so on, but the sub-groups often had dinners together and I remember Andy Roland was one of their guys. Apparently he teaches at Goldsmiths now.

Kieran Connell: Right, okay, I must get in touch with him. You know, he's one of the people on my long(?) list.

Dave Batchelor: Well you should because he was a very... I mean he's quite a strange guy. I haven't seen him for many years but back then he was ultra-theoretical and I hadn't got a clue what he was talking about, pretty much the entire time, but I assumed everyone else did, but now I'm not so sure [laughs]. But we had, you know my first dinner party, and he cooks this most elaborate dinner and we were drinking fine wine, what for me then was fine wine, which I'd never had in my life before.

Kieran Connell: There's a certain kind of irony there, kind of like it's an ambiguity perhaps?

Dave Batchelor: There was a certain sort of bourgeois side to it.

Kieran Connell: How do those sub-groups actually work, I mean what was the actual process of working in a group; like was it worthwhile, was it difficult?

Dave Batchelor: It was really... It was strange. It was a very small group and some of them were much more established, and had been running for some time; they'd been producing you know these occasional stencil papers, you know which I always thought was rather a brilliant system for you know generating, and making material public. As far as I recall, the Visual Ideologies sub-group never produced a single paper. We sat around agonizing, and talking, there was... Michael Green was involved in it, me, and Andy Lowe, and a Canadian woman who was there on sort of a secondment of some description I think. Joe Spence came along to a couple of the events.

Kieran Connell: The photographer?

Dave Batchelor: Yes, the artist photographer who -

Kieran Connell: Would it have Maureen McNeil who was involved? She was Canadian but she came as a member of staff during the late 70s, but (inaudible 00:26:03) -

Dave Batchelor: No, I think she was younger than that. She wasn't a member of staff. Angela McRobbie might have come to one or two sessions, but again obviously, clearly I don't... I don't actually remember anything that we talked about -

Kieran Connell: [Laughs] but it's quite you know -

Dave Batchelor: - but it wasn't art. And at the time I wasn't, I was not familiar with you know broader issues of visual culture at all. That only became apparent to me during my time there, and a bit later I guess. But that was the only sub-group that I was a regular part of.

[00:26:54]

Dave Batchelor: I do remember I went to the sport sub-group.

Kieran Connell: That would have been Chas (inaudible surname)?

Dave Batchelor: Well, I knew Chas but he didn't seem to be involved, but he was fairly full on with his Ph.D. at that time. I liked Chas very much and he seemed a lot more down to earth than some of the people there. Chas and Greg and John -

Kieran Connell: Clark.

Dave Batchelor: John Clarke, very much John Clarke; he's a lovely guy.

Kieran Connell: Yeah.

Dave Batchelor: And these were actually, they were all older sort of slightly more mainstream sociology probably, people that I found much easier to get on with.

Kieran Connell: You'd already done kind (inaudible 00:27:21) rituals and I suppose the rising policing crisis and -

Dave Batchelor: Yes, all that stuff was done and dusted. It part of the legend of the centre by then. I remember turning up to this sports sub-group which was going to be held in a pub and I thought, I foolishly thought that we were going to watch the football -

[Laughter]

Dave Batchelor: - and... So I turned up and I said, "Oh, so what's the score?" They said, "What score?" I said, "Well, it's the FA Cup Quarter Final. Aren't we [Laughs], aren't we here to discuss that?" And I've forgotten the guy's name now, again (he was one of the guys on the interview 00:28:00), and he said, "No, no, but I think Manchester United won" and I said, "Oh God, those wankers won". He said, "Well, if you're going to use swear words like that we're not sure we want you in this group".

Kieran Connell: So quite, very serious -

Dave Batchelor: Yeah, it was a bit bloody hard, yeah it was a bit puritanical. There was a puritanical element to it, yeah, not just the cultural studies but to the world, you know the counter-culture had become -

(Overspeaking 00:28:21)

Kieran Connell: Remnants of that kind of 1968?

Dave Batchelor: Very, very... Rather strict and stern times, but again I just... It was another sense of just feeling a bit out of place and a bit, not... I didn't feel eloquent enough and I didn't feel sophisticated. I felt very unsophisticated when I was there, but again, you know when I've spoken with Roger afterwards, and Mary Langan, and people, you know... It was maybe different for them, but there was a very similar feeling at times.

Kieran Connell: Uhuh. You mentioned, you touched on Stuart and there's (inaudible 00:29:03) little bit, but I just wanted to ask you about, because obviously on the one hand there was this commitment to doing things differently, go beyond the kind of traditional staff-student relationship -

Dave Batchelor: Yeah, yeah.

Kieran Connell: - having students on the interview panels was quite a bold statement, but on the other hand did Stuart and others, Stuart in particular that you mentioned (inaudible 00:29:20) very charismatic

figure, and talker and thinker, so I was wondering how those dual-commitments kind of... those dual kind of themes played out really, students/Stuart(?) as being (inaudible 00:29:32) figure on the one hand, but the kind of commitment to different relationships on the other?

[00:29:37]

Dave Batchelor: Well I think, in a way that example I gave of the kind of breakdown in the teaching for a bit was evidence that it wasn't resolved. I mean students did presentations but that's fairly normal, that was nothing to (inaudible word) about. In the end, it was more orthodox than not to some extent, you know it... and I don't have any problem with that. I didn't have any problem with it at the time I don't think. It seemed, you know I've always... I think even then I thought, you know democracy's a... It's a valuable political system but if someone's got more to say than someone else then they should probably have more time to talk, and it's not a productive way of dealing with things given everyone the same amount of time to talk, because they don't equal things to contribute you know. There's the sort of pragmatics of... And there's certainly pragmatics of teaching, although I think Stuart, Stuart's a very practical man; he got things done. And at the end he was getting that course done and the best way of delivering you know that vast body of material was by basically telling us about it.

Kieran Connell: Yeah.

Dave Batchelor: And I mean certainly not everyone felt the same way about that, but I think Paul Gilroy and I, we... I remember once there was talk about every... It became very bureaucratic this democracy. There was talk about how each session democratic session would have to be chaired by a different person, and there should be a rotating chair, and I just thought the idea of there just being a chair which was rotating [laugh] was kind of funny.

Kieran Connell: [Laughs]

Dave Batchelor: And I remember Paul Gilroy and I kind of just cracked up at one point, and I just thought "Okay, maybe someone's getting this in the same way I am", so I didn't -

Kieran Connell: You finished... Did you get your MA then?

Dave Batchelor: Yeah.

Kieran Connell: Because I remember you were in the minority I think, lots of people, so many people didn't finish, particularly Ph.D.'s and -

Dave Batchelor: Ph.D.'s were probably things that never got finished but MAs, yeah everyone... I'm not sure everyone did do it. I wrote a truly terrible dissertation on the philosophy of Henri Lefebvre, and you know I'd never studied philosophy. I hadn't studied Hegel, I'd read some Marx but you know but just from a sort of fairly random perspective. And Michael Green was nominally/normally(?) my supervisor but I don't remember ever having a single supervision, so you know I end up with, not just me (inaudible 00:32:24), so you were just left to your own devices. And because I had no experience of writing at that length and in that form and in that kind of context you know I just, what I churned out was dreadful, clearly. And whoever was the external was I think encouraged to give me basically [laughs] a pass on the grounds that they, you know everyone said, "No one fails". So I got my MA. I mean as it turned out it was the most useful thing I've ever had -

Kieran Connell: What, to have an MA (inaudible 00:32:59) the centre?

Dave Batchelor: It was... By the time I started teaching in London in the mid-80s it was a passport to, you know, well what was critical studies, complementary studies, general studies, whatever it was called back then. Having done the Birmingham bit was... You know, doors opened.

Kieran Connell: Right.

Dave Batchelor: Strangely.

Dave Batchelor

Kieran Connell: I was going to ask you about that, I mean presumably the kind of influence that time in your life had on your subsequent I suppose practice and career? So, you went afterwards, you went back to teaching then despite your experiences in?

[00:33:36]

Dave Batchelor: I know what happened afterwards; I finished at Birmingham very kind of gloomily and I went back to Nottingham where you know where I'd been at college and where a lot of my friends were still living, and I was unemployed for a good eighteen months or so. But the very sort of charismatic teacher I had at art school, Charles Harrison, who died recently, he got me some... He was by then teaching at the Open University, working at the Open University, As Stuart was by then, well, they never got on. That's another story. He got me some research work for an Open University course; a history and modern art course, and I began to do a bit of work for him, freelance as it were, and at the same time I picked up half a day a week teaching at an art school on a foundation course, at an art school in Loughborough.

Kieran Connell: Right.

Dave Batchelor: And that was you know that was like my foot in the door. And I picked up bits of work in the area; I started teaching a bit at Sheffield and you know by this time having an MA from the cultural studies was very, very useful. I never planned... I never planned anything very much. I certainly never planned to be a regular teacher but it was a way of earning money, you know and if you could do it a couple of days a week then you had enough time you know also to try and produce your own work. That was always the tradition of art school -

Kieran Connell: So by this point you were trying to support yourself to produce your own work?

Dave Batchelor: Yeah, but I wasn't... You know I was making work but I wasn't, there was no chance that I could exhibit it or sell it at the time. In a way I felt I had to kind of re-learn you know what it was to make work in a studio, having not made any work when I was at art school for quite a while, and then for the two years I was at Birmingham, so I had a sort of moment of re-education and you know it was quite a slow process. So yeah, I picked up part-time teaching in the East Midlands and then I moved to London in '84, and very quickly picked up part-time teaching at Goldsmiths, and Birkbeck, and elsewhere, and I became aware then how useful this MA was. I didn't think... In a way I don't think I had... I'm not sure I learned that much. I'm not sure it equipped me to do what I was being employed to do. Nevertheless, it got me... the certificate got me -

Kieran Connell: Interviews?

Dave Batchelor: Yeah. And continued to for quite a long time. You know Middlesex Polytechnic as it was at the time was... There was a magazine called Block, which was run by people in the art department and that was very much the cultural studies, sort of the offshore cultural studies in life at the time and they... And when I eventually got a, in the mid-90s I got a, started teaching at the Royal College and one of the people there was, one of the guys was very involved in Block. He never liked me, but he couldn't turn me down because I had that certificate, which he didn't have.

Kieran Connell: Shows you the kind of power I guess -

Dave Batchelor: Yeah, so you know it was, in a way it worked out in the long run. But as I say I never actually planned anything, so I never knew what was going to happen next.

Kieran Connell: I mean, I just wanted to ask you about your kind of (inaudible word 00:37:11) practice as an artist, I mean, I suppose it's possibly stretching it a little too much to say that you know Althusser and Lefebvre might have influenced your(?) contemporary work, but is there a... You mentioned Thompson, going to those Thompson seminars, kind of got you back thinking about the poetic and the kind of... So is that really the kind of, if you're going to trace it back, your rediscovery of the art in a sense? Was Thompson the (inaudible 00:37:35) at the crucial moment in that?

Dave Batchelor: Absolutely, it was, it really was. There's not many times you can pin-point those kinds of moment and the direct effect they have but when I first went to art school, I'd met a bunch of very

important, you know people who are very important in my life and you know without whom I wouldn't, I think in some ways I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now, but what, how can you really say that now?

[00:38:02]

Kieran Connell: Mmmm.

Dave Batchelor: But you know another moment was, yeah, those Thompson talks. I mean knowing Stuart was very important, but yeah. Yeah, so it was not just, it was the Thompson talks while I was at the centre, because the centre was, you know in a way was, very theoretical and academic, and Thompson was highly intellectually informed, and theorized himself, but it had that spark of the poetic, and that absolutely convinced me that I needed to recover that in my own work, whatever that was going to be. So that meant, so I started doing drawings again in my bedroom and then when I moved to London getting a... You know, renting a back room in the house I was living in and starting to make slightly bigger work, but again with very little sense of what I was going to do with it. But you know a sort of necessary period and I felt very vividly that this is what I had to do, even if I wasn't selling any; I wasn't you know showing any at the time, but it sort of seemed to make sense of things. I also began to write for contemporary art magazines in the mid-80s which is quite a good way of getting your name visible, while otherwise your work's not, you know not being made public. So I was teaching, writing and working in the studio; always teaching part-time, always writing short essays and reviews rather than, you know of exhibitions, rather than theoretical text of any sort. And since really you know I mean (inaudible 00:39:46) 1984 and you know slowly, it took me a good ten years before I started exhibiting work and being known for the work I was exhibiting as well as stuff I was writing, so... It was a slow process.

Kieran Connell: Yeah.

Dave Batchelor: And then you know essentially what I'm doing now is just a sort of continuation of that and you know the studio's got bigger and I've got, I make a better living from the studio. I still... I stopped teaching but I've actually just started doing a day a week, at Goldsmiths.

Kieran Connell: (Inaudible 00:40:23)

Dave Batchelor: Otherwise I don't quite have time to do... And I still write occasionally. So in a way what was sort of vaguely set in place you know 25 years ago now at least is essentially that the same blocks are in, you know around. Their ratios and their proportions have changed and so forth but yeah. And I think I realised when, in 2000... In the early 90s I started getting involved in interesting colour as a subject in the studio and that, which was you know, it's almost exactly 20 years ago now, and it completely took over, and you know it still remains the absolute centre of everything I do in my working life. And I, so I began to make works you know which used colour and were about colour in various forms, and I also began to read around you know the sort of theories of colour and how historically it had been characterised in western philosophy and artistry and such like, aesthetics and... And I wrote a short essay in the mid-90s and then I published a book in 2000, called Chromophobia, and I realised it was my cultural studies book. I never set... I only realised that after I'd finished it, because I sent this to a publisher; Reaction Books, a really good publisher, and the first question publisher's always ask is "How many pictures?", and I said, "Oh I don't know, it's a book about... I mean it's a book about colour so they'll have to be a lot of colour pictures". And that always worries publishers because that's expensive, and the editor, Michael Inman(?) who runs Reaction Books, he looked at this first chapter I'd sent him, he said, "Have you thought of not having any illustrations in this book?" And I thought, "No, (inaudible 00:42:18)" it dawned on me that I wasn't writing about art, I was writing about ideas about colour, and everything else I'd written up until that point had been you know a review of an exhibition or a discussion of some works of art. And then suddenly it dawned on me that this was a book about, it was about colour but it wasn't a book about art, and there's as much about movies and The Wizard of Oz, and literature, and Conrad and (inaudible name 00:42:44). And language. And there's Weigenstein and Walter Benjamin in it and it just (inaudible 00:42:52), I've done a cultural studies book.

Kieran Connell: So it's kind of a (inaudible 00:42:57) you didn't do very much (inaudible 00:43:00) ended up doing -

Dave Batchelor

Dave Batchelor: Well, yeah -

[00:43:03]

Kieran Connell: - your own interpretation.

Dave Batchelor: - and I never even thought (inaudible 00:43:05) it makes me sound, it sounds like I had a plan
-

Kieran Connell: [Laughs]

Dave Batchelor: - I had a vision, which I never had. And I've just finished another book, which is going to be published in February, which again it's a very... Chromophobia is a very short book; it's only 120, 140 pages. It's a long essay. It's very polemical. And this new one is kind of, again it's short. It's a long essay rather than a thesis. And again it's more about literature and movies and architecture and language and football even. I mean it's called The Luminous and the Grey. It's mainly about how grey is imagined in the culture... So, yeah, it's a cultural studies book. You know and that's the thing, it's always the case that you're not necessarily aware of how these things are working on you, so it may well be that the experience of being at Birmingham was slightly less accidental than I describe it, and maybe the effects on me were less random than I tend to describe them. And maybe without even knowing it you know I needed my ideas about art to be tested against wider ideas about visual culture and politics and so on. I guess.

Kieran Connell: Well, thanks very much. That was very interesting. Thank you.

[End of Transcript]