

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: So, Richard, I was going to ask first really just for your recollections of what brought you to the Centre in the first instance, I mean, how did that actually come about?

Respondent: When I left university I'd worked in a theatre acting and a little bit of directing, everything actually, and I realised I wasn't any good, but I'd been in, you know, drama at university. I didn't study drama but I'd been in a drama group and all that sort of thing, and I don't quite know... I'd read this *Uses of Literacy*... And I remember I was a prompter at a pantomime in Chester and I remember reading one of the leaflets or whatever it was - I think it must have been the annual report or something of the Centre - sitting in the wings. I hope I didn't miss a cue or something. But how did I get to that? I don't know. I once saw a note that Stuart Hall wrote to Richard Hoggart - I don't know, I must have looked in my own file - which Stuart'd written after he'd interviewed me and he'd said something like, "He really understands what we're doing and I don't know where he gets it from". And I thought, "Well yes, I wonder where I did get it from". I somehow had this feeling about the importance of popular culture, although what I was actually taken on to do in my PhD, you know, what I got the money for, was homosexuality in literature; it wasn't going to be entertainment and so on, it was going to be... Well it wasn't only going to be E M Forster and Isherwood and people like that, it was going to be popular fiction as well. So I'd obviously even then understood, somehow got the idea that you could study popular fiction seriously, and I don't know why. I had studied theatre at university -

Interviewer: What was your first degree in then?

Respondent: French.

Interviewer: French?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. And where was that?

Respondent: In St Andrew's. And it was a very good department and, you know, we'd studied Marxist approaches and semiological approaches and so on, so I mean it's not... you know. Which now it's of course old hat but in 1968, which was when I graduated, it was amazing really. And we'd studied... I remember when we studied Gide, which we'd studied in the first year, they talked about his homosexuality, which was again 1964. So I must have in some sense... And I'll tell you what probably was *La Nouvelle Héloïse* by Rousseau... We had this wonderful teacher, Sam Taylor, and it was a novel and the whole course was about the culture that led to romanticism, and this was a new field of study. And this book... you know, okay, Rousseau, a very famous writer, but this was his most famous book at the time and was a bestseller and was everywhere and it was kind of... it had an existence beyond its publication, it was kind of a reference point. So I suppose I did get some idea from that of thinking of literature, (a) in terms of popularity but (b) in terms of cultural presence or something like that. So I must have picked up that from somewhere. Plus just liking popular culture, television but movies above all. So anyway... So I had all of that but at the same time... And why did I think homosexuality, I mean, why was I...? This was pre gay liberation. But anyway, that's what I was taken on to do.

Interviewer: Were you aware of... did the Centre have a reputation? I mean, obviously you mentioned kind of flicking through the annual report in the wings of the theatre (overspeaking)?

Respondent: Well only Richard Hoggart, I'd read *The Use of Literacy*, but I hadn't read Raymond Williams, I don't think, and nor Stuart, nor the... what's it called, *The Seven*(?) -

[00:04:20]

Interviewer: Popular Arts.

Respondent: The Popular Arts. I don't think I'd read that. I mean, I think I did read it before I went to the Centre but I hadn't read it before I applied. So I don't know, I don't really. I mean, I don't know how it came about that... You know, I'd come from a sort of lower middle class family, I don't come from a... They voted Conservative and I was brought up in the sort of not-very-posh suburbs of London, so I'm not at all either the kind of very high privileged nor from the kind of... you know, a working class background... So God knows where it call came from.

Interviewer: But you did graduate in '68 which (overspeaking) –

Respondent: Yes, well that's true.

Interviewer: Did you have a political commitment prior to joining or was that still quite (overspeaking) –

Respondent: Yes, but in a very amorphous way, I mean, I was never in a political party or anything, but I was politically aware. Did I do anything political? I don't remember actually doing anything political apart from sort of having political opinions. And I was always interested in black culture, I mean, that had always been a very important reference point for me, always very... I don't know what I thought about gay culture at the time. Well I was aware of it as a... Oh this is too... I don't know. That would be a whole other discussion really about what I thought. I mean, I think in 1968 I didn't think... I just thought, "Oh poor me, I'm gay," I didn't think, "Oh let's fight the good fight and change things". I mean, I think I thought the law should change but I didn't have a particularly political view of it. But, yes, I was politically aware but I wasn't involved in politics. So anyway, then for some reason or other I got... And when I got to the Centre after a bit I thought... I basically thought, I'm afraid, "Do I really want to read all these dreary novels, and how much more I would like to write about entertainment". And I proposed this and they were happy with it, and, as far as I know, they never asked the British Academy or whoever it was who gave me the money, so to this day I have not written the PhD I was paid to write.

Interviewer: What was the atmosphere then like when you arrived, does anything strike you about what it was like, was it different to your previous experience of like, you know, higher education?

Respondent: Well it certainly was that.

Interviewer: In what way?

Respondent: Well I suppose it was so intense really. I mean, really I think I could say there were about three or four people I was at university with as an undergraduate who had the same kind of excitement about doing intellectual work and I'm sure we wouldn't have put it that way, but just kind of being... you know, particularly my friend, Margaret, I mean, we would... you know, the excitement of discovering Rousseau or, you know, reading around and extra things and whatever it is, but everyone else was not like that. So suddenly you were in a situation in which everyone was like that in different ways, so that was very different. I suppose I felt frightened of... that's too strong, but I did think they were either cleverer - which you say everyone says - or more kind of politically real than I was. And I suppose I did feel... I mean, I never minded making a fool of myself so that meant I didn't really mind if what I said was wrong or didn't work and so on and that also meant I didn't have rows with people and so on, partly because I'm a very emollient person as well. But I think I thought that they thought that I was frivolous and I remember once... I was like a dandy really and I loved clothes, and I remember buying a shirt – God knows how I could've afforded it – a shirt in a little shop in John Bright Street in Birmingham... It was very of its time, of course, it had sort of very flowing loose sleeves and was a sort of marine blue, I suppose, and it had ice-cream cones as a design on it, and I bought it... I had to go into the Centre after it and I decided I would wear it and when I got to the building I went into the gents and I changed back into the shirt I'd had before because I thought they won't... I don't think it was quite about being gay, it was just about being thought frivolous and wasting money on clothes and, you know, that sort of thing. I mean, how much that came from me really, I just projected that onto them. Because no one ever has said anything like that to me.

[00:09:49]

Interviewer: Because you were there during '69?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: So you were there for three years?

Respondent: Three years, yeah.

Interviewer: Right. To what extent was identity politics present whilst you were there, or was it much more (overspeaking) –

Respondent: Hardly at all, I would say really. I mean, gay politics was never in the Centre. I mean, it did start and I did connect with it while I was there but I don't think I ever mentioned it, as far as I know, and it was certainly never officially there. I suppose the elephant in the room, you'd say now, was black politics which, again, was hardly ever spoken but of course everyone was aware of that, it's Birmingham after all. And, you know the whole... there was a tension around Stuart in some people... not as far as I was concerned, or probably even most people there, but a feeling about what was Stuart's relationship to that, and he certainly didn't put it on the agenda when I was there. And then of course there was feminism and that was the one thing that was actually spoken and with a great deal of tension. I remember a meeting - I even remember the room, almost remember where everyone was sitting – in which people like Rachel Powell and Janice Windship and Ros Brunt and... I'm not quite sure who else would've been there, people like Sue Puddefoot maybe, people who've sort of almost... not Margaret Marshment, I don't think, but somebody else whose name I can't remember... would try and say, "Look, this is what should be part of our agenda," and really having a really rotten time at the hands of... not of Stuart, and not of me, I don't think, although I'm not sure I said anything or really stood up for them properly, I don't know. Judith was there, of course, Judith Scott. But it was a very unpleasant... And I suppose that's one of the other things I remember that sometimes the meetings, the big discussions –

Interviewer: General meetings?

Respondent: - generally meetings, were horrible, I mean, the people were horrible to each other. And I remember sort of almost wanting to say, "Well why can't we all be nice?" you know, and, "Oh I thought we were supposed to all be on the same side". Again, that was true in that meeting. So although I've actually got to be very fond of most of these people now, have fond memories, but I do remember thinking that, that... because I'd had no experience of politics and because I was sort of naive about left politics I thought being on the left everyone would love everyone, you know.

Interviewer: So that would've been... presumably, it's towards the end (overspeaking).

Respondent: Towards the end of my being there, yes. Whether it was in the last... Let's see... '69... I can't remember whether it was... It must have been in '72 maybe. Yeah.

Interviewer: And what was the hostility about? Because looking back now from the perspective of the, you know, 21st century... why was there hostility, was it to do with the existing politics that was already there at the Centre?

Respondent: Well, I mean, no doubt one could interpret it in all sorts of ways about men being threatened and all the rest of it but all I really remember was seeing that real politics is class politics and anything else... though race was never mentioned, of course, but anything apart from that... you know, on the whole feminism and no doubt gay politics, if it had been mentioned, would've been thought a kind of distraction, a trivial, you know, just kind of a distraction from getting on with the 'real thing'.

[00:13:47]

Interviewer: And what was the 'real thing'?

Respondent: The 'real thing' was class politics, you know, what you were understanding was the culture of the working class. And in fact quite a lot of the... Or course there was a tension between sort of that... I

was looking at entertainment, well who's... you know, who's the audience for that exactly?... (Inaudible 00:14:09), I did talk about - I don't know if I ever wrote about it quite like this – but about, you know, what's the class of the person that produces this stuff and, you know, to whom is it addressed and all of that sort of thing. But (inaudible 00:14:22) entertainment, it doesn't really want to have... or show business, it doesn't really want to have a very precise address, you know, it doesn't quite say, "We're addressing the working class". I think I'd certainly thought about it in terms of it being popular in some senses working class so, you know, in that sense what I thought I was doing was part of class politics. And then only a bit later really did other kinds of politics come into it (inaudible 00:14:57). And there was always that feeling, that tension, too about really what were we doing sitting around having all these clever ideas when really we should be out there, you know, we should be out there doing community work, we should be out there doing... I'm not sure that people were actually in... I don't remember anybody... apart from people who were in the Communist Party, like Ros, I'm not sure that people were in political parties. Maybe some were that I didn't know. Yes, what's-his-name was, in the SWP, Colin... Can't remember his name [Sparks]. So there were people who were actually in political parties but nonetheless the kind of the assumed real politics was the politics of class.

Interviewer: And did you feel like the intellectual work you were doing was also a political project?

Respondent: I did but I was... yes, but I've always been ironic and I've always thought, "Yeah, but, come on, it's not really doing anything," and I think that probably didn't endear me (inaudible 00:16:04). I think I was always a bit inclined to say, "Well come on, let's face it, it's..." And certainly I've always sort of... For instance, I've always thought you should try to write in an accessible way, for a long time did used to try and write not just in academic journals and of course I did do other kinds of political activity around gay politics, I mean, it wasn't like I didn't do anything else and it wasn't like I didn't think the ideas that I got from the Centre were not being made active in those activities, but still I did have a sort of, "Let's not..." Like there was a whole move around something called 'theoretical practice', which was Althusser, and I always thought it was comic really, the idea that you would say that writing theory was really the same as doing political practice. So I always had that kind of ironic relationship to just how seriously we should take the politics of what we were doing.

Interviewer: So did the Centre have a relationship with the outside world? I mean, you mentioned the gay politics, I mean, when did that kind of become, you know, an important part of your life in Birmingham?

Respondent: Well my life, but I'm not sure that it was the Centre's life –

Interviewer: So it didn't seep into the Centre debate?

Respondent: I think the ideas did, just as it did in relation to feminism and later, of course, black identity politics and so on, so it's not like they didn't have any connection, but I wouldn't say they were Centre activities in my time there. I seem to remember in the first summer I was there we got news of gay liberation in the States, I think I remember reading an article - maybe The New Statesman or a newspaper or something – and beginning to think, "Oh that sounds good". And of course I was in a gay relationship already and... And I'm one of these people that would say, "I was born this way". Of course, we're not supposed to think that but that is my experience. So, you know, I'd been... even in St Andrew's – God! – I was sort of having some sort of gay existence. So obviously I had all that life. And of course one of the nice things, I did have a life outside of the Centre, I didn't just live for the Centre, because I was gay and going to gay clubs and meeting gay people, etc, etc, so I already had that. Well then we did start... I did get involved in starting... I think it was called the Gay Action Group first. Because we thought Gay Liberation was a bit American, a bit London, so we must call ourselves something else. And I just got involved with that and... Oh that's right, there was a place called the Peace Centre, which I think was quite an important place actually, which I think came out of CND, and one of the people that set it up had been... John Minnion. Very nice tall man with a beard. He had some connection with Cultural Studies and he'd been one of the people that set up the Peace Centre and that was a kind of a meeting place. I mean, actually the first –

[00:19:31]

Interviewer: Yeah, was it in the city Centre, was it, or...?

Respondent: It was in the city Centre, yeah. I mean, there was already an organisation called the Campaign for Homosexual Equality and I'd already had a little bit of contact with that and in fact the person that ran that was in the Sociology Department in Birmingham University, Nick Stanley, he was doing a PhD there and I got to know him and so on. But then we developed sort of out of that slightly against it, I suppose, because we thought the Campaign for Homosexual Equality was... it was about respectability and about working behind the scenes and lobbying sympathetic MPs. I mean, actually I hope always but certainly now I'd say, "They were great, those people who did that and that required bravery too," but at the time we were all saying, "We ought to be out and doing things and proud and visible (inaudible 00:20:33), blah, blah," you know, that sort of thing. And also one of the problems that gay people faced was the representation or the image of gay people. So that was the kind of Cultural Studies spin on it, in a way. I tended to push those activities in Gay Liberat.... maybe we did end up calling it Gay Liberation actually.

Interviewer: Was there a relationship between that politics and the feminist politics that was active in Birmingham at that time?

Respondent: Well a rather tense one, I think, really. I remember having a joint meeting in the Peace Centre with people from Women's Liberation and people from Gay Liberation, and the fact is most people in Gay Liberation were men and there were... I mean, it was quite interesting, there was a kind of, I suppose it was kind of old-fashioned ongoing dyke presence, but they on the whole thought we were all too namby-pamby and middle class. And on the other hand there were women, more sort of middle class people, I suppose, realising their lesbianism and on the whole they just thought we were too misogynistic, too male dominating, too obsessed with each others' penises and whatever, and it was all part of the discourse. So they would be more inclined to be in Women's Liberation. And we did have a meeting, which was okay but it was quite a tense meeting about, you know, could we work together, what did we have in common, did we have anything in common? Of course, there was a... I don't think this was true of people in Birmingham but there was a view in Women's Liberation that gay men were the worst of all because they loved other men so they were even worse than straight men. So there was all sorts of tensions around that. And of course a lot of women left Gay Liberation even if they went through it and either wanted to have Lesbian Liberation or would just be part of Women's Liberation. But in the Centre there wasn't that tension, I mean, I never had any... I mean, most of the people I got on best with were the other women really, with Janice and Ros and Judith, and they're still friends of mine, so –

Interviewer: But in the Centre there was a... you know, the feminist moments (overspeaking) written into the Centre (overspeaking), hasn't it?

Respondent: Yes, yeah.

Interviewer: But there doesn't seem to be as clearly, you know, a sexuality kind of moment that, you know –

Respondent: Well if it was it was after my time. I suppose someone like Frank Mort I think was much more insisting on... I mean, I don't know Frank very well but I would guess that it was much... And of course it was what his research was about. And there were maybe other people later. I mean, I went back to the Centre to give a talk twice, I think, altogether, and I think the first time was a talk about Judy Garland and gay men, and that was the first time I'd ever done anything that could be said to be gay culture or anything in Cultural Studies. So in that sense I wasn't there if it had its 'queer moment' as would now be said. And I don't know whether it did really, I mean, apart from... I hope I'm not forgetting someone obvious, but apart from Frank –

[00:24:23]

Interviewer: Well I know Jackie Stacey (overspeaking) a bit later -

Respondent: Oh Jackie, of course. Of course, yes. How stupid of me.

Interviewer: - in the '80s.

- Respondent: Yes. Because even her work wasn't about lesbianism at that point, though of course she was very out and involved with lesbian and feminist politics.
- Interviewer: I was going to ask you a bit about that, kind of the working practices really of the Centre, I mean, what were they, did they exist at all? I mean, how was the learning and research structured when you were there?
- Respondent: Well the first year I remember well, we had two seminars that had already been arranged and I assume had been arranged by Richard and Stuart, Richard Hoggart, because Richard Johnson was –
- Interviewer: He came a bit later, didn't he?
- Respondent: Yes, I think he was already in the History Department but... And one was on structuralism, it was like... Because there was a theory seminar and then there was a practice, although I suppose now we might say a case study one. The theory one was on structuralism and the practice one was on the western, and that was already set up. And then for the theory each week we'd have something to read and there would be a discussion and so on, and there was sort of this legend in the year... I think it was the year before that it had been Richard Hoggart who had really determined that theory seminar, and they'd all spent - I'm sure you've heard this a million times – they all spent what they sort of represented as being weeks on end studying Tiger Tiger Burning Bright. And I actually of course was quite sympathetic when I heard about that, not that I'd ever studied... I mean, I'd never read Blake at all actually. But nonetheless I was really quite sympathetic to Richard Hoggart's approach and I liked him too actually personally - he was only there a year more - because he was concerned with the formal qualities of works of art and I still think if you're going to understand popular culture or popular art... and of course 'art' is a difficult word but I would include everything from... even to say 'from - to' implies a hierarchy... but as it's understood now from, I don't know, slasher movies or soap operas all the way through to, you know, Ingmar Bergman or Shakespeare or whatever; it's all art as far as I'm concerned. But to understand it, and understand it socially as art, you have to understand it as art because the first social fact about it is that it's art, and that's more or less from Richard, that's something he says in one of his things. So I thought, "Well I wouldn't have minded that," you know, whereas structuralism, I found it... I mean, I did struggle a bit understanding. Some of the structuralism, not all of it, because of course I'd studied French and we'd actually studied structuralism, so it wasn't as difficult perhaps for me as for some other people. But some of it I found... Althusser particularly, yes.
- Interviewer: Was that introduced when Richard had left to join UNESCO or was on secondment to Paris?
- Respondent: Well he left in the middle of the year, he left in January, so he'd already accepted to go, so he was kind of not that much present and so on. And there was quite... I don't know, there was... I'll come back to that because (inaudible 00:27:51). Because the other thing we did was the western and that I think initially was set up as being the western film, which even then, I guess, was a kind of accepted canon (inaudible 00:28:05) great works. And there was a film season and we all had to go and see a western and write about it and so on, and I'd hardly ever seen a western actually. And actually it was great, I loved doing all of that. But we also decided it wasn't enough to look at just the sort of great westerns, we had to look at the western in the broadest sense, so we had subgroups who looked at western novels and western comics and even people that got dressed up in wild west clothes and so on, and we had these little subgroups who worked together on those things. And I remember once going to a conference in the American Embassy - and we all went down in a van driven by Chas Critcher - about the western. Of course that was very much a the film western and I remember Alan Shuttleworth saying at it, "Ah yes, but we have to understand the western as a much broader... a cultural idea, you know, something that spreads through all sorts of different cultural forms," and one of the other people there who wasn't from the Centre, who was from Sussex University, was a David Morse(?), I think his name was, saying, "Oh well that's crapping on in the worst sense of the word". I've never forgotten that phrase, "That's crapping..." And you think, "What's the best sense of the word?" That idea that this was all amorphous and rubbishy and so on. Whereas we thought what were doing was kind of having a much broader understanding... And you could say there is a whole history... that's a way of writing the history of the Centre, that it moved out

from being about texts, however broadly conceived, however much it embraced all kinds, to, you know, everyday life and all of that sort of idea. So anyway, so we had those two things, one which was very much all together, often really quite distressing and difficult. Very often at the end Stuart would often come with a huge pile of books – everyone tells you about this – and somehow at the end would somehow sort it all out and clarify it all, and you never knew quite whether that's what he'd already thought or whether his mind was beavering away as he sat there, but it was often quite uncomfortable. And the on the other hand there was this westerns project which was more comfortable and more fragmented and, you know, (overspeaking) –

[00:30:35]

Interviewer: So these sort of groups would be established by students or by...?

Respondent: Well I'm not sure where the idea of the subgroups came from but certainly after that subgroups became a kind of standard way of organising and you were in a... but that was more like you were in a subgroup which was meant to kind of bring together people's research interests. Because I remember the second year I was... There were two things going on in the second year, in the second year there were these subgroups, so we didn't have a big topic like the western. In fact, as far as I remember, we had lots of subgroups and I was in the Work and Leisure subgroup and we actually, we sort of read quite a lot of (inaudible 00:31:18) sociology about work and leisure but also... I remember reading Polly Toynbee who wrote this book called A Working Life in which she went and worked in various places and just... you know, she was of course a very young journalist then. So we read those sorts of 'ethnographic', you might call them now, accounts. So on the one hand there was that but on the other hand from somewhere there came a kind of rebellion about having been made to do structuralism, and I don't remember the ins and outs of it but what it meant was that the next year we'd... it was like the label for the general seminar was 'What do we mean by 'Cultural Studies'?' and people would put... I'm not sure if I proposed anything but people proposed different texts and often very interesting ones. I remember one was The Twisting Lane by... God, what's his name... Tony Parker... which was interviews with sex offenders, and all his work was, he would go and interview various people and in theory he'd just presented what they said as a kind of unmediated truth and I thought I was very clever in pointing out that all of the interviews actually said the same thing, they all said, "I can't help it, poor me," and that this seemed to me was actually a structure throughout (inaudible 00:32:53). But anyway... And Elizabeth Bott and other people (Inaudible 00:32:57) that have rather fallen off the radar now, but no doubt also stuff... I can't remember. There's no sort of reading list account of that?

Interviewer: There are reading lists but they're quite sporadic (overspeaking) key texts are always there, and -

Respondent: And I'm sure we must have read, yes, things like Hoggart, and Williams, no doubt.

Interviewer: In a sense that kind of debate alludes to the interdisciplinarity (overspeaking), the borrowing from different disciplines.

Respondent: Yes, that's right, absolutely.

Interviewer: Was that something that you kind of adapted to quite well?

Respondent: Oh yes, I liked that. Yeah, very much so. And also partly because... I suppose even as undergraduate, you know, we'd done linguistics... I mean, okay, French you'd think you'd study that... but actually no one did linguistics as part of a language degree in those days. And I was very excited by what was then called the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis which was an idea – and I'm not sure what people think about it now – but it was an idea that the structure of a language actually told you about the nature of the culture that had produced it. So I was really... I thought, "Gosh, that is such a..." So I guess that's exactly... I was lucky to do that degree because it gave me things which, although they're not part of Cultural Studies, they were also... Both the thing about the idea of a 'hit book', as it were, and how that is a cultural ramification, like with La Nouvelle Héloïse, and then the idea that, you know, language is expressing the culture, both of which might be problematic, but they gave me an entrée into Cultural Studies. Sorry, I've forgotten what the question was.

[00:34:39]

Interviewer: Well, I mean, one of the things I've been trying to keep in mind is also about how things changed when Richard left and... you know, was there a discernible change?

Respondent: Well I suppose he'd almost left, you see, in a way; he was there but we didn't see him very much. I'm not sure he even came to the general seminars and I had very little contact with him. So I'm not sure. I mean, I don't know whether this would've happened anyway but there was definitely a feeling of, you know... what would it be? Put 'democratisation' or 'people power', 'student power' or something. Well it probably was student power that we... I mean, that whole thing about that we determined what got read, we were in the subgroups and the subgroups were self-directing. We even were involved, for instance, in choosing who the next students would be, I mean, I don't suppose that's done now anymore. But I remember being on a committee that was interviewing for all the prospective candidates. So there was definite thing, which of course is very post '60s anyway.

Interviewer: But, I mean, is that where it came... I mean, where did that kind of... I mean, there was clearly a sense that the students demanded ownership of the Cultural Studies project, so where did that come from? Was it encouraged, do you think, by Stuart and the others, or...?

Respondent: It certainly wasn't encouraged by Richard, I'm sure. I would think it was encouraged by Michael. I don't actually remember him in so many words encouraging it but I think he almost certainly did. But, I mean, they... You see, I had sort of slightly missed out on the student... even though I was a graduate in 1968 and I had worked in Paris when I graduated in a mental hospital for students, I'd already done it the year before, and many of the students there in this mental hospital had in fact been involved in the... you know, 'les Evénements' in Paris. And maybe that was quite important for me, if I think about it, because it was sort of about... I thought they were political, "Why are they in a mental hospital?" you know, so maybe I... and did get involved in various political activities with them. And there was also... Isn't that the same year as the communist Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia maybe?

Interviewer: Round there, I think, yeah. [it is]

Respondent: Yeah. And so I think we had a debate about that. And some of them had obviously been involved in the equivalent of Trotskyite parties or Maoist parties and so on. So I guess that was quite politicizing for me to have that experience, but anyway... But I had never been actively involved in 'the student movement', I mean, sort of, you know, but just in talking, you know, like I remember being very anti exam. When I was a student *all* the assessment was based on end of year exams and I met someone who graduated from Glasgow about ten years ago and it was still that there years ago. I don't think it is anymore but... And I was always very, and I still am, I hate exams, I'm very against exams, and I remember being very vociferous about why this was a bad thing, which was, you know, part of many, many things that the student movement talked about, and the very fact that I'd even had the nerve to query how I was being taught was in the air, even though I wasn't (inaudible 00:38:33) in any formal student movement. But the year before I was there there had of course been the occupation in Birmingham University; of course I wasn't there then.

Interviewer: Was that something that was kind of one of those myths (overspeaking)?

Respondent: Yes, absolutely, and how people had behaved... And I guess there was quite a lot of controversy around Richard and his trying to negotiate, had he betrayed, (inaudible 00:38:58) a classic thing. Whereas I think Stuart was squeaky clean, and Ros, and Chas and all of them were absolutely in the thick of it. It was almost like natural. But it took a year of a more conventional approach that had been already laid down for this to bubble through into... I don't know what exactly they were demanding in the student movement in Birmingham but it's not just about... I'm not sure what it was about, but what it can be about is "What's the curriculum, what are we being taught? Why are we being taught this?" I mean, I have some misgivings... When I was an undergraduate I had to study medieval French and I had to study The Song of Roland, which is a military epic, and I thought, "Oh God!" ... In fact, it's absolutely wonderful and if I hadn't been made to read it I never would have, so I'm quite... I think there's something to be said for... yes, for choice but also for some things you

should be made to do, otherwise you just... there's a danger that all that you do is reaffirm what you already know. Anyway, at the time there was still that feeling that there should be some input, at any rate, from students themselves about what they were taught and how they were taught and so on.

[00:40:30]

Interviewer: And that's kind of a theme, that democratisation of the Centre, (inaudible 00:40:34), I mean... Or certainly a (overspeaking) theme anyway since that period.

Respondent: It seemed to, yes. Yeah.

Interviewer: So, I mean, the staff clearly had its emphasis of kind of breaking down the conventional boundaries between, you know, lecturer and student. But at the same time, you know, your memories of Stuart walking into the theory seminar with a big pile of books and making sense of everything is something that lots of people have talked about, so I was wondering if you could talk about that in a little bit more detail. I mean, the actual... you know, Stuart was the Director after Richard and Michael was a lecturer, so how did those relationships actually work out in practice?

Respondent: Well I suppose there was always an ambiguity as far as Stuart was concerned, partly because I think we always thought he was so much cleverer than us. So there was the ambiguity between "We're all in it together but actually he's the boss. We're all in it together but actually he knows more and is cleverer. We're all in it together and he's so nice but nonetheless he's in this position..." And, you know, he was such a lovely person but nonetheless kind of "He isn't actually one of us in quite the way..." you know, blah, blah. So I'm sure there were tensions around that.

Interviewer: Was Paul there? Willis.

Respondent: Paul Willis, yes.

Interviewer: I mean, I guess in a sense he was a sort of hinterland between the two, wasn't he, because he was a research... certainly at one point he was a research fellow.

Respondent: Yes, that's right. I mean, he was such a lovely person and I really... maybe I'm wrong but I'm really sure that everybody loved him. He often... I'm trying to think... he was often quite a calming voice, I think, at various points, and because he was so... you know, his work was so good, he was so intelligent without sort of being brilliant in the way that Stuart was (inaudible 00:43:14), or Brian Trench or there were other people. And he was able to be a calming voice at times, I think, in a way that other people... You know, not everybody can... some calming voices really just make people even more irritated. But he was not that. But I think he felt he was one of us and he... after all, he didn't have any power in relation to us. I'm not sure what power... well I suppose... I'm not sure if Stuart or Michael had really, what power did they have? But somehow I felt he didn't really feel that his status was really any different from us, Paul. And I think there were other people, Andy Bear was in that position. Have you been in touch with him?

Interviewer: No. I'll have to look him up.

[00:44:08]

Respondent: He's Australian.

Interviewer: Oh okay, yeah, I do (overspeaking).

Respondent: I've no idea if he's still alive or not, I mean, why shouldn't he be, but he would be in his 70s now, well into his 70s. But, I mean, no reason why he shouldn't be alive but I never... Didn't know him very well really. So there were one or two people who were in that sort of slightly in-between position... And Rachel Powell as well, she was a researcher or something, I forget exactly what it was called, her position. So there were people who were in that. But I think they always identified and acted much more with kind of the ordinary postgraduates.

- Interviewer: Were you there for... Because I think working papers and copies of his journal was '71, so do you remember anything around the motivations behind that? Because one of the themes that's come out with other people is that people say, you know, at the Centre there wasn't this kind of academic careerism that you do get at universities now, so I wondering about what was the motivation behind the Centre journal. I mean, before that there was the (inaudible 00:45:16), occasional papers or whatever they were called. I mean, do you have any recollections of the debate around that at all?
- Respondent: No. Isn't that funny, I don't. Because I was quite involved certainly with the first, and I actually edited one of them, maybe the third one or fourth one. But, no, isn't that very odd? It just seemed to arrive as something that was going to be done. And I don't think I thought of it as being... But I was so naïve, you know, I'm not sure I really... I suppose I must have known there were academic journals but I never really thought about them.
- Interviewer: Did you see yourself as progressing towards an academic career, or...?
- Respondent: Yes, well I think I saw myself in terms of teaching and then my first work was in adult education, which of course you could kid yourself... well that's unfair. But, I mean, you could think it was a kind of taking ideas beyond the academy.
- Interviewer: They call it 'organic intellectual(?)'.
- Respondent: Yes, all of that sort of stuff, which of course... I mean, if I thought about it at all... And I thought about writing but much more in terms of sort of popular journalism. Well even Sight and Sound, they actually turned me down the first time I tried to publish in Sight and Sound. It was a very interesting experience. I wrote an article about The Sound of Music and I sent it first of all to Sight and Sound – first who replied almost immediately saying they didn't want it... I forget why. But it was a perfectly pleasant thing. And then I sent it to Screen - God knows why I thought Screen – and I didn't hear for over a year and then finally it was returned with no comment all sort of scruffy, and I thought, "Here is this conservative Sight and Sound being actually rather professional and pleasant and here is this cutting edge, definitely thought itself left, journal treating people rather shittily really". Some of the earliest things I wrote were in Gay Left then Marxism Today when it started to...
- Interviewer: And Birmingham Free Press?
- Respondent: And Birmingham Free Press.
- Interviewer: Do you have any recollections of that at all?
- Respondent: Oh God! I wish I had some c... Have you found any copies?
- Interviewer: Yeah, I've got some up in... I can send them –
- [00:48:08]
- Respondent: There are only three issues, I think, or is it four?
- Interviewer: (Overspeaking) we've got all three then in that case.
- Respondent: No, maybe only three.
- Interviewer: They're in the archives, I can send you some.
- Respondent: (Inaudible 00:48:13) and of course that was... I mean, I guess not everybody involved in that was of course from the Centre.
- Interviewer: Michael Green was (overspeaking).
- Respondent: Michael was involved, Ros Brunt was involved, and Ros Brunt's then partner, and he was a graphics person... So he sort of designed it. Nick... can't remember what his surname was. She's still in

touch with him, he lives down the road from her in Sheffield. And I even remember the house. They lived next to the ABC Bristol Road. I'm not sure that even that is there now.

Interviewer: No, I don't think so.

Respondent: Where I always remember going to see The Godfather, Part II, I think, some time after it had first been released and bumping into Dick Hebdige, who I didn't really know very well, and thinking it was so appropriate. Because Dick was so stylish in a rather sort of Godfathery style, you know, so... and again such a lovely person. And then next to that there was a rather rundown pub and then next to that there was a rather rundown house at which Nick and Ros lived upstairs, and that's where we had the meetings for the Free Press, so that's why I remember that. So I think we probably thought it wasn't meant to be just a Cultural Studies project. And I'm not sure who else was involved, I think probably my then partner, Ken Bartlett, and no doubt other people.

Interviewer: I think so, yeah. I've seen the name.

Respondent: Yeah. You've seen that name?

Interviewer: On my list, yeah.

Respondent: And he was nothing to do with the Cultural Studies Centre. And it, you know, just didn't last very long.

Interviewer: I mean, obviously it had kind of quite grand... I mean, originally was the idea to kind of provide like an alternative? Because, I mean, I think in the bits that I've seen it talks about, you know, the mainstream press always providing a very kind of one-sided account.

Respondent: Yeah, that's right, yes, and this was to be sort of... yeah, it was to... And I think it was meant to be quite open to anything alternative. And in fact the first gay thing I published, I think it was in maybe the second number, and there was discussion about it because the article was called 'Are queers oppressed?' and of course 'queer' was not used in those days in the way it is now, and so a lot of people said, "Oh should we be using this word?" Of course, it's a bit of a giveaway to the kind of limitations that it was dealing with... that that was how it was posed, not the 'queers' bit but the 'oppressed'. It was an interesting intellectual issue, "Are we oppressed?" But it floundered on interpersonal difficulties and power play and... –

Interviewer: A bit like most of these things.

Respondent: Yes, yes. So I don't think there was any particular ideological falling-out. And I suppose there was a... I don't quite know how we financed it and how expected to finance it, so there was that. And it's actually of course a lot of work producing something like that and, you know, everyone was working, either they were students or they were working at something else. So one way and another plus some power differences, yes, it floundered, unfortunately.

[00:51:39]

Interviewer: In a sense, though, the notion of a magazine like that, is that part of the emphasis that was placed at the Centre on this notion of the organic intellectual, or was it more kind of classically Marxist consciousness-raising or something?

Respondent: I think it was definitely... I mean, I don't actually remember anyone ever using the phrase 'organic intellectual', I mean, maybe they did. Because that's Gramsci, isn't it?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And I think Gramsci –

Interviewer: (Overspeaking) later perhaps.

Respondent: Yes, I think Gramsci sort of began to seep in. I'm not sure when... I mean, of course I can't remember the timing exactly. I mean, obviously Stuart knew about Gramsci.

Interviewer: I think Prison Notebooks may have been translated in the late '60s, early '70s.

Respondent: Yes, that's right, so there that was in... And of course ideas always takes some time to take hold. And there was a little Pluto Press 'Gramsci's Marxism' but that was later again.

Interviewer: Yeah, '72 even.

Respondent: So it was just a bit later but it certainly was that idea, whatever that idea is. I think it was like... Well for myself it was, "Here am I being paid by the state to have ideas and look at movies". I often would sort of be, "My God, I'm being paid to sit here looking at Doris Day," you know, "... and so I've got to make it do something and be present beyond this little enclave". But it was quite... for me, at any rate... and then that's another way perhaps that I'm more close to Richard, and Stuart Hall as he started out, it was kind of adult education, it was, you know, making knowledge and ideas available beyond a narrow confine. So whether that's quite the same as organic intellectuals, I'm not sure.

Interviewer: Mm. But it's a path that lots of people trod.

Respondent: Yes. Oh absolutely, yes.

Interviewer: I mean, there's all these letters in the archive of... I think John Clark (overspeaking) various... All the polytechnics of Birmingham, you know, General Studies was seen to be populated by Centre people.

Respondent: Well absolutely, yes, that's right. I mean, as it happens, I didn't do much of that because I got into Film Studies but of course then film was still... that was still seen as a mainstream popular art, and although... And it was also the moment of rediscovering Hollywood, so it was rediscovering a popular cinema. So although we did... I mean, I did also teach Fellini or whatever. Well of course Fellini was a popular filmmaker in Italy, I didn't know that then. So I did teach that stuff too... Because I didn't think of it as taking culture to the masses, and that would be one view, I don't think I thought that, because I always thought it was much more about making sense of the culture of the masses, and I think that's what I thought Cultural Studies was really, and sort of reflecting on it and developing a criticism of it. Not criticism in the sense of saying what's wrong with it but much more kind of... thinking about how it works and all of that sort of thing. And it's true, for a lot of people it was getting into General Studies and then to some extent that might lead into Communication Studies, or then of course eventually to Cultural Studies itself. But initially, you're absolutely right. And I did work at the Art School in doing General Studies and at Aston University, I took over from Paul Willis there. And that was rather interesting because that was much more radically student-led because really we were just there to facilitate anything the students wanted to study and it was quite problematic to know how you assessed it. A very nice man – God, what was his name – and he was very... he liked having people from the Cultural Studies Centre to work there and he was very... I suppose he was libertarian really. So you're absolutely right, that was a route but... And of course there was that idea that the polytechnics were working class universities so that's why it all sort of changed when they were made into universities, and so that whole mission as managers took over... Oh, that's the greatest evil of our time, I think, management. Well no, obviously it's not compared to people trafficking or whatever, people not being paid proper wages, but nonetheless it is a major evil of our time. But, yes, I think people did see it as, you know, because you were talking about the media, etc, etc, with apprentices and so on that that somehow was... And again, I don't think it was a "We must take..." I mean, there was a kind of literacy thing, "We must make people literate ... and we must make them culturally literate," so there was that element, but there was also definitely an element of reflecting upon the culture in which they found themselves and so on and offering the tools for that and so on. But it was also quite... I mean, one of the things I've often thought was a problem with Cultural Studies is that it's too political in a way, it's too... I mean, everything I've said up to there is good but there was a kind of conversion to the left element to it as well.

[00:57:42]

Interviewer: And why was that a problem, do you think?

Respondent: Well I suppose I don't think you should... Because I'm a democrat, I suppose, in the end, so I think you shouldn't... I mean, I think you should present ideas but I'm not sure you should relentlessly... And the students would often resent us, you know, and they would say, "Why are you always pushing all this leftwing stuff at us?" and so on. So there was a way in which we weren't... you know, we didn't allow... I mean, what should... I mean, God, I'm not sure I can get into the complexities of it, I'm not sure I've thought enough about it, but I don't think you should allow sort of racism, "Oh well that's just another point of view," obviously I don't think that, but at the same time, I mean, there is a range of points of view that are, you know... I suppose having been brought up by Conservatives who were actually extremely nice people and very kind and very open to all sorts of people... you know, there are other ways of thinking than particular left agendas.

Interviewer: Mm. I've just got a couple more questions, I don't want to take too much of your time up really, but the one thing I was going to ask you about was, did you ever have any insight into the relationship between the Centre and the wider university?

Respondent: No. It was almost like it wasn't there. I hardly knew anyone anywhere else and if I... I knew one or two people through Gay Liberation, like I had a friend who was in Low Temperature Chemistry research, you know, so my only connections were through that. And I think we did sometimes have people come from Sociology. I don't think we ever went to Sociology but I think some of them, like Janet Wolff and people like that, came into the Centre. So, no, I had no sense of its relationship to the rest of the university.

Interviewer: So there was no sense of –

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: You saw yourself essentially as a student of a centre rather than a student of the university?

Respondent: Absolutely, I did. And, funnily enough, I have almost no sense of connection to Birmingham University and when very occasionally I've been there since... Like I remember once about eight, ten years ago I went to a concert there and I thought, "My God, I can't believe I was actually a student here," because it seemed... "Where is this place, it could be like anywhere else," so, no, it had no...

Interviewer: And also just finally I was going to ask about your kind of subsequent career and intellectual progression, and, you know, obviously you're a Professor of Film Studies, do you see yourself as being still practising Cultural Studies and what's the relationship between Cultural Studies – now I suppose it's an established discipline but when you were at the Centre it wasn't – between that and Film Studies? I mean, how do you think those two relate to each other? If that's not too much of a, you know, (overspeaking).

[01:00:28]

Respondent: Well I always thought, and was always quite conscious in a way, because I did briefly work in... I worked in the Communications Department at Sheffield for a time, just for a year actually. But I consciously thought I would rather do Cultural Studies within Film Studies than do Film Studies within Cultural Studies. Although actually to a certain extent what I've written, I think it's always worked outwards, I mean, sometimes more than others but - like in the White book or the book I wrote on pastiche - film is important but it's certainly not the only reference point, so... But I've always thought I wanted to know at least quite well one thing, so rather than... That's almost going back to the example of the western and 'crapping on', maybe that struck a chord with me. But I thought, "Well it's quite important to be actually quite precise about something and you can't be precise about everything," so it was a kind of quite conscious intellectual choice. Occasionally there was the possibility I might teach in art schools and I used to think, "Well that would be alright because it would be quite nice to each in an art context". Harvard was one, that would've been one, but I forget what the others were. And I used to think, "Well that would be quite nice because I'd be there saying, 'Yes, but what about the social, don't forget the social'". But I think I've actually preferred being in what seemed to be... although Film Studies has changed now, I'll come back to that, but for a long time Film Studies, I felt you had to keep saying, "Yes, but what about the camera

angles? What about the sensuous qualities? What about the rhythm?" So I preferred being an aesthete (inaudible 01:02:27), I suppose, in a context of a social thing. Well now Film Studies, well I suppose it's become... it's both become a big discipline and a narrow discipline; on the one hand it's so much more just about film, on the other hand, of course, it's a very well-established discipline, but there are so many different approaches, I'm not sure you can really say what its approach is.

Interviewer: Is CCCS relevant today in Film Studies?

Respondent: Oh yes, I think it is.

Interviewer: Is it influential within Film Studies?

Respondent: Oh I think so. I mean, it depends. I think a lot of work that's done, particularly, I suppose, work on representation but also... I mean, one of the things actually, I've been talking with one or two people recently about this, I feel that the popular has rather fallen off the agenda so that Film Studies is still interested in representation but it's much more drawn towards arts cinema and the avant garde in a way that... I have nothing against them but they're just not everything. And the whole issues around the popular and what that means seems to have slightly... seem to be much less central to the discipline, which is a pity, I think. But I think the general... I remember somebody at Sheffield - I think it had by that time become Sheffield Hallam - but who had been in Sheffield Polytechnic teaching Film, Tom (Ryall), an absolutely lovely person, I remember him saying, "Oh well we're all Cultural Studies people now," and I think there's some truth in that, I think the assumption... I mean, some of the things like looking at genre, looking at stars, looking at representation, I mean, they all do come out of a Cultural Studies agenda, so although they probably have other histories about how they arrived at that... Although actually stars, I suppose, since we're talking about me... I don't mean as a star but it's one of the things I wrote about, and that undoubtedly came out of a Cultural Studies agenda and it is now one of the main things that people talk within... You wouldn't have a degree in Film Studies probably now without having thought about stars, and that comes out of Cultural Studies, I think.

Interviewer: So how important was your time then at the Centre in your kind of subsequent intellectual formations?

Respondent: Well I sometimes think I've never thought anything new since then, that I've always stayed with what I understood to be a... that it was about the social value and meaning of whatever it was you looked at, of cultural artifacts, but that what was special and which may be - I don't know whether everyone would recognise this as Cultural Studies - what was special is that you attended to the sensuous esthetic formal qualities as well... you know, you didn't just go instantly to representation and ideology (inaudible 01:05:46) And I always thought that was the point, and I sometimes think I've never thought anything new since then, although I've applied it in different areas and so on.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you very much.

[End of transcript]