

Interview with respondent 0704

Date: 9/12/2014

Location: Duke of York Cinema, Brighton

Interviewer: Emma Pett

Interviewer: Thanks very much for agreeing to do this. So, I suppose probably for the context of the interview, it would be helpful if you just began by explaining where you lived in the 60s and how that sort of changed throughout the decade.

Respondent: Ok, well I was born and brought up and still lived there in the early 60s in a very small town called Cleckheaton, which is a well known sign of the M62 that's the only way people know it. West Yorkshire.

Interviewer: How big is Cleckheaton roughly, just for people....

Respondent: 30,000?

Interviewer: A small town.

Respondent: Small, yes. I then went to begin undergraduate at Newcastle-upon-Tyne so I saw some cinema there. Then '65 I moved down to St Albans, lived there until '68 when I moved to Sudbury-on-Thames. So all fairly small places.

Interviewer: but the first half of the 60s you were in Yorkshire, then you were in the south of England.

Respondent: Came down, got a job.

Interviewer: Can you just tell me a little bit about your family background? You were living in the town or were you living outside?

Respondent: No I lived in...when I say I lived in Cleckheaton, I actually lived in a small village outside Cleckheaton, with my father who was divorced and my sister, younger sister, two years younger than I am. We were a fairly ordinary working class family.

Interviewer: You went to school in the local town?

Respondent: Yes, to the local school, yes. Whitcliffe Mount Grammar School. It was a fairly bog-standard 60s grammar school, nothing special about the place. Cleckheaton itself, in those days, had two cinemas, you know for 30,000 people. It has none now, but we've ... So it was, yeah there was good choice of films you still changed Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday so you got four films a week. Yeah, I was...actually started in the 50s when I was younger, I went to the cinema a lot and continued in that way through the 60s. So...

Interviewer: Were the two cinemas...did they show different kinds of films or were they quite similar programmes?

Respondent: It was mainly Hollywood, cowboys I seem to remember. Early James Bond, you know, they were mainstream cinemas.

Interviewer: So how old were you in 1960, you were...

Respondent: Eighteen

Interviewer: Eighteen. Are there any films that come to mind particularly? You've mentioned some in the questionnaire and obviously you were very interested in the New Wave films.

Respondent: I was thinking about that when I was wondering what you were going to ask me. I think the main film I really remember from the 60s was "Dr. No". I remember seeing that. As you say, I quite like French cinema and things like that. I had to go to a local town, Bradford or Leeds or Halifax or some larger place to see those...

Interviewer: To see the French films. And you did that did you?

Respondent: Oh yeah, yeah. I went with my then girlfriend now wife, it's really sad isn't it really.

Interviewer: No, no not at all.

Respondent: There was a small cinema in Bradford that would show a lot of French films. It was a sort of boutique type place.

Interviewer: What they'd call an art house cinema now. How long would it take you to get into Bradford when you went to see these films?

Respondent: Well you would...it was of course on the bus, two buses. Half, three-quarters of an hour, something like that. Yeah, three-quarters of an hour.

Interviewer: Did you prefer those to the films that were shown at your local cinema?

Respondent: Oh yeah very much

Interviewer: That was what you... What was it that attracted you to those films?

Respondent: I think at that time, probably slightly before your memory, that the beatniks were the literature point for that sort of thing and I sort of saw myself as a, not quite San Francisco beatnik in Cleckheaton. I just sort of liked alternative things, so I think I saw them a bit as alternative. I had a smattering of French so I could more or less hear what they were saying without the subtitles. Yeah, it was a spin-off the beatnik image.

Interviewer: So it sort of felt like something quite modern and different.

Respondent: Indeed, yes. Modern and different are two very good words to describe it.

Interviewer: It's interesting that you said "Dr. No" was the film that stuck in your mind because that's slightly different.

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: What can you remember about going to see "Dr. No"?

Respondent: It was a large cinema in Newcastle so the ? cinema itself was different. It was in colour that's one of the things I remember about it and I went with other blokes who used to knock around together in those days.

Interviewer: When you were an undergraduate?

Respondent: Yeah. So it was a blokes' night out.

Interviewer: And a memorable one obviously. Did you say it was a bigger cinema than the local cinemas? So physically was it...was it one of the art deco cinemas...?

Respondent: I'm not sure but it was an Odeon or a Gaumont or something like that. I think it was an Odeon but I couldn't be sure. It was a big city cinema.

Interviewer: Did it have any...in comparison to the two cinemas back home, were there notable differences in the whole kind of ritual of cinema going there or was it the same set up?

Respondent: It seemed more like quotes "a night out" close quotes. I mean there was no restaurant or anything like that. It was just bigger, plusher, smarter, better decorated and one went for a good night out.

Interviewer: Did you go to any of the other cinemas in Newcastle or was it only that one?

Respondent: I'm sure I would but I can't remember them.

Interviewer: There was no ration on so did you buy refreshments or was there....?

Respondent: No, that night in particular we all went out for a Chinese meal afterwards in a restaurant, which is one of the reasons I remember it.

Interviewer: Was that something you didn't do very often?

Respondent: No, we ate out quite a lot, because a gang of blokes living in a house nobody could cook but we all liked eating.

Interviewer: What about when you went to the cinema at home, the two local cinemas there, did you ever have...was there somebody selling drinks or popcorn or...?

Respondent: No, ice cream at the interval, particularly if it was a double feature you would get ice cream at the interval but that was all.

Interviewer: And did you do...did you go in one of those rolling programmes that people have told me about where you don't necessarily go in at the beginning of the film and then people would say "this is where we came in" ...

Respondent: Yeah, that depends on the buses. I mean one would try to get in at the beginning but if you....

Interviewer: When people tell me that I can't believe that they didn't walk in at the beginning but yeah....

Respondent: It depends on if the bus was a bit late you arrived a bit late. There was nowhere really to hang out for an hour until the next film started so you had to go in.

Interviewer: Some people have told me that they were taken to cinemas because their parents couldn't pay the heating and things like that and it kept them warm...

Respondent: No, well it wasn't true for me. No, I never went to the cinema to get warm. I always went because there was a film I either wanted to see or sounded interesting.

Interviewer: When you saw the British New Wave films the first time, did you see them when they came out in the cinema?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: You said that in some ways you could identify with the angry young men thing, obviously they've been... I don't know if you've followed film criticism, but some of them...people have been quite critical of Tony Richardson for example because he actually went to school in Oxford and

this idea of representation of class. Whereas actually "A Taste of Honey"
Rita Tushingham was a working class girl and it was slightly different. Can
you remember...

Respondent: Keith Whitehouse was working class.

Interviewer: Some of them were and some... Can you remember anything particular
that resonated with... hearing the regional dialects, seeing places that
looked familiar? When you talk about having that ability to identify...was
that the first time you'd seen...?

Respondent: Yeah I think...the thing that springs to mind when you said that was
interior. It's the first time it wasn't Noel Coward or some huge place I'd
never been to.

Interviewer: They were recognisable

Respondent: The recognisable residences and interiors, furniture that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Did you feel... John Osborne and Tony Richardson they had a political
agenda in terms of trying to..it was a time when class was changing, was
that an element of it for you?

Respondent: No I don't think so, no. I was relatively left-wing in those days I would have
voted Labour if I'd been able to vote. No, I never saw cinema as a political
vehicle. It was entertainment.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit about, there's a few films you raise in the
questionnaire, some of them I think probably are favourite films, "Celine
and Julie Go Boating" Can you tell me a bit about why you like those films?

Respondent: Right, let's start with "Last Year at Marienbad" I was reading quite a lot of Robbe-Grillet at the time and by the way his new DVD pack from BFI is wonderful. No it's not wonderful but it's interesting. Anyway and Robbe-Grillet of course wrote the screenplay for it so that was an attraction. I don't know why I liked it. It was... we had a phrase at the time which used to be suitably detached, so if you were cool you were suitably detached and it...the whole ethos of the film struck me as suitably detached.

Interviewer: So it was part of that beatnik attitude...

Respondent: Yeah, that's good yeah. So that's "Marienbad". "Celine and Julie" let's talk about that. I think I liked the title there, that's what got me on to it because "Celine et Julie Vont en Bateau" which was the French title it means Celine and Julie slightly mad a bit dippy, that sort of thing.

Interviewer: It's a play on words

Respondent: Yeah. Go boating? No no no, but I went to see it and I thought the two girls were nice and I liked the eating sweets to take you somewhere else because I used to eat a lot of sweets in those days and that struck me as being a good idea. Again it was the slightly detached view of life, the plot is that the two girls go to what might be somewhere they can film(?) or might really be real life and that angle really...I enjoyed that. Is that sufficient? I can...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: I can get really boring on these two films.

Interviewer: If you can think of anything more to say, say a bit more about them.

Respondent: Yeah, Bob Dylan who is a bit of a hero of mine, I remember him saying “Marienbad” should have been called Marienbad Asylum. Wrong, totally wrong. I thought it had something approaching my view of life my psychology. I like these people wearing very very nice clothes...

Interviewer: There was a style that was also a kind of philosophy of life that was in it.

Respondent: Yeah, and the style was the sort of clothes I used to wear in those days, black suit, white shirt, black tie. Very boring now. Yeah, there was something in the philosophy of the film that I liked and the same goes for “Celine and Julie” that was, again it was very detached.

Interviewer: And was that something different to what you’d grown up with do you think?

Respondent: Yeah, very much so. It was part of one’s image but it was also part of what you believed and bought into and...

Interviewer: What about... I was really intrigued by the fact that you went to the Warhol film “Empire State” where did you see that, was that in Newcastle?

Respondent: No that was when I lived in Sudbury towards the late...

Interviewer: Which cinema? Did you go to London to see that?

Respondent: No, it was a film club at our local college. Twickenham College of Technology had a film club which I used to go to relatively frequently and they showed it, I was going to say one night, one day and they had little sort of food stalls set out and drinks stalls and things like that and you could just walk around and chat to your friends, watch the film and...

Interviewer: How many people used to go to the club, was it quite big? 50? 100?

Respondent: No, no, 30 but there wasn't a regular clientele. It was just...

Interviewer: Drop in?

Respondent: Yeah yeah. It wasn't a club in as much as you joined, you just "oh good film this week, I'll go".

Interviewer: Just a college thing

Respondent: Yeah for the students really.

Interviewer: Were you teaching there is that how you...

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: So what was...what was your memory of the Warhol film, because you've put how you were intrigued by how it was different to commercial cinema.

Respondent: Yes, basically because it's the same shot for 24 hours which is a bit different from James Bond. But it was, I found it interesting as a way of looking at something just to...as time passed and lights went on and lights went off I thought it was...

Interviewer: Representative(?) really...

Respondent: Yeah, and I thought gosh what a smart idea this Warhol guy had to make this film.

Interviewer: Had you ever seen any of the Stan Brakhage and the experimental film makers?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: No you hadn't. Because I think Warhol was more popular so perhaps that a lot of people that was how they first came across experimental... When you said that there was food out and people having drinks was that during the screening?

Respondent: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: So people didn't just sit down and watch it...

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Because that's what they would have to do in a....

Respondent: In a cinema, yeah.

Interviewer: So that's quite interesting is the way in which it was screened. It was relaxed.

Respondent: Yes, it was a, what we'd now say, a total experience. You know, you were there, the film showing on screen and you could look at it and think and turn around and chat chat chat chat chat, turn around look at the screen again. It was certainly different.

Interviewer: Was that why you were intrigued by it because...

Respondent: I think so yeah. It was not in my then view, a cinema experience.

Interviewer: That's fascinating. Did you see anything else like that? Can you remember any of the other films that that film club showed? Or was that quite an unusual one?

Respondent: I remember having an argument with someone who was a friend of mine who was a postgraduate in London doing film and I actually preferred

“Magnificent Seven” to “Seven Samurai” and that led to a bit of an argument when we went to see “Seven Samurai”. That’s just again my...

Interviewer: Was that at the film club?

Respondent: The “Seven Samurai” “Magnificent Seven” was commercial...

Interviewer: So it showed sort of world cinema as well, what we would now call world cinema.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah. Things which you wouldn’t see at the cinema, local cinema. They probably showed some English films as well but I can’t remember any.

Interviewer: And that was...so that was sort of mid- to late-60s was it, that you’d be going to that...

Respondent: Late 60s.

Interviewer: And at that time you didn’t go to the cinema as often you said in the questionnaire.

Respondent: Correct, yeah

Interviewer: So when you were younger, did you kind of go and see all the main releases as they came out...is that how it was when you were 18 and when you were a student?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you go to the cinema quite often then when you were in Newcastle?

Respondent: Yeah. It wasn’t much major releases, I did go see them, but I had certain things I liked which I will tell you about. “Abbot and Costello”, “Bowery

Boys" I did like that and I'd sort of see each of their films when they came out.

Interviewer: Did you ever go and see films....what were then called vintage films, so films from the 30s and 40s?

Respondent: Yeah, the odd musical I guess...

Interviewer: There was a chain of cinemas in London I think it was called Classic cinemas in the 60s that showed those old films. Did you...not very often?

Respondent: No probably, I don't know when it was made, obviously I went to see "White Christmas" and there were Fred Astaire movies and things like that but it wasn't a major ?

Interviewer: And how important do you think cinema was in your cultural life in the 60s? Do you think that's changed over time?

Respondent: Oh yeah, yeah I mean television is obviously the big change from going to see cinema releases. I mean my son now he runs a distribution company and is just getting in to production and he says if you make 10% from theatre releases on a film you're doing ok. You get much more from Sky and airlines and things like that so, yeah....as they would become more available to me, other entertainment outlets, cinemas become less important. Now I probably go, once, twice a month. Mainly to this place actually. The big screens, the Odeons and so on in town, twice a year. Yeah it has changed certainly.

Interviewer: Did you have a television in the 60s?

Respondent: Towards the middle, yes my father got one and so when I was living at home I used to watch bits of it, but not much, and then we didn't have one when we first got married, no. Second half of the 60s, no is the simple answer.

Interviewer: Was watching films one of your main forms of entertainment then, if not the main form? Were there things like radio or other...

Respondent: Yeah, I'm a relatively large music fan so radio, records, good old vinyl in those days, and reading were the main things. Reading music and cinema.

Interviewer: Is there anything that you can remember about the social experience of cinema going that's changed? So for example, some people have talked about the national anthem being played at the end and all that sort of thing...

Respondent: It did the cinemas we were talking about earlier at home, people stood for the national anthem, and I did, I joined in you know. Well, multiplexes I suppose the big things happened, much more availability of movies. Movies have become, no, my view of movies is that they've become much more bang crash violent shoot 'em up, which doesn't appeal to me. I didn't go, for example, to see the whole "Star Wars" series I haven't seen most of the later James Bond things. So there's...I think there's been a difference in the style of film which is made. Just trying to think, no I don't think now I would expect anybody to make "A Taste of Honey" or an equivalent. The actual thing itself yeah you can buy buckets full of popcorn and Coca Cola now things like that, which don't interest me, too old for that. So, certainly when I take my grandchildren to the cinema which is rarely, it's much more

a commercial opportunity to buy sweets and that sort of thing. No, in those days you paid your one and thrupence and you got your seat and that was it, you either enjoyed the film or didn't.

Interviewer: It was about the experience of watching the film rather than the peripheral things. Although you said you did like going to the big cinema in Newcastle.

Respondent: Oh yeah, that was a night out. Yeah, I think the watching of a film is, as I say, my view of what modern films tend to be, modern Hollywood films, they tend to be a bit more crash and bang-y, dare I say it a bit less narrative.

Interviewer: They vary

Respondent: I'm sure that they do yes. I told you my son was a film producer. He's got a wonderful business model: I wouldn't make a film that my father would want to watch. No, he's perfectly right he's making money. But that's just a little jokey thing about...

Interviewer: You said when you were talking about swinging London in films. I mean you didn't live in swinging London so they perhaps didn't speak to you as much as the New Wave films did. You described them as pure ?? which I thought was funny.

Respondent: They were. "Close Up"

Interviewer: "Blow-Up"

Respondent: "Blow-Up", thank you, that struck me as being a lot of sound and fury about not much.

Interviewer: They didn't have this detached cool that you were interested in.

Respondent: No you got it, yes.

Interviewer: Did you ever have a sense at the time of these films reflecting a different lifestyle to yours?

Respondent: No, but one film I did see in swinging London at the time which I did like, was "Easy Rider".

Interviewer: What did you like about "Easy Rider"?

Respondent: The soundtrack, these guys were cool guys sitting on their motorbikes, big Harley Davidson motorbikes, that sort of thing.

Interviewer: It was about the attitude.

Respondent: Yeah it just, attitude and "bugger you" sort of attitude.

Interviewer: There was an exhibition of Dennis Hoppers photos on recently in London and they had some clips of "Easy Rider" up on the wall playing it was good.

Respondent: I thought the, you know, talking about different lifestyles, I think it was the American lifestyle versus my lifestyle rather than the London lifestyle versus my lifestyle.

Interviewer: Interesting so the American beatnik and that sort of post-beatnik, well I suppose it was a bit of hippy in "Easy Rider" that had an appeal that the swinging London thing didn't really.

Respondent: It didn't have an appeal in that I wished to be there, but it had an appeal in that it was different from where I was at and so, silly phrase, but intellectually interesting rather than emotionally interesting.

Interviewer: That makes sense. When you look back now and you see some of those 60s films do you feel like they captured some of the social changes that were happening at the time.

Respondent: Oh yes

Interviewer: Are there any films that you feel capture that particularly well.

Respondent: Yes, but I can't remember its name. There was a film....Richard Harris I think was the star it was a film about rugby which I used to play in those days, and he was a rugby league player and he had an affair with the manager's wife or something like that and it was great life, great life and then it ended with him sort of lying in the mud on a wet rugby day and someone in the background shouting "get up lad". Yeah I think that was a view of the 60s that would not be a view now.

Interviewer: In what way, the sort of brutal realism?

Respondent: Yeah probably, the realism, brutal.

Interviewer: Down to earth maybe, brutal's too strong a word.

Respondent: Yeah, down to earth

Interviewer: That attitude, yeah because I suppose you're from Yorkshire...

Respondent: And it was the, what we would now call the professional Yorkshireman was just a Yorkshireman in those days. I don't think you'd get that now, so I think that is capturing a change in scenery a change in attitude and so on.

Interviewer: British culture

Respondent: Yeah in British culture.

Interviewer: It was certainly an element in British culture that you don't hear about as often now, that down to earth, no-nonsense working class post-war attitude in some ways.

Respondent: What we see on...oh god I'm horrible on names...it was a Tom Courtenay film

Interviewer: "Billy Liar"?

Respondent: Yes, "Billy Liar" thank you. That was a change in, changing mood in Yorkshire at the time I saw it which was probably soon after it was released. It was interesting at the end...

Interviewer: That kind of...the dreaming?

Respondent: Yes the dreaming, trying to chat up the girl...

Interviewer: At the time was that seen as a bit daft?

Respondent: Oh no, no. I wanted to be Tom Courtenay. No it wasn't. At the end when Julie Christie got on the train to go to London and he rushed to the station and didn't get on the train, that was, that said quite a lot about the way we were in those days. I'd have done the same, I'd have rushed to the station and not got on the train.

Interviewer: Why is that do you think? At the time you wouldn't have made that sort of risk or....?

Respondent: Yeah, it's jumping into something that I don't think I would have wanted to jump into. It's back to your swinging London, you know I wasn't a swinging Londoner, I was a northern lad and he stayed a northern lad, good for him.

Yeah "Billy Liar" was a good film, and I think that caught something of it as well.

Interviewer: Caught the tension maybe between swinging London and the rest of the UK where it didn't really happen.

Respondent: Well I think it was only that last scene that you got the tension between the two, because he was very much, I think it was Halifax it was set...

Interviewer: Somewhere like that yeah.

Respondent: He was very much a local lad you know. So I don't know, you just got his dreamy would be change in his life but it was not to move away, it was a change in the North that was happening or possibly happening at the time. Do you see what I'm trying to say?

Interviewer: Yeah I do yeah.

Respondent: I'm not saying it very well.

Interviewer: Yeah I do, it's interesting because it captures that particular outlook, like you say, of someone who grew up in Yorkshire and that informed how you saw that film.

Respondent: Yeah, that informed how you saw life in the film.

Interviewer: That's great, it's really, really interesting. Is there anything else that we haven't discussed that you'd like to mention, anything that you can remember about your cultural life in the 60s?

Respondent: No I think I've said that cinema was part of the culture, but there was reading and records and things like that as well.

Interviewer: You did see it as entertainment, you didn't see it as political.

Respondent: No

Interviewer: It was just that you expected your entertainment to stimulate you intellectually.

Respondent: Yeah that's a very good way of putting it. I was just about to say, entertainment yes but it was an intellectual entertainment as well. Which is probably why I like the French stuff, still do. No I did in the 70s actually go work a while in France.

Interviewer: What part of France was that?

Respondent: I was teaching at the university of Bordeaux. That was where I got my taste for this stuff. I've been a sort of Francophile all my life and I'm sure it's "Marienbad" to blame.

Interviewer: That's a good note to leave it on, thank you very much.

Respondent: Thanks I've enjoyed it

End of Interview