

Interview with Respondent 0228

Date: 29/11/2013

Location: UCL, Department of History

Interviewer: Matthew Jones

Interviewer: It is 29th November 2013 and this is an interview with participant 0228. I wondered if we could start by maybe you telling me a little bit about your life the 1960s, about where you lived to what you are doing.

Respondent: Okay, well my family home was in Cambridge and in 1960 I went to university in Hull and I was there for two years. I spent a lot of time in London during the whole of the 60s and after university I was in Glasgow for a year and then at university again in Manchester where I finished my training in 1964. And then I lived in London until 1966 when I moved to Sheffield and I was there until 1969 when I moved to Ipswich.

Interviewer: A lot of moving then.

Respondent: lot of moving.

Interviewer: You say that you were training...

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...in the first part of the 60s.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: What were you training as.

Respondent: I'm a social worker.

Interviewer: A social worker. Fantastic.

Respondent: So I did my training in Manchester. Yeah.

Interviewer: Lovely. You mention in the questionnaire that you are cohabiting at some point in the 1960s. I was wondering did you ever...with the person you cohabiting with, did you ever go to the cinema with that person?

Respondent: Sure.

Interviewer: And you say that you went most frequently to the cinema with friends but also with dates.

Respondent : Yeah.

Interviewer: So I guess I'm wondering about whether dating in the cinema was a particularly common thing in the 1960s.

Respondent: I think so. I mean I think that there wasn't the... Certainly, well in some of the places where I lived there wasn't that much entertainment so going out often meant going to the cinema. Yeah.

Interviewer: So the friends that you went to the cinema with, do you remember who they were and why you went specifically with those people?

Respondent: Partly related to what I just said that, you know, that's what one did in terms of entertainment. So what shall we do? You know, it's Saturday or something so shall we go and see a film? That kind of thing.

Interviewer: Sure. You also mention that you went to the cinema very occasionally by yourself. I was wondering, what circumstances would you go to the cinema by yourself under? What would drive that?

Respondent: I certainly go to the cinema by myself now more often than I used to then. I think it was more about, as you quite rightly pointed out, I moved around a lot. Being in a place where I hadn't yet got to know people and wanting to go to the movies so that would be the reason I think. Yeah.

Interviewer: Sure. Thank you. You say that sometimes you combined a visit to the cinema with a meal out. You say that you did that quite often.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: I wondered if you might be able to take me through a typical visit to the cinema for you...

Respondent: (Laughter)

Interviewer: ...if such a thing exists.

Respondent: Well, I mean I think this was different in the different places because I was doing different things and I was, you know, my friends and whatever were different people. I could certainly think that when I was at university or...either time...that, you know, with a date one would go to the cinema and then one would go to somewhere horrendous like a Wimpy bar or something or a Chinese or Indian restaurant afterwards. Places that were cheap and again there was not the kind of choice that there is now.

Interviewer: Fantastic. You say that you... We asked about what you most enjoyed about going to the cinema and you said something very interesting there. You said you've always enjoyed cinematic images of people and landscapes and so forth. I was wondering if you might explain what the appeal is of cinematic images of these things. What do you get...or what did you get in the 60s from the cinema that you couldn't get, for example, from the TV or the radio?

Respondent: Well to go to the last part of your question first, I didn't have access to a television until I got married, which was in 1966, because my now-ex-husband had a television and my parents didn't have a television until probably 1963 and other people I know didn't have television, so I didn't have access to that. I've never been a great radio listener and I never had a radio. I think we had one when we got married, but I still don't listen to the radio much except in the car, so those things were not available. I grew up going to the cinema and my parents were very keen cinema-goers and so I think when I was a small child I was taken along to lots of things that were not suitable. And also part of my growing up was in a very small town where there was very little entertainment, so that going to the cinema was something that everybody did and so I kind of grew up with an appreciation of the cinematic image, which continued. Still continues.

Interviewer: And this... When you talk about growing up and going to the cinema with your parents, was that before the 1960s or during the 1960s?

Respondent: No, it was before the 1960s.

Interviewer: Before the 1960s. And the appreciation...

Respondent: In the 50s mostly.

Interviewer: And that appreciation of cinema stayed with you through the 60s?

Respondent: Yeah. Oh yes, definitely.

Interviewer: You mention a couple of cinemas in particular that you used to visit. You mentioned the Cosmo in Glasgow, a cinema which doesn't exist anymore in Manchester, a fleapit you describe it as, and the Academy cinema in London. I was wondering if you might have any memories of the interiors or exteriors of these buildings at all.

Respondent: I can remember...I mean, I can picture exactly where the Cosmo is, or was. It's on a street off the eastern end of Sauchiehall Street and it had Cosmo on the outside. It had a sort of awning, as they did, and the Academy was kind of the same. I don't remember much about the inside of those cinemas. I think they were both big and fairly sort of cavernous and kind of dark and comfortable with certainly a ground floor and an upstairs as well, but I can't remember anything...I don't think they were particularly interesting in terms of the internal architecture or anything. I do remember the fleapit in Manchester, which was on a corner and which was much more basic and the seats were not very comfortable and I remember there were also sort of, kind of seats for two people, which I don't think I've ever seen anywhere else. I think was a pretty old cinema. It would probably have been a music hall or something before and I don't remember what it was called.

Interviewer: The seats to two people, I'm quite interested in those. I wonder, those are... Well, were those particularly for couples...

Respondent: Yep.

Interviewer: ...I assume.

Respondent: I would imagine so.

Interviewer: And did you ever see people kind of canoodling in them, if you will?

Respondent: No, because I mostly went in the... I was a student. I went in the afternoons when there weren't very many people in the cinema. No is the answer to that.

Interviewer: What was the appeal of going to the cinema in the afternoon?

Respondent: Getting away from what one should be doing. Yeah, I mean I still go to the cinema in the afternoon, you know, if one can and if there are things to...that one might wish to see.

Interviewer: You also talk about... You've already mentioned your time in Hull and Manchester at university. You also mentioned that you were in film societies there. Could you tell me a little bit about those film societies?

Respondent: Well I suppose...I mean in both cases they were a kind of a supplement to all the other... the sort of commercial cinemas that one went to. And I suppose they showed what one would imagine... one would describe as art movies or old films like black-and...early black-and-white films, continental films also. Yeah, so they supplied a kind of different...or films that would not have made it in the commercial cinema, I guess. So they made a kind of an addition to the rest of one's cinematic diet.

Interviewer: And how often did you meet with the film society?

Respondent: Well they showed films every week. I probably did go pretty much every week. Maybe not exactly but, yeah.

Interviewer: And how was that organised? Was it student-led or was it staff-led? Do you remember?

Respondent: I think they were both student-led.

Interviewer: Right. What was shown at these societies? You mention art films.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: I guess I'm wondering, what do you mean by 'art film'?

Respondent: Well I know that one of films that I saw in Manchester...I have recently seen the Werner Herzog *Nosferatu* at the BFI and I know I saw the Murnau film in Manchester. And also *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* I remember. And also, I have to say, one of the most boring films I have ever seen which is the

Auden/Britten *Night Mail*. I think that at Hull I saw some Orson Welles black-and-white films but am not quite sure. I can't really remember.

Interviewer: Whereabouts did the film societies meet?

Respondent: In Manchester it was upstairs in the union, which still exists as it did. In Hull it was in one of the university buildings in a lecture room, lecture hall.

Interviewer: And what was the atmosphere like when watching the films?

Respondent: I can't remember anything in particular about that.

Interviewer: No problem. Did people... Do you remember how people behaved during the screenings?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Okay. You also mention another film club that you belonged to which was the Academy film club in London and there's a lovely memory in the questionnaire about them sending Christmas cards to their members, which I found very charming. I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about that film club. How often it met and so forth.

Respondent: Oh it didn't meet. One... I think one got prior notice of when films were going to come on and probably reductions in prices. It wasn't a club in any other sense, or if it was I certainly wasn't involved with that.

Interviewer: So it was more informal...promotional?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Fantastic.

Respondent: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: And was that attached to particular screenings or was it across the full programme?

Respondent: I don't know.

Interviewer: No problem. We ask a little bit about how people behaved in cinemas in the questionnaire and you talk about the fact that people did talk in cinemas and that you talked in cinemas.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you remember what you talked about?

Respondent: What one was watching. Other people whom one recognised in the cinema. Anything, I think.

Interviewer: And do you remember it ever bothering anybody else in the cinema? Did anyone ever complain to you?

Respondent: I don't remember anybody complaining. I do remember at the end of my training we did a placement at Wakefield prison so we were in Wakefield for a while and I remember going to the cinema with a couple of the other people who were on my course and we were talking and people were glaring at us, but otherwise I don't remember.

Interviewer: Did it stop you talking?

Respondent: I don't remember that.

Interviewer: No problem. We also ask about food and drink and you mention that people did eat and drink and that they bought food from usherettes. Was that something that you did?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: And do you remember what you ate and drank in the cinema?

Respondent: Well, soft drinks, ice cream, that sort of thing.

Interviewer: And was that part of the pleasure of the experience or was that just an additional thing that you did sometimes?

Respondent: I wouldn't have described it as part of the pleasure. It was just something that one did.

Interviewer: You also talk about a specific memory of yours of going to see *To Kill a Mockingbird* in Manchester at the fleapit cinema that we talked about earlier

and again you talk about going to see it in the afternoon. I wonder why that particular memory stands out for you.

Respondent: I mean I can remember other films I saw in the afternoon in that particular cinema. It was a fantastic film and I have to say I probably remembered it because I belong to a book group and we just read it, which I'd never read it...hadn't happened to read it before and actually, no it was about a year ago that we read it and I was on a transatlantic flight where it was shown in December last year and so I watched it again. So it was in my mind when I did the questionnaire, but it is still a fantastic film.

Interviewer: Do you remember the day that you went to see it in the 60s? I'm not asking for the date specifically...

Respondent: (Laughter)

Interviewer: ...but I'm wondering about whether you remember the experience of seeing it in the 60s.

Respondent: Well I certainly went with a friend and I've said where we saw it. I don't remember anything else about it.

Interviewer: That's entirely fine. There's a couple of other films that you talk about remembering seeing. One of them is *Singing in the Rain*, which you say you saw at the Cosmo in Glasgow. I was wondering if you might be able to tell me a little bit about that cinema-going experience.

Respondent: Yeah. I was in Glasgow for a year and the people...I knew quite a number of people but... And I was working in a hospital and we got Christmas off and I'd been away for Christmas and had come back to Glasgow for the New Year, New Year of course being a major issue in Scotland, and I didn't have any arrangements. And so I remember that the secretary of the professor in the unit I was working in suggested that we go to the cinema to see *Singing in the Rain* on New Year's Eve and so we did.

Interviewer: Did he suggest that you see that together as a group or...

Respondent: She.

Interviewer: She. I apologise.

Respondent: No, it was just the two of us.

Interviewer: Lovely. That's a rather charming way to spend New Year's Eve. I might plan it myself.

Respondent: (Laughter) Yeah.

Interviewer: We ask about European films in the questionnaire and you've already mentioned that you saw art films and within that you mentioned a few European film titles. I was wondering, where did you...where did you see these European films?

Respondent: Well the contemporary ones in the cinema. Obviously the Academy was one place, the Cosmo was another. But I think there were a lot of cinemas that showed Italian films, French films. I mean the ordinary commercial cinema that showed these films.

Interviewer: Were these cinemas just within London or were they across the country?

Respondent: Across the country.

Interviewer: So you saw European films in cities outside of London?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you particularly enjoy European films?

Respondent: Some of them.

Interviewer: What was their appeal?

Respondent: Well, I mean, I suppose my favourite Italian director was Antonioni and I mean the photography is amazing and the acting was amazing and the stories were interesting, though sometimes confusing. And I would say my favourite French director was Truffaut and all those things apply, although the stories perhaps were even more interesting.

Interviewer: So was your viewing of European cinema driven by specific directors then? Did you follow the work of specific European directors?

Respondent: I wouldn't say followed it. I mean I saw the films by other directors like Fellini for instance who I'm not a great fan of. I think it was more driven about, you

know, what was on and, you know, as I said before, sort of conversations with friends and whatever about, you know, what shall we do and so we'll go and see that. Yeah.

Interviewer: So it was more about circumstance, about what was showing at the cinema?

Respondent: Yeah, I mean I saw English and American films as well. I mean, yeah.

Interviewer: Let's talk a little bit about English and American films then. What did you think of British film during the 1960s?

Respondent: Well, I saw a lot of them and the... I forget the genre term for this but *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and all those films. There were interesting. Obviously they were close to one's own experience and the ones I remember are nearly all in black-and-white. I think in terms of the cinematography there were not as wonderful as the Italian films for instance.

Interviewer: When you say 'not as wonderful', what do you mean?

Respondent: While the photography was... I don't quite know how to describe it. Less artful, I suppose. Yeah.

Interviewer: Sure. What about other British films, because the... If I understand you correctly, the ones you are talking about are the kitchen sink dramas.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: The gritty Northern...

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...social problem films.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you remember the swinging London movies at all?

Respondent: *Blow-up*, I remember. The Beatles films. I can't think of any others at the moment.

Interviewer: Do you remember enjoying them in the 60s?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: How much did you enjoy them?

Respondent: A lot. I mean they were interesting. They were mostly about young people which I was. Not that one could relate them terribly directly, but yeah.

Interviewer: I find that interesting, that you couldn't relate to those films directly, because earlier you mentioned the kitchen sink dramas and you said that they reflected something of your life.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: What was it about the kitchen sink dramas that you felt reflected your life that you didn't see in the swinging London films?

Respondent: Well I mean the ones I can think about, like the one you mentioned, were not set in London and I was not in London for most of the time. I was either training as a social worker or a social worker and I was very politically active also at that point. So those things keyed more into my life, I suppose.

Interviewer: And after you moved to London did that change at all?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: What about American films? Do you remember seeing American films in the 60s?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you enjoy American cinema?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: What was it that you enjoyed about it?

Respondent: Well, if I think about the films that I saw, I saw *Dr Strangelove* for one. I saw *Days of Wine and Roses* and various other films of that kind. *The Manchurian Candidate*. They were well acted, well presented. *The Graduate* also. (Glances around the room) I noticed you've got that somewhere. Yeah, no I enjoyed them.

Interviewer: Do you remember specific stars from the 60s?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Who do you remember?

Respondent: Betty Davis. Joan Crawford. Laurence Harvey. Angela Lansbury. I also saw the Ken Russell films so I remember the stars from them like Vanessa Redgrave and Oliver Reed. Do you want me to go on?

Interviewer: No, no...

Respondent: (Laughter)

Interviewer: ...I suppose I'm interested in why you remember these particular stars. Was there something... Were they people that you followed particularly?

Respondent: No. I mean I think some of the stars related to the films I've just mentioned obviously. No, I don't think I followed any particular film stars.

Interviewer: So you wouldn't, for instance, go and see a film because of the star in it?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: And I suppose, talking back to our conversation about directors, you wouldn't go and see a film because of the director of it?

Respondent: Oh no, that I would do.

Interviewer: You would do?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: So it would be fair to say that you are more interested in directors than in actors?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Fantastic. We were just mentioning how you felt that some British films reflected your life more than other British films did. In the questionnaire you talk about the Nouvelle Vague, the French New Wave, and you mentioned that it... and I'm afraid, if you'll permit me, I'll quote from the questionnaire, if that's okay. You said that it 'projected a lifestyle that was somewhat at odds

with life in Britain during the period'. I was just wondering what you meant by that. How were these films at odds with British life?

Respondent: I suppose, yeah I mean they didn't relate to life as I knew it. I mean some of them, for instance, like most of the films with Alan Dalon, were about crime and so forth, which I didn't know anything about and wasn't part of my life. They were also often quite geographically based in France or outside France, which again was something that didn't link with anything that I knew about. I suppose also they reflected a more sort of glossy lifestyle than, again, than I was aware of.

Interviewer: Had you been to France and other European countries by this point?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And so did you find that they reflected your experience of those countries from your travels in those countries?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Okay. The British films that you say did reflect something of your experience of the 1960s, was that appealing to you? Did you go and see films because you'd feel that they would reflect your experience?

Respondent: No. I mean, you know, I go back to what I said about, you know, how the choice of a film was made.

Interviewer: It was whatever was on?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: You also talk about the swinging London movies as being somewhat sentimental. You've already talked...

Respondent: Did I say that?

Interviewer: You did in the questionnaire.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: It's okay if you don't agree with yourself.

Respondent: No, no. Okay.

Interviewer: That's absolutely fine though. I was just wondering what, well, whether you still agree that there is something sentimental about them and if so what that might be.

Respondent: Well, there is something kind of unreal about them I think, the ones that I saw. Again, not related to most people's lives and kind of more escapism really.

Interviewer: And was escapism something that you looked for in cinema?

Respondent: Possibly.

Interviewer: I wonder if we could talk for a moment about watching 1960s films now, after the 1960s. We've talked a little bit about *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the fact that you read that in a book group and then saw it on the plane. Is there a nostalgic appeal to watching films like that now?

Respondent: I don't know. Maybe. I mean obviously if one watches them either at the BFI or on television or something - well, 'one' - I would be likely to remember, you know, having seen it before. I wouldn't say it was particularly nostalgic though. No.

Interviewer: Do you make a point of seeing 60s films if they are shown on TV or at the cinema nowadays?

Respondent: I have recently seen, again at the BFI, some 60s films that I didn't see at the time, like *Repulsion*, for instance. I would think about it if they were on the television. I don't think I'd make a point if there was something else I wanted to do.

Interviewer: Sure. You say that you don't own copies of these films, that you don't own 1960s cinema on DVD or Blu-ray or VHS. I was wondering, do you own any other films from any other eras on home media?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: So this is... This is not to do with the 60s, this is just a fact that you don't buy historically...

Respondent: (Nods head)

Interviewer: Okay. No problem. That's actually all that I had to ask, but before we finish I was wondering whether there was anything else that you'd like to say, that you think is important that I haven't asked about yet.

Respondent: I don't think so.

Interviewer: No? Well thank you very, very much your time. It's been a pleasure.

Respondent: Okay.