Barbara Klinger: Hello, my name is Barbara Klinger, I'm a professor in the Department of Communication and Culture, also known now and transforming into the Media School at Indiana University. It's Monday, April 13th, 2015, and I'm here in the city of Bloomington, Indiana at the IU Cinema, the campus' state-of-the-art theater, which, director of the theater, John Vickers has very kindly allowed us to use today, for the interview. So, thank you John, wherever you might be.

I'm extremely happy to have with me here today, Professor Richard Dyer, who is teaching a graduate seminar on *La Dolce Vita* for our department this spring. If we let him return to his regular job, he usually teaches in the Department of Film Studies at Kings College, London, after having previously taught for many years at the University of Warwick. Among other honors, he's received a 2007 Lifetime Honorary Membership from the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, and a 2014 Lifetime Achievement Award from the British Association of Film, Television, and Screen Studies. He also became a Fellow of the British Academy in 2012. He's lectured and taught worldwide, making him a global force with which to contend.

Professor Dyer is author of numerous canonical books in the field, including *Stars* in 1979, *Heavenly Bodies*, 1986, *Only Entertainment*, 1992, *White: Essays on Race and Culture*, 1997, *The Culture of Queers*, 2002, and *Pastiche*, 2007, all of which helped to ignite scholarship in teaching in film and cultural studies, in the areas of stardom, the musical, race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and queer studies. Eloquently agile in theory, history, and criticism, his accomplishments and influence far exceeds these works.

Today we'll hear about some of the formative aspects of Professor Dyer's career and achievements, hoping to engage a broad understanding of his experience and contributions to the field.

Richard, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for "Fieldnotes".

Richard Dyer: Thank you, and how wonderful to be doing it here, and for you to be the interviewer.

Barbara Klinger: Well, I would be extremely sad if I weren't the interviewer. It's a perfect moment in terms of your being on campus already.

A good place to begin, I think, is with your education. You received an MA from the University of St. Andrews in 1968, with an emphasis on French, German, English and philosophy. And then a PhD from the University of Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1973, where you wrote a thesis on entertainment and show business. So, just to begin, what were St. Andrews and the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies like during this era? And I'm thinking about how did this kind of background shape your interest in film and entertainment more generally?

Richard Dyer: Well, the department ... My main topic by the end of being at St. Andrews was French, and it was a very good department, and we ... It sort of opened up perspectives. One, very important to me was studying linguistics, because I got very excited by something which nowadays perhaps is not greatly approved of, but the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. That the form of a language is related to the structure of the society in which it's used. Now, I don't know what people think about that, but just making that kind of connection was very exciting. We had lectures on Marxism, on structuralism, things that again, perhaps are now a bit passé, but in the middle of the 1960s, that was very exciting.

I wanted to a special topic on French cinema, and I spent the whole of my last summer vacation reading about French cinema, but they wouldn't let me do it in the end, because they said they had no one to supervise it. So, I suppose that shows their limitation, but it was a great place to be, and it was a wonderful film society, and there were two cinemas, so there was a very lively culture. How that quite became entertainment, I don't know, because anyway, I moved, after working in the theater briefly, I then went to the Cultural Studies Center. And I was originally going to do a thesis on representations of homosexuality in fiction. But I somehow felt I didn't want to read what I thought would be rather dreary books. And I just, I don't know where it came from, I just thought, I want to understand what we mean when we say entertainment. And I suggested that, and it was accepted.

Then I thought, well, what am I actually going to look at? And I looked at lot, I went to theater and television, and so on, but I thought, well, films are a good idea, because you can watch them more than once, and musicals are a particularly good idea, because they are, on the whole, about entertainment. So that's how I ended up getting more professionally involved in looking at film specifically, so it came out of it. But initially, it was just that musicals were a good object to study, to study the notion of entertainment.

Barbara Klinger: So when you think about St. Andrews, and then you think about the Center for Cultural Studies, there were no film courses being offered, you found your way through your ... Sort of these other paths to film.

Richard Dyer: That's right. There was certainly no film at all in St. Andrews, I don't think they even mentioned films, as far as I remember. Though there was a very good film society, so I did see, apart from Hollywood and contemporary British films, we did see other films. We did, at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, the first thing we did, actually, was a project on the Western. And we did actually look at a lot of Western films for part of that, although we also looked right across the boards, we looked at novels, we looked at strip cartoons, we looked at people who got dressed up in Britain and rode about as cowboys and so on. So I think initially, it was set up as to be a classic thing on the classic Western. Already there was a kind of canon of the Western, and we were to look at John Ford, and so on and so on. And we did do that, but I think a lot of said, “but we have to look beyond this to the Western as a more broad

phenomenon.” So, in a way, that stopped being properly a film studies course. And I certainly never went on a course on film studies.

Barbara Klinger: And what's interesting too, about what you just said, is that today everybody's thinking about converging media, and trans-media, and inter-media, and it's true that even decades ago, when we were educated, when we were getting our education, that people were teaching across the media, and it was not ... It was just seen as part of the curriculum, and not as something particularly exceptional.

Richard Dyer: Yes, that's right. That's right. About the only thing I remember doing there, which came back, apart from the fact that Westerns were something I had seen very little of, so it made me see films that I came to love, like "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" and films like that. But also, a new film then was "Once Upon a Time in the West", which I loved and wrote about. It was one of the first things I ever wrote at the Cultural Studies Center. And then years and years later, I've written about it and used it in teaching about music and film and so on.

Barbara Klinger: So those early moments are formative indeed.

Richard Dyer: Yes, yes.

Barbara Klinger: In so many different ways. More than we can probably enumerate.

I also wanted to talk a little bit about your first job. University of Kiel, '74-'75?

Richard Dyer: Yes, and that was an interesting appointment, because it was half in American studies, and half in adult education. I'd already done teaching in adult education before that, on a part-time basis. In a way that was very much part of the Cultural Studies project, it was both the idea that you didn't only want to teach students, as it were, you wanted to sort of go out into the world and have a much broader sense of engagement with the people. I mean, I'm somewhat naïve to put it like that, but there was that idea of making education active beyond the walls of academia. So, that's why adult education was a great thing to be in. And also, it was great because you were getting responses that were not ... People didn't have to please you, they weren't there to please you, in the way that students want to please you. So there's a way in which I learnt a lot from doing adult education, and felt I was getting some kind of other kinds of feedback.

And also, if you don't teach well, and I don't mean brilliantly or anything, but if you don't get the teaching right, they don't come back. So, again, it's a really ... I feel everyone ought to do that kind of education, it's really good training in thinking about teaching, and thinking about making ideas accessible and so on.

But then anyway, then I went to Kiel, and half of that continued that work, and the other half was more in American studies. But of course that was, although I was teaching film within American studies, and it was one of the first film appointments in a university-

Barbara Klinger: That's one of the things I was just gonna ask, is how did you go about getting that job, how was that processed?

Richard Dyer: Well, the British Film Institute had set up these lectureships in universities, it was almost like the education department then was a fantastically lively department, and it had very much the idea of establishing film studies right from primary education right through to higher education. And as far as the higher education was concerned, they started funding these three-year lectureships on the understanding that they would then get taken up by the universities into full-time jobs. So, this was I think ... I'd already applied for one at Warwick, which I didn't get, Robin Wood got that. But I'd only just got my PhD, and then obviously Robin was a much more established figure.

And then, I did actually work in ... No, then I just applied for the job at Kiel, and I don't know how I managed to get it, but I had been doing some teaching there already, on a part-time basis. And I suppose ... One of the things for instance, they were had a sort of theme in the American studies department at the time, and that was about the idea of abundance as a theme in American culture. And since I'd written in my thesis about the idea of abundance and spectacle and so on, I guess I was able to make the connection between looking at the films, and some of the themes that they were interested in. And it was American studies, it wasn't just canonical literature, canonical history, it had that studies idea, so obviously there was an affinity between that and ideas coming out of cultural studies.

Barbara Klinger: That's really interesting. And the idea that the British Film Institute had such an ambitious pedagogical plan.

Richard Dyer: Yes, I know.

Barbara Klinger: Place for film.

Richard Dyer: It was incredible. I suppose it was right down to Paddy Whannel really, of course then went to Northwestern. But he very much established that, and it was right through. I think it was a combination partly ... And this, I think, is also true of cultural studies in a way, that part of the impulse, particularly from say, Richard Hoggart, who set up cultural studies, part of the impulse was people need to learn to be able to resist the media. So part of the idea was that the media was somehow perhaps, is in danger of inculcating bad ideas, so people have to learn to be critical of it.

But the other part, which was much more Paddy, and even Stuart Hall, wrote that book together, "The Popular Arts", was that a lot of this popular culture was wonderful, and one should just cherish it, and learn to appreciate it. So it was being wary of it, and at the same time, able to appreciate it. It was an idea of educating people to be critical in a wide sense, not just negatively critical, positively critical as well. I think that was very much what the British Film Institute thought film studies would be, it would be that. And it both be children not just accepting the media, but seeing it as a construction, I mean they wouldn't have used quite that language. But also at a higher level, appreciating the greatness of John Ford, or whoever it might be.

Barbara Klinger: Very prescient. That's very interesting. I did not know that before. Do you remember the first class you taught, or what the first classes you taught tended to focus on?

Richard Dyer: Well, I think among the first classes must've been, there was a film society in Birmingham. I actually lived in Birmingham, although I ... Well, not although anything, I lived in Birmingham because I had been a student there. And there was a film society, and they were not doing so well, I think because television was increasing. It wasn't quite yet video, but nonetheless. And there was more opportunity to see a wide range of films. And they saw the way of rescuing their society, of turning it into a course, and again, they managed to get funding from the British Film Institute, which was to help them do that. And I think they must've asked at the Cultural Studies Center, was there anyone who could do this, and I, in a sort of foolhardy way, said, "Oh, well I can." So I think the first teaching, I think it probably was, apart from odd lectures around the place, it probably was teaching for them. And I'm not quite sure, but what would the courses have been? I remember teaching a course on Polish cinema for instance. And I remember teaching a course on Japanese cinema. There was quite a thing that you would teach courses on national cinemas. See, what I don't think I ever did, was teach stars or musicals. Perhaps I did teach musicals, yes, I did teach musicals. But I don't actually remember what the first course was.

And then, when I got to Kiel, I was again teaching a wide range of things. Really an introduction to film studies. And of course, for American studies, it was basically Hollywood, and a little bit of independent American cinema, but basically Hollywood. And I guess very genre based, musicals and Westerns probably a lot.

Barbara Klinger: So you moved really directly into teaching on film.

Richard Dyer: Yes, yes.

Barbara Klinger: And so philosophy and French and various other things ...

Richard Dyer: Yes, well they were-

Barbara Klinger: They were important for training your mind, but then you actually didn't teach.

Richard Dyer: No.

Barbara Klinger: French courses.

Richard Dyer: No, no. No, I didn't even teach French cinema, oddly. I mean maybe the odd French film. But no, I never taught French. I did teach French at secondary school before I went to university, but never afterwards, no.

Barbara Klinger: So, partly what I'm getting, in terms of the early scene, and the growth of film studies in your surround, is that institutional support, incredibly important from the British Film Institute.

Richard Dyer: Yes.

Barbara Klinger: And also, maybe not support in this sense, but the presence of film societies, which helped nurture the spirit-

Richard Dyer: Absolutely.

Barbara Klinger: And just the viewing experience, and the critical acumen. And then the universities that were beginning to offer. Is there anything else in the mix that you think really was important in Britain, in terms of supporting and growing film studies?

Richard Dyer: Well, I do think the film society movement was very important, and it was through that, going right back into the '30s that you first got criticism, Roger Mandel and so on. So, that was deep rooted. And of course cultural studies itself was already becoming, I suppose, making a bit of a splash. There was also, of course, the Society for Education in Film and Television, which had money from the British Film Institute, but which published "Screen". And "Screen" really did seem to give the impression that if you wanted to think about culture, and if you also wanted to think about culture almost politically, and certainly theoretically, the way to do it was in film studies. I mean, in theory media studies, but really it was always film studies. And although, in many ways I never felt at home in "Screen" and around "Screen" and so on, it was a major presence. It organized, for instance, weekend schools, which again were open to anybody, and I remember being involved with one which was about entertainment. I remember showing *Finian's Rainbow*. That was very different in character from a lot of the other ones. But still, they did, nonetheless, organize that, to their credit.

So they were more like a ginger group, I suppose, and also were based in London, and I was living in Birmingham. So them, and also the British Film Institute organized these summer schools, which lasted for two weeks, which were at Sterling University, which had fantastic screening facilities. We would

have two or three 35mm screenings a day. We'd have lectures, we'd have seminars. I got very involved in organizing them. I didn't organize them, but I was one of the people on the team that put them together, although the first time, I went, I was actually a student. It was in Christine Gledhill's class, I remember, and studying film noir. But they were important, because they were for anyone. And of course, that didn't mean that absolutely anyone went, but nonetheless, they were a way of people in education, people in the developing world of not repertory cinemas, but some film theaters, which again, the British Film Institute put money into. And film theaters had this idea of putting on repertory programs, providing notes along with screenings, and so on. And a lot of the ideas for that were generated particularly at these summer schools. So I think they had a huge influence right across British culture.

I suppose also, BBC2 television did initially show a lot of non-conventional films. Channel 4 was much later, and they did show more avant-garde films, but certainly BBC2 showed a lot of non-English language films. So there was quite a lot of different things going on.

Barbara Klinger: And mostly all government supported?

Richard Dyer: Yes, yeah, that's true. There's very little that wasn't. I don't know how much the government actually supported it, but certainly that's where the money came from, yeah, absolutely.

Barbara Klinger: You've hinted a little bit at some of the key debates during the '60s and '70s, or at least early on, where is film a bad object, or is film a good object?

Richard Dyer: Yes, yes.

Barbara Klinger: And did that, as time played out, over the '60s and '70s, did that debate get reformulated in any way, or did it disappear, or were there other key debates that really shaped the field at that point?

Richard Dyer: Well, I think more recently, because I think film has ... I think the bad object now is television.

Barbara Klinger: The bad object now?

Richard Dyer: Yes. Well, I mean, although it's what's ... Certainly what people I work with tend to feel, people in television studies feel that they now carry the burden of having to justify television as something worthy of study. Well, seen from the outside, because I have very little to do with television studies, it seems that combination of ... That there is still all this ideological critique, it's much more important to critique television ideologically, than films. I mean, who cares about films anymore, sort of thing. And on the other hand, there's a kind of populism within television studies, because it needs to be defended, it tends to

be, if people like it, then it needs to be defended. So, that's what I mean by saying it's a bad object. There's a still a debate about it.

I think film studies now is almost like theater studies, or something. Now, quite when that happened, I don't know. But I mean, I do think that the key development was one that I have always slightly held myself away from is auteur-ism, because I think it was the one great success of film studies, is establishing the idea of the director as an auteur, not as an author, but with that that implies, so that now it's all part ... You can talk about Shakespeare, and you can talk about Fellini, and it's all accepted. That discourse is completely established.

Almost the first project I had after completing my PhD was, I was going to write a book about William Wyler, and that seemed like a really kind of exciting thing to do at the time. I remember seeing all the films that could be got for me. The British Film Institute got hold of the whole lot, and I saw a lot of films, even started preparing it. I never did it in the end, but looking back, at the time that seemed like, my goodness, you are going to show that even though Wyler, Wyler was an odd figure because he was kind of respectable already, in fact, if anything, he'd gone into slightly unrespectable because he was seen as sort of middle brow by that point. But nonetheless, it still seemed exciting and edgy or something, to say, "Oh, you know, Hollywood films, they really are a creative vision, and they're brilliant." And all that kind of thing. But that, I think, is so established now.

I'm always very struck when I teach people who come from languages, they will always say things like, well in Fellini's "La Strada". And I always in film studies we would never say "In Fellini's 'La Strada'", because we might talk about "La Strada", we might talk about Fellini, but this kind of complete commitment to always attaching the film to a director is ... But I think, in the culture at large, insofar as people talk about films beyond, “I like it”, or favorite stars and so on, those are the terms in which it is established, and that is a product of the early film studies.

Barbara Klinger: And so, in a way, what you're saying in England, is that initially film was a subject of great debate, and it had to do with good object, or bad object, sort of like *Positif* and *Cahiers du cinema*. And then later, television became much more interesting, and so got divided in that way, between good and bad object. And then film has become respectable and traditional.

Richard Dyer: Yes. I think so really. I still think ... The whole question about students, is are they taking a risk? I think when they first used to do film studies, their parents are always very worried. I don't think they are now, I think they're much more worried ... I mean, it's more complicated, because television ... First of all, it's quite unusual for television studies to be within a humanities paradigm in Britain, it's much more within a media studies, a sociological paradigm, so in one way that's different. All within training to be someone who will work in

television kind of assumption. So parents, perhaps, don't worry too much, because they think well, there are jobs, even though there aren't really, but they may think that. But film now, is a bit like studying literature, it's not much use for anything, but middle class parents don't worry about it, in quite the way that they perhaps did used to worry, because in the past they thought it was sort of a bit ... At least with literature you were studying the greatness of the past. But I think now, film has pretty well established as that in Britain, it's accepted. Whereas I think television ...

Warwick University introduced a degree in film and television studies, and it did eventually abandon it, because it didn't recruit good enough students. So in a university that was very concerned with very high school leaving grades, it couldn't really continue to teach that. They still teach television studies, but there's no degree named film and television studies.

Barbara Klinger: Very interesting, because some of the finest scholars on television studies are from England.

Richard Dyer: Well, yes, yes.

Barbara Klinger: That's ... In terms of the way institutions work, that's very interesting to know.

Richard Dyer: Yeah, that's right. But obviously there is plenty of television studies in other places, and within other contexts. It's often within media, communications, cultural studies, and so on. It's quite rare for there to be very much film studies within ... Sorry, television studies within a film studies umbrella as it were.

Barbara Klinger: Well I know that you didn't spend all of your time doing university things, and that you are also a public intellectual, and that in the '70s, I believe, you worked on programming for the National Film Theatre. Out of interest, do you remember some of the programs that you curated for the National Film Theatre?

Richard Dyer: I think the first was the lesbian and gay programming, "Images of Homosexuality". So that came out of big involvement in the gay movement and there'd been seasons of "Images of Women", "Images of Black People', and I thought there ought to be one of "Images of Gay People". And again, it was through contacts in the British Film Institute, that I wrote to them and said, don't you think this would be a good idea, and they said yes, really, without demure. And then after that-

Barbara Klinger: Can we just stay on that for a second. I believe that was in the later 1970s, around 1977 or so.

Richard Dyer: Yeah, that's right, yes.

Barbara Klinger: And what were some of the films that you showed? Again, it's going back quite a long way.

Richard Dyer: No, in fact I have occasionally given talks about it since, because it ... We showed "Mädchen in Uniform", and "Different From The Others", and tended to try to be historical. It was half and half, women and men. Some of the women's films were ... On the one hand there were people like Barbara Hammer, I think it was the first time Hammer was shown in Britain. And there was Constance Beeson, what ever happened to Constance Beeson?

Barbara Klinger: Indeed.

Richard Dyer: But there was also, of course, soft pornography, almost to kind of make up the numbers of having equal numbers of men and women. So I don't know if there's a film called, "Elise et Chloe", in which sort of lesbian soft porn, "Les Biches", "Olivia". Although "Olivia", I'm not sure we did actually show "Olivia", because almost the second season I ever did there, was a season about Jacqueline Audry. Because I think we ... We started to realize all these other films that Audry had made, apart from "Olivia". And in fact, it was the man, Brian Baxter, at the National Film Theatre said, "Well why don't we just ..." I remember him saying, in this rather sort of ... "Oh, why don't we have a whole second season about madame." But good for him that he thought it was a good idea. And I'd worked on that with Elaine Burroughs who worked in the archive in the British Film Institute.

I'm trying to think if we showed anything that we couldn't show. I think there were some things, I think "Un chant D'amour" we couldn't show. One or two things we weren't allowed to show. But we did show "The Killing of Sister George". I'm just trying to think what else, "Victim". It was kind of historical, and even "The Killing of Sister George" was already about 10 years old by then. And "Les Biches" probably. It was 30 programs, which is astonishing really. And there were questions raised in the House of Lords, should public money being spent on this season defending homosexuality? Of course, it was legal, but still it was disapproved of. And of course, the irony is that really very few of these films did we, at the time at any rate, feel, oh, these are great. These were kind of these awful oppressive films, but we put them there so we could study them properly.

I mean now ... "Killing of Sister George" is a classic one, I think, that at the time, we all that was terrible, this was the awful oppressive stereotypical film. And then it's been kind of, what's the word, re-embraced, by particularly younger generations of lesbians, interest in butch femme, and the whole energy of the film and the wonderful performance of Beryl Reed. So all of those things have now, somehow, made it lovable again, but at the time, we didn't think we were putting on all these films that would convert people, or ...

Barbara Klinger: Or that were about liberation.

Richard Dyer: Yes, yes, exactly. It was a liberationist's perspective on these films, and that went, because we had seminars, we had program notes and so on. So that was all part of the deal.

Then after that, I did almost more programming in Birmingham, I did seasons on Coppola, on Jane Fonda, on Marlon Brando, on dance in film. And in London I did a season on ... When I started to get back into lesbian and gay film history, films made by lesbians and gay men. I got very interested in the German period, so I curated a season of sexuality in Weimar cinema, including "The Blue Angel", as well as "Mädchen in Uniform" again, and "Different From The Others", and this wonderful film, "Sex in Chains", "Geschlecht in Fesseln", so I did that. And I did a season on body building in the cinema, which was called "Built to Show", I always thought that was a rather good title.

And then much later, they asked me to do a Fellini season, and I did a Nina Rota season. And at the moment I'm trying to persuade them to do a serial killer season, but I'm not sure they're going to do it.

Barbara Klinger: But it's also interesting to see how that early programming experience percolated throughout the decades and years of your writing and scholarly interests too. Programming could do that.

Richard Dyer: Yes, absolutely. It's great, yeah.

Barbara Klinger: It is. And I know you were also involved in a gay liberation movement in Britain, and is there anything about that, that you can tell us, just in terms of your involvement?

Richard Dyer: Well, I was involved with it in Birmingham, and we did various actions. I was in an education group, we went into schools, and mainly answered questions about being gay. We leafleted, including, we leafleted films. I remember we leafleted "Sunday Bloody Sunday", which of course, in some ways was a progressive film, but a lot of the time when people saw it, people laughed at the moment when Peter Finch kissed Murray Head his name is, the young man. So we did this leaflet which sort of said, well if you were laughing at that, then you're part of the problem, or something like that. And we had little film seasons in Birmingham, discussing gay films like "Loving Couples", one of Mai Zetterling's first directed film in Sweden, and "Fox and His Friends", I think probably. So that was at the alternative cinema in Birmingham. So we both leafleted the mainstream cinemas when it was relevant, but also had these seasons and discussions in the alternative cinema.

So I was involved in it in that way, and I was involved in ... We wrote, I think it may be the first English language gay sex education pamphlet. I was in the group that wrote that, called "Growing Up Homosexual" I think it was called. Oh, and I helped produce the newsletter. Then I was briefly in Gay Left. I've seen it written, he was a leading member of Gay Left, I wasn't really. I wrote a couple

of pieces for them whilst I was still in Birmingham, then I lived in London for a year before I went to Warwick University. I was teaching in Reading University. And in that year, I was a member of the Gay Left Collective, so I helped produce the journal. And I think that was the year in which we had the season too, actually, the first, the National Film Theatre, "Images of Homosexuality" season. So I was involved in that way, and involved in the book that came out of that. So yes, it was a variety of kinds of involvement like that, including ones that had an implication for representation.

And there was a particular turn, which actually in a way, came particularly from "Screen", about the importance of looking at avant garde film, and independent film, which was partly a kind of thing against ... It was very influenced by Third Cinema ideas. So, Hollywood was wicked and awful, but so was art cinema, so even that, of course we love both of them, so the good thing was independent film. And I partly thought ... It's not that I ever betrayed my love of all kinds of cinema really, but nonetheless, I did take on board the importance of thinking about films that were made from outside of dominant perspectives, and that's what led me to start to write about films made by lesbians and gay men, so that was a different project. So I'd originally done "Images of Lesbians and Gay Men" and even a bit thinking about camp, and aspects of the culture of lesbians and gay men, but also then thinking about actual filming, production of films made by, for, and about, was kind of the mantra of lesbians and gay men.

Barbara Klinger: And the writing you were doing was not just academic writing, you were writing in all of these different venues, in terms of public outreach. But in terms of scholarly publications, what was the - if you could call it this - the kind of environment, or atmosphere for scholarly publication? What were your first few publications, and was there an apparatus already in place? I mean, I know in “Movie” and other places, and other venues, there was, but was there a broader sense of being able to get published in film studies?

Richard Dyer: I think so. I think, more or less the first piece I wrote was about "The Sound of Music", and I sent that to "Screen", and they never replied for a year, and then sent it back in a sort of dog-eared copy. I then sent it to "Sight and Sound", which we then, at the time, thought of as a very reactionary journal, and they wrote back within three weeks, and said, "Well, we think it's very interesting, but we don't want to publish it." But it was a very nice letter, and it really struck me that this sort of hot radicals from "Screen", really it was quite shabby the way they handled it. Whereas, "Sight and Sound" was very professional, even though they rejected it. So then "Movie" agreed to take it on.

But then "Movie" had always been very committed to Hollywood. Even in Victor Perkin's "Film As Film", although one might think of him as the cream of Hollywood, that he's going to do anything he wants to write about, but his principle is that a theory of film should be about the films that most people see. If it doesn't work for them, then it's not really right, and that's an important part of his argument in "Film As Film". So, in that sense, "Movie" was quite

responsive to the idea of writing about "The Sound of Music". And I wrote about "Mahogany", and "The Towering Inferno", and "The Way We Were", so a lot of the ... They were quite keen as well, that there should be a kind of developed criticism of films of current cinema. So I guess that was quite ... What there wasn't in universities was quite the kind of pressure to publish. There wasn't this kind of, you must publish, you must publish. It was almost like, well, if you did, it's a bonus, and eventually you might get promoted as a result, but it wasn't make or break.

And in fact, the first ... Well, I suppose the first book I wrote was connected with the lesbian and gay film season. And that wasn't ... That was just an edited collection. But the first monograph was on stars. But that started, I wrote a very short piece for ... "Screen" magazine had a sort of sister publication, or it might even be a niece publication, or something, it was called "Screen Education"-

Barbara Klinger: I remember. I remember "Screen Educate", I remember reading a lot of "Screen Education".

Richard Dyer: Oh, right, right. Well, they ... and obviously that was meant to be more practical. And I wrote a tiny little piece for that about stars, and just saying, if we're going to understand cinema, stars are a very important part of the way films work, and we need to do that. And I think is was maybe Christine Gledhill, or somebody or other in the education department at the British Film Institute said, "Oh well, why don't you put together a whole set of study materials for people to teach stars?" And in fact, we ended up doing two things, we did a whole thing on the dumb blonde stereotype, and then another thing on stars. The idea was that not only that there would be a sort of teacher's manual which would both give some ideas about stars, but would also talk about how to teach stars, and some methods for teaching stars.

But also we produced ... We, I mean I participated, extracts, because at the time of course, there was no video or anything, so we produced extracts about, I can't remember, I know Jane Fonda, and Betty Davis, and Dietrich, and John Wayne, and Marlon Brando, all people we decided to focus on. We produced these extracts, which themselves had notes that teachers, including obviously, in higher education, could use to teach stars.

Barbara Klinger: Can I ask, what do you mean by extract?

Richard Dyer: A clip, a five- or ten-minute clip from a film.

Barbara Klinger: So you would use a five or ten minute clip from a film, and just on celluloid?

Richard Dyer: Yes, on celluloid, on 16mm.

Barbara Klinger: On 16 mm. And then you would accompany that with program notes, or?

Richard Dyer: The extract, there was also a kind of little catalog, and in the catalog it said, "We've chosen this extract because it illustrates the way this, that or the other aspect of John Wayne's image, or ..." They did it on lots of things, it wasn't only on stars. So the catalog would have a quite long, often even two pages of background information and things to do with the extract and so on. And basically, teachers would rent them. I don't know how much they had to pay, but certainly that was part of what they rented to use for the teaching of film. But then they could also get this other guide which was a guide to studying stars. But that guide ... And we also did a whole thing on ... Another separate thing on Marilyn Monroe, so we had three things, the dumb blonde stereotype, the thing specifically on Marilyn Monroe, and that was rather beautifully produced with reproductions of newspaper coverage, and a whole set of slides that could be used, as well as, then we also of course, made extracts that could be used with this sort of study guide to Marilyn Monroe.

But the stars study guide, which was ... Actually before all of that, I did one on the musical, because at that time, they were developing genre study guides, and extracts from musicals. And the genre study guides, there was actually a whole packet, what's called a study unit, and you'd get a whole film, you'd get, I think it was about five or six extracts, or clips from other films, plus you would get this booklet about the history. And I remember we did, for the musical, we had "Sweet Charity", the whole film, plus we couldn't use MGM, they wouldn't let us use MGM, but we had extracts from "Funny Face", which is actually not an MGM film. [crosstalk 00:43:40]

Barbara Klinger: Did you have to get the studio's permission?

Richard Dyer: Yes.

Barbara Klinger: And who was publishing these things?

Richard Dyer: The British Film Institute.

Barbara Klinger: And so they were distributing these extracts, that's fascinating.

Richard Dyer: Of course, only to be used in schools, or in educational situations. They were extraordinary really.

So anyway ... I'm sorry, I keep going ... The stars one, it just got out of control, and it clearly had to be a book. So then, I think Angela Martin, or somebody at the British Film Institute said, "Well, we should make it a book." So, then I wrote it as a book.

Barbara Klinger: And the rest, as they say-

Richard Dyer: And the rest is history.

Barbara Klinger: Is history, yes.

So from "Stars", and "Heavenly Bodies", those were two ... You've written many books, but those were two of the ones that really developed an area in the field of study, that many people, as we've been saying, many people went to those books as the kind of foundational books in the field, and before they could work on stars they had to read that. And other sorts of works by Christine Gledhill as well, before they could take off ... And Richard DeCordova. So that created a sub area in the field that's still flourishing today, and people are writing about star labor, and things like that, as they have been for a while.

Richard Dyer: Which is the big absence from my work, and that's why I think someone like Adrienne McLean's, "Rita Hayworth" book is really wonderful, I think it really does something different.

Barbara Klinger: That needed to be done.

Richard Dyer: Yes.

Barbara Klinger: But you can't do everything in one book.

Richard Dyer: No, no.

Barbara Klinger: Exactly.

Thinking again about the early periods, and your own formation as an intellectual, were there any individuals, any scholarship, and/or any films that ... Or other kinds of media, that really kind of set you on your course, or that really made a huge impression on you, and that shaped your thinking?

Richard Dyer: Well I think at St. Andrews there was a teacher called Sam Taylor, and he did a course called pre-romanticism, and this was a new topic, and he was just discovering it. So partly, we were very excited with his excitement about discovering a new area. But also, there was very much a sense in the way he taught it, of, although it was literature, of literature being a kind of cultural presence. And particularly, we studied Rousseau's "The New Heloise", and also Goethe's "Sorrows of Young Werther", and they were both texts which were kind of cultural phenomena, so a lot of what we did wasn't just to read the text, but to read all the stuff around the text as cultural phenomenon.

Because I remember when years later, I shouldn't have been, but I had actually read the note that Stuart Hall had written after my interview to go to the Cultural Studies Center, he'd written, "He seems to understand what we're getting at, I don't know where he gets it from." And I've often thought, where did I get it from? And I think it perhaps was from that course, and also from the linguistics course, and I was always interested in theater, so I often chose theater subjects, which meant that there was a sense of it wasn't just literature,

it was that was alive and which had implications for audiences and production, other media and so on. So I think a lot came from that.

And then obviously Richard Hoggart, probably more than Raymond Williams actually, was a big influence on me, and particularly, something he said was, "If you want to understand popular art, you have to understand it first as art, because that is the first social fact about art, is that it is art." Now, art, of course, is a problematic term, but just that sense that you had to kind of pay attention to form, to affect, whether I'd have used that term then, I don't know, but that you couldn't just, as it were, read for meaning, read for ideology. You had to read for, you had to study for how these things worked emotionally and in terms of beauty, or ugliness, or thrill, or whatever. And that was very important in Richard Hoggart's writing.

Obviously, Stuart Hall, I suppose Stuart, I mean was a friend with Stuart right to his death, but he must've influenced me, but I can't put my finger on what the influence was. Although I think through him, and a little bit directly, I guess, Gramsci, was important as a way of combining a sort of Marxist understanding, which I would still say I have. Whether most Marxists would think I'm a Marxist, but I still that my mantra really is, we make our own history, but not in circumstances of our own choosing. And a lot of that dynamic of understanding what the circumstances are, and understanding what anyone has done with those circumstances, I still think that is my model of cultural production. And that obviously comes from early Marx, but then the way it was taken up by Gramsci was really important.

Apart from that, I'm not sure that any film studies ... I greatly admired Victor Perkins, but I guess it influenced me. Working with Victor influenced me, because Victor was extremely rigorous, rather frightening. He was a lovely person, but also slightly frightening, because he was so, sort of scalpel intelligence, and you felt you couldn't get away with any kind of sloppy thinking. But also, at the same time, a kind of involvement with the film text, which was a kind of love affair with it, really, which I actually felt I nonetheless did learn from, even though I couldn't quite do it in the way he did it.

But I'm not sure I can say there any film text that really changed me that much, except maybe, but it's more specific. I was teaching in Naples, and I just by chance was in a bookshop, and I really didn't know Italian very well at that time, but I came across this book by Vittorio Spinazzola, called, "Cinema e Pubblico", "Cinema in the Public", which was just interesting, because it was the first thing I'd read which talked about the paradox, which of course links very much up with Gramsci's ideas, of neo-realism being this movement, which was very much a movement which wished to kind of recover ... To make films for the people, in the name of the people. Films that would express the reality of ordinary people's lives. But, actually, the people didn't like those films very much, and they went to see Hollywood, or Pepla, or some of the big genres of the Italian cinema in the post war era.

And it just put the problem of using the word popular at all, because neo-realism isn't popular in a certain sense. It's to do with the people, but at the same time, it's not box office. And I think that really changed me a lot, and if probably was part of a movement of being more interested in European cinema, but particularly in its popular forms. Because I had initially been, I was very much a Hollywood person. And I guess that re-oriented me, and gave me a way of ... I mean I love Antonioni, I'm not against art cinema, as it's called, but at the same time I still have that commitment to the importance of understanding the popular. And I think that book sort of gave me a way of finding a way of orienting myself more towards Europe, which there are all sorts of reasons why I wanted to do that. And at the same time still being concerned with issues of the popular.

Barbara Klinger: That's make perfect sense. And there's no straight line, it's always this kind of choreography of different voices at different times that makes the difference.

Richard Dyer: Right.

Barbara Klinger: Did you have a falling in love moment with film? Was there a film that you saw where you absolutely fell in head over heels, and that also kind of assisted your journey?

Richard Dyer: I think there are probably some. Certainly, the first film I remember seeing, but I can't believe it was the first film I ever saw, was "The Lullaby of Broadway", with Doris Day, and I love Doris Day. I must've been 11 when "Calamity Jane" came out, and I saw it every day for a week. Of course it interests me now, because now when I see it, I think, why did I like it? I mean, I think it's great, and I love Doris Day, but it's a such a queer film, as we would now say. And then I think, gosh, is that why I liked it? No, I don't remember thinking that, but you know, it's got Howard Keel in drag, it's got Doris Day setting up house with another woman, I mean it's just ... So I don't know why I loved it so much.

Barbara Klinger: Well, I think you're on to the answer to that question. Yeah. It has all those special ingredients.

Richard Dyer: Yes, but whether I saw that when I was 11? Maybe, who knows? The other film I'm sure really changed my life was "La Dolce Vita", because it intoxicated me. The music intoxicated me, and of course I eventually wrote a book about that composer. The whole energy of the film, the whole fluidity of the film, and I wouldn't have said that then. I was utterly caught up by it. And at the same time, it was divine decadence, and that was a way of ... A way of becoming gay was not so much ... Well it was in a way to embrace an idea of decadence and really think, oh isn't this wonderful and let's just go for it. So, even though one might see "La Dolce Vita" as critical of decadence, it also of course is a very seductive film. And I was certainly utterly seduced by it. Obviously, I was ripe for my life to be changed by it, but it was a turning point in my life, undoubtedly.

Barbara Klinger: And has remained a motif.

Richard Dyer: Absolutely. Yes, absolutely.

Barbara Klinger: I'm thinking about, you keep coming back to Italian film, and I'm thinking about the first time I read the Peplum chapter in "White", and how I'd never read anything about the Pepla films, and this was my first encounter. And to have that chapter positioned in such a way that there was all this work in art history that you'd done in the book previously, centuries before. So how did the idea of writing a book on whiteness come to you? And again, in such a heterogeneous, the book is incredibly heterogeneous in the territory that you cover with that concept.

Richard Dyer: I don't really know. I somehow gradually got ... Obviously I had been involved ... I had written stuff about African American film particularly. I was very on the margins of black film, I mean really, really on the outer, outer margins of the black film movement in Britain. I knew people like Kobena Mercer, and Isaac Julien and so on. So, I mean, there was that, and I'd always been interested in those issues, and somehow, I don't know, and then there were also personal experiences to do with falling in love with a Jewish man, and then becoming aware that I wasn't Jewish, and that made me aware of being gentile. So all sorts of personal things. So I think all of those came together with people, including, I think, Stuart Hall, saying, really, white people have got to take responsibility for their representation. It's not good enough just for them to be being liberal and nice about non-white people. And I think that chimed with a lot of these different experiences.

What I remember is, Kobena Mercer asking me if I would contribute something to what was an issue of "Screen", because "Screen" changed a bit, "Screen" became much more friendly, and much more sort of comfortable, particularly when Mandy Merk was editing it. And he asked me if I would contribute to this special issue, it was going to be called "The Last Special Issue on Race". And I said, "Well, it would be quite good to write something about whiteness." He said, "Oh yes, that's really a great idea." So I think it was just the positiveness of his response, was partly what then ...

So then I wrote that, and then I thought, well, there's a lot more here, and I must think about how to do it. And in some respect I'm sort of ... I think the first part of that book is fine, and was sort of surveying, and particularly thinking about the idea of, well, what does it mean to even to use a color, that color term, and what is it as a color term. And thinking about the technology of photography, and so on, all of that, I think that's great. But the last couple of bits, I thought, almost like I ought to do case studies, it was like, that's what I do, I think of myself as that's what I do. I always think I don't do theory, although people say, "Yes, you do." But I never think that. Very often people say ... Someone the other day said, "I'm very interested to meet you, as a queer theorist." I thought, I'm not a queer theorist, where did he get that idea?

Anyway, I've always felt theory and me are not the same thing. So I thought I must do a case study.

At the same time I had this feeling that I ought to write about things I like, because I shouldn't write about, I don't know, Nazi propaganda, or something, partly because that's so excessive, but also because I don't want to just be morally superior to it. I need to have things that I, in myself, respond to. So then the Peplum ... The other one was "The Jewel in the Crown", and that was probably more ... I adored "The Jewel", I still adore "The Jewel in the Crown". So that was probably truer to that principle.

Peplum is slightly ... I mean, I like muscle men, I am turned on by muscles, so it was partly a way of ... And when I was much younger, I used to go and see all those films, and yes they bored me to tears, but they were muscle men in them. I remember going to see Tarzan films particularly, and really thinking, oh, God, let's get past this, can we just have another shot of him in his loincloth? But I suppose it was a way of writing about something which I wasn't going to be morally superior to. And then I wanted to write about that something that was not just Hollywood, so it was an Italian popular culture. And I was more and more getting interested in writing about Italian popular cinema. So various things came together to determine that particular example.

Barbara Klinger: Again, the many tributaries.

Richard Dyer: Yes, yes.

Barbara Klinger: Leading up to these things.

Your more recent work. Serial killers.

Richard Dyer: Oh, right.

Barbara Klinger: And we've been lucky enough here at IU to hear a lecture on this subject, so, work in process.

Richard Dyer: Yes. I've always been interested in horror films. And I always loved vampires, and sort of interested in werewolves and zombies, but vampires, I really love. But everyone's written about vampires. And I did actually teach a course many years ago in Solerno, which was called, "The Limits of the Human", and that was including serial killers, but also vampires and zombies, these figures that are, they're kind of human, but they're not quite human in various ways. So I'd already started to be interested in that, just as I suppose you could say, the stars are about what is it to be human, they are definitions of being human, in a way. So there was a kind of general interest in that.

And then I saw "Seven", and I was ... I thought it was absolutely wonderful, but it was also, again, so often it's a personal thing. Perhaps I sort of concealed, in

relation to the Robeson, I mean, I was in a relationship with an African American man at that time, and that undoubtedly was also a factor in making me feel more strongly the importance of writing about a black star. But anyway, I went to see "Seven", with who then was someone I hardly knew at all, I'd only known him a few weeks, Georgia, who is still my partner. And we were both utterly ... And it was an accident, we were supposed to go and see another film, and I got the time wrong, said, well let's go and see this, it's probably all right. And we just thought it was fabulous. And then someone asked me to write a small book about it, and then I introduced a little bit into my teaching. And I suddenly got interested.

And I suppose what interested me, well, two things really, one was just the paradox that serial killing is practically non-existent, it is so rare as to not be really worth thinking about, but it's everywhere in culture. So I got interested in it in terms of what is it being made to mean? What themes is it articulating around ideas of masculinity, around ideas of human impulse and so on? But I was also interested in the idea of seriality, almost the formal qualities of the serial killer genre, and particularly the idea of repetition. So I got very interested in that too.

Because in some ways it does seem like a bit of a departure. It's not like I love all these films, which some of the things I've done have just been because I love those films. But nor is there any political reason to write about serial killing. But I do think there is a continuity in the sense of ... It's almost like a case study in what a ... It's particularly wanting to try and think about, what does a taken for granted term really mean? So what is it about the serial killing? What do we mean? What's at stake in the seriality of serial killing? And I think that's the same as saying, what is entertainment, what is a star, what is pastiche?

Barbara Klinger: I was just gonna say, there's a connection there to the beginning of our conversation, when you wanted to unpack, or just completely excavate the idea of entertainment.

Richard Dyer: Right. And in fact, I suppose that goes back to your earlier question about what things influenced me. I mean, actually, I should say that Susan Sontag would be one my people I would - I wouldn't say emulate exactly - but I love her work, I love that sense of public engagement. But also, some of the German theorists about common sense constructs. The idea of basically, that what intellectual life should be is a reflection upon common sense terms. So that goes right back to when I first studied in cultural studies, and Schutz, people like that.

Barbara Klinger: Where do you see the future of film and media studies? Let me actually pose two questions. How do think pedagogy has changed? Either in terms of the technology we use, or just in what we can assume our students might know. And then, where might you see the future going, or maybe we're already there? I know those are big baggy questions.

Richard Dyer: I mean, I suppose I don't ... In terms of where are we going, I suppose I do think it's ... Well, two things, one is that I think film studies is just one of the humanities now, so the whole question is, where is the humanities going? Will the humanities continue to be ... Will higher education just become utterly instrumental? Which is obviously a pressure. And I think there may be more of a pressure in Britain, but maybe that's not true.

Barbara Klinger: It's a pressure here too.

Richard Dyer: Can, as it were, useless knowledge, which is actually all about understanding and growth, and all of these things I believe in, but will they continue to be supported when they don't actually, aren't about economics or finding cures for cancer and so on. So I don't particularly feel that film, in that way, is any different from history or English or whatever. Though I think, obviously, there's still a slight feeling, and this is true with theater studies too, I suppose, people get into it because they want to make films and so on. But that's still ... I think film studies is not really many people get into it for that, it's quite a secondary thing, if they know they're doing film studies.

I think there's also a development in film studies which slightly ... I feel there's a sort of development in film studies without films. That there's an awful lot of work, and you could say I'm to blame with "Stars", after all I said, you mustn't only look at films, you need to look at everything surrounding, and I still think that's right, but I'm just disconcerted by just how much work is about ... So much work on reception, which often seems to me really quite thin in a way. And so much work about ... Anxiety about textual analysis, which I think is a difficult term.

One of my vague thoughts is to write ... Well I give this paper occasionally called "The Persistence of Textual Analysis", which is about how we all are constantly doing textual analysis, so we ought to foreground the fact that we are, and be rigorous about it, rather than kind of do it, but somehow not really embrace it and be rigorous about it. So partly, that kind of worries me, what I see as this kind of avoidance of engagement with films themselves. I feel in the end, what's the point of studying film, unless you actually study films? So partly ... I'm not gonna worry about it, but I wonder about it.

In terms of the pedagogy. I'm not sure I have a very interesting answer to that really. I am very aware of how different it is. For instance, somebody said to me recently, "Well, I never show extracts in a talk now, I always just show screen grabs." And it is a temptation, but of course then that is to privilege the image over movement and sound. So I can see pressures in different ways. And it's very hard to know what people have seen, because on the one hand, they can see almost anything now. On the hand, it's the paradox of the internet, it's true that practically everything is there. Actually, that's less true than one thinks, but still, it's incredible what you can get to see. On the other hand, there's quite a lot of evidence, I think, to suggest that the usage of the internet is that people

see more of the same. More of what they would see anyway. So it doesn't actually work in terms of having this huge knowledge, which is ... Perhaps I use it like that, I'm not saying I don't.

At the same time, there's a kind of misgiving about textual analysis. I mean, there are some perfectly valid critiques of textual analysis, but it seems to me we should still do it. It's not just that we should, we do it all the time. In fact, in this talk I give, I always say, there's actually no such thing as not doing it. People say, "I don't do textual analysis, we look at publicity." We you're doing textual analysis of the publicity in that case. You're still textual analysis. So then why privilege publicity over the film itself? I sort of feel perhaps I ought to write a book about it.

Barbara Klinger: I think one of the things that the move to context supposed to ward off is that the certitude that you found the final truth of the text, through textual analysis. And so I think if you can recognize that it's a mobile thing, and do textual analysis under that cover, that it's different than saying, than locking in the...

Richard Dyer: That's one of the critiques of textual analysis, you're absolutely right, and I think one should be much more concerned with showing what the text makes available for meaning, and for understanding and affect, and so on, rather than, yes, you said locking, absolutely, I agree with you. But I think sometimes that those worries about textual analysis then lend people to abandon it. Or else, yes, as you say, to use context to somehow anchor the text in something more secure, but it doesn't really, because it's just another thing that has to be textually analyzed.

Barbara Klinger: And put into motion. Yeah, it's very true. There's slippery objects out there for us to try to grab a hold of.

Richard Dyer: Yeah, that's right.

Barbara Klinger: Well, I think we've come to the end of our time.

Richard Dyer: Thank you.

Barbara Klinger: I wanted to thank you so much for sitting for the interview.

Richard Dyer: Well thank you. That's great. It was really wonderful.

Barbara Klinger: Really appreciate it. And I can't wait to see it up on SCMS website.

Richard Dyer: Yes, great, thank you.

Barbara Klinger: So thank you.