8 June 2010

Interviewer: Mike Dick

Interviewee: Joy Cuff

Camera Ruth Bolland

Roll 4

0:00:00.0 MIKE: The copyright of this recording is vested in the BECTU History Project. The name of the interviewee is Joy Cuff, something Matt Artist. The name of the interviewer is Mike Dick, 8 June 2010, and this is tape Four.

0:00:22 MIKE: So Joy, yeah, we were talking about Mackenna's Gold.

0:0025 JOY: Yeah, Mackenna's Gold. I mean, we did so many little inserts as well and I did lots of art work for the inserts, for the map, and then they had some of the different stars to come down for different inserts and one of them was Julie Newmar who I think was on Catwoman before she was on Mackenna, some time before. She was very beautiful. But she was quite a volatile actress, very difficult, I heard. So the day before she was coming down, they wanted to do all the set-ups and also

the camera tests. So who was on the set? And I was dressed up as a Navajo Indian and actually it's quite frightening, I actually looked like one. But I had the, you know the old Evo - Stik scar? They used to give us… and I was redded down and my hair parted – I had long hair – and you just grease it and it's all dark. And I wore what she was wearing and you had to stand where she would have stood and I just think… all the lighting. Because they used Q I s as well and I was so hot and the camera test was I had to put the Bowie knife – actually, I've still got the Bowie knife, it's like my memento from it – to Greg Pecks' throat. But mind you he wasn't here because that was the camera. I was teased like mad because Carl Foreman's directing [laughter] and I was thinking I don't really want to be here! But anyway, that was the camera test which also was shot on 65mm with an anamorphic so I've actually got it on 35mm somewhere. I've still got it. But where you find an anamorphic lens to have a look at it now, I don't know. But we were a long time on that film as well. It was another one. Just fun and easy, lovely, long, barmy summers we had.

0:02:33 MIKE: The impression I get though is that you have to be a kind of flexible person to work in the way that you were working. You'd be called upon to do a whole range of skills. I suppose by that point you've

developed over the kind of movies that you've been working on and obviously the early days of Thunderbirds, this kind of basis of skills. I mean, how would you define the sorts of skills that you've brought to a production?

0:03:06 JOY: Well, I know it sounds funny but somebody once called me, I think I said this at the beginning, a jobbing artist [laughter]. And that's what I think artists are, you know, you can do anything. If you can do it two-dimensional… two-dimensional work is very abstract. It doesn't matter what you're doing, if it looks figurative, it's abstract because if you're translating something from three-dimensional into two-dimensional, and then to do three-dimensional work, to me, that's what life is. You're reproducing something from life anyway then so… And as I've always drawn and sculpted all my life, I didn't find it strange that I could jump from one thing to another really.

0:03:54 MIKE: I mean the next production that drew on your skills was Tony Garnett and Ken Loach at Kestrel . And that was in 1969, wasn't it? The Body.

0:04:08 JOY: Yes, The Body was an amazing film actually because it's the body from birth to death. And they shot some quite amazing footage which probably wasn't in the film anyway but I did the growth sequence on that. Now this was an animation, I think it was the Great Ormond Street Hospital - I believe it was Great Ormond Street because that's a children's hospital - had photographed children, a male and a female, from birth to 18 every six months to study growth. So we decided, we had a designer, so we decided we'd do, a bit like Leonardo Da Vinci's man who stands like a cross. So that's how the 18-year-old would end up and so was the baby. Actually it wasn't quite a baby because they had to stand up so probably about 18 months old. So I did it in the circle with four lines across so you could see also the growth and had to cut each limb because so you'd see every year, and it's so funny watching them because when they're about seven or eight, they stand up straight and they have their photograph taken and they get to a teenager they're kind of sloped, God, have I got to be photographed again, but you had to make them look all the same so I had to cut each limb and then reassemble it and then paint it in so it didn't look broken so the growth sequence went like that. And I also did one for a hand as well. Which reminds me, on She I also did the… when the hand goes up into the flames and you see it gradually gets licked with flames and then you can skeleton and then it disappears. Well it's shot in reverse and I gradually built up between

shots fingers until… from a skeleton, but that's an underside, but it's just interesting to do things almost on set as well.

0:06:30 MIKE: Was that stop frame animation you would use there or what? What sort of techniques would you use there?

0:06:35 JOY: What, on the hammer?

0:06:37 MIKE: Yeah.

0:06:38 JOY: On the hammer? No, it wasn't stop frame, it was shot… not even at high speed, maybe it was shot at high speed, and we had a real skeleton which was then moulded so we had lots of them all identical and each one was a stage further on to having flesh on it. And they just filmed it and dissolved it, filmed it and dissolved it, and you're right, I think it probably was on… though it was a model, but I think it was done upright. But it was done on a fixed camera. And the arm was on like an armature that stayed there and you'd just put on the next one but because it's a dissolve, it worked quite well. I think it was five stages but back to The Body. So I did that and there was a hand to do as well and I also did the

title sequence which was quite interesting. I remember the font was Micro Gramma because it was up to the minute which actually is a font now, they've changed its name, I can't remember off the top of my head what it's called now, but it's used now because it's very modern. And…

[interruption by ringing phone]

[CUT]

0:08:12 MIKE: So you got married at this sort of point in the…

0:08:20 JOY: Yes, actually I was married then. Yes, I was married on that. Now, really strangely when I was on The Body, we were on set, one of the doctors came up to me and kind of introduced who I was and she said "oh, you're pregnant, aren't you?" and I went "[laughter] Not me!" and I was, which I've never forgotten that [laughter]. That was really quite amazing. How did she know because the big thing about The Body was the birth. I remember doing, because I did the titles, and the birth at the end was Barnaby and he had a credit so he must be, he's got to be 40 now, isn't he?

0:09:08 MIKE: So you married Bob, Bob Cuff's son?

0:09:13 JOY: In'69, yes.

0:09:14 MIKE: And then you had Simon, your son, in '70. What I'm interested in at this stage is how you balanced that, you know, you're working a very busy life at the moment, at that time, and then you're juggling motherhood as well. I mean, how did you manage to do all that sort of thing ?

0:09:33 JOY: Well, with The Body, I worked right up until he was due actually because you didn't think about, well in those days if you were freelance, in fact you probably don't now, you don't have any other money coming in, and I just worked up until he was born and I'm trying to think… what did I do?

0:09:59 MIKE: You did Family Life.

0:10:00 JOY: Yes, I did the titles of Family Life, didn't I? Well then actually I started doing things in my own studio at home. And if I was working, I'd take him over to my mum so I was quite, I didn't used to work all the time and also I used to work at night. And I've actually got, you know and 30, 40 years on, I do work really well, I can get up at night, I can work really well at night.

0:10:30 MIKE: You've got this wee baby and [laughter]…

0:10:33 JOY: Yes, I know. I know. [laughter] And I know when I worked, I think it was Sean Hudson, I worked on "Brancusi"as something for the Arts Council and that was titling again and I had him with me. I mean, he often came with me to meetings and I remember breast-feeding at a meeting and nobody kind of, well, I didn't think there was anything funny in that. And I thought we were al getting open-minded but now, they're still a bit funny, aren't they, about mothers working? But yes, I was quite lucky because I didn't work full-time in a studio, very rarely, if I had to go, like I worked on an advert, I went back to Abacus and worked on something, I'd take him over to my mum's. Because Paul at that time, he was working on documentaries and he often used to go away for quite some time. You know, like when Simon was one, he was away

for a month. And I also started doing quite a bit in theatre so I was doing it at home in between, you know, you'd work 24 hours a day in between feeds. I mean, my house always looked a mess but I mean I didn't have to go out to actually work a nine to five job which was probably quite lucky.

0:12:01 MIKE: Can we move on to 1988 because that was kind of a major, major film that you were involved in at that point.

0:12:09 JOY: Yes, I did other art work not working in the film industry probably, actually to accommodate children really. And I was close to home. 1988 was The Adventures of Baron Munchausen. Now there again, it was Terry Gilliam, people ask me ooh, what was Terry Gilliam like? Well I don't really know because I was working with Bob and a cameraman called John Grant in a barn on Walton-on-Thames. That was John's set-up, amazing set-up, just next to his house. And I'd fit that around always getting back just after the kids got back from school, about six o'clock because it's not really very far away and going over there… I used to have another job actually in the morning as a pottery technician in a school. So I used to go after that and then I used to work at the weekends or at night. I used to take my matte painting home with me and lug it upstairs – I don't know how I carried it around – we were very

lucky, we had an old London taxi then which you get a six by three glass in the back. Because when I was at art school, they said don't paint anything larger than that because you can travel around in a London taxi. So I could transport it backwards and forwards.

0:13:39 MIKE: That's good advice, that. What were the challenges of working on Baron Munchausen then?

0:13:46 JOY: One of the challenges was we never got paid for a long time. I didn't get paid for a year actually. It was quite funny because this is post production and of course he'd spent all his money. I believe, I mean did he mortgage one of his houses, I know he was putting all his money into it. And this was post production. We just get the live action, we'd be told what the rest of it had to look like, well I did the burning city one, well alright it's a burning Spanish town in the 1800s or something, so you'd go and do a little bit of research on architecture and stuff. What we always had in the studio was National Geographic magazine. And it doesn't matter what age it is, you know, if you've seen them in Oxfam , pick them up and flick through those and you can get lots of research just in a couple of different issues. So once that had been

delineated and I'd started to draw that, I think once it's laid in, you have a camera test quite early on, just to make sure you've got things like…

[CUT]

0:15:28 JOY: The early takes always used to show you whether you've got the right perspective because that was quite a difficult shot because you're looking down on the town square, because that was the only bit of live action, and just the side of the house and the front of a house there and all the rest was a burning city. That was quite amazing because we had flames and fires and smoke travelling and that was all on glass because you'd have moving glasses. I didn't actually see a lot of that shot because you see, you're away doing another shot. But I knew that was what they were doing because that was all stop-frame when you're doing moving glasses so…

0:16:17 MIKE: How did sort of techniques change, or did they change because we're talking what, this is 1988?

0:16:25 JOY: Techniques don't change at all.

0:16:26 MIKE: Yeah. How's that?

0:16:28 JOY: This is what's amazing. I mean, it's like you talk about Stanley's technique of using live, undeveloped film in the can. That's what they were doing 50 years ago because they couldn't dupe films, or duping wasn't very good. The minute duping had good quality, oh we'll dupe it and then we can marry it together and all that, but the quality that Stanley wanted with that shot, you know, it's not duped so neither the live action or the model was duped; it was two first takes. And split-screens, really only the technique of locking off the camera properly has got better, but it's exactly the same. And of course now it's digital, it's different.

0:17:24 MIKE: It's CGI. Yeah.

0:17:26 JOY: It is different but it's works perfectly now. I mean, it used to be difficult because in all your different takes, ah look you can see black so it was a bit of the matte showing off as white or the other way around, it wasn't painted up to the join. And you were always told you

have to do a join where it's sympathetic, instead of doing it right across something. On Erik the Viking actually, some of the joins would be really quite difficult because they were halfway up a brick wall or… yes, some of them weren't quite so easy and one of them, I know they got quite cross on one because it didn't have a locked off camera when they shot it out wherever they did it, in Malta or whatever. I don't know where they went on location. So if you'd have a slight movement, so you'd have to do a soft matte so that if it did move… mind you, if you knew where it was, I mean I always saw things like that because you'd go looking for the join, to see where it was. One of the best shots in Mackenna's Gold was the shaft of light which everybody thinks is a real shaft of light, but it's not. I did that with a spray gun, it was really good. It sprayed light. And it works really well. It's when they're actually going in to find the gold.

0:19:00 MIKE: Do you think we've lost something, you know? We've got all this CGI, we've got Avatar, we've got all these sorts of techniques that we use now and audiences go in and they watch a movie. Do you think we've lost something along the way?

0:19:11 JOY: Yes. What I don't find strange, and I know people are talking about quality but I saw Alice. Amazing, amazing. But there's something unreal about it.

0:19:26 MIKE: This is Tim Burton's latest movie.

0:19:28 JOY: Yeah, yeah. I mean unreal as in it's a shock. I mean, the crowds in that garden party, I just find it's unreal. Because the eye can't see everything. You only focus on a small bit and even when you're photographing a big expanse, say even on 2001, it still had that, you lose the, like on the moon surface, you lose the quality because the mountains in the background are not modelled as detailed as the ones in front because you don't see them, you know? They're a shape. And I sometimes looked and thought why does this look, it does, it looks strange to me. And of course I've been a bit of a drop-out for years now. I don't have a television. I don't watch television. [laughter] And I probably watch less and less films now. I don't go to ordinary theatres; I go to an art cinema. And I always think they're like rushes theatres anyway because having seen epic films. So I haven't seen 2001 for a long, long time because I'd never go and see it. I haven't seen it on the

box because I wouldn't watch it on the box because it's not meant to be…

0:20:48 MIKE: But you're going to see it in a couple of weeks' time. Describe that. How do you think you'll feel when you're sat to see it?

0:20:54 JOY: It will be emotional because I still shiver when I think about, as I said, it's the soundtrack. It's just amazing. And that opening shot is just so beautiful. It makes me feel cold. I've just thought of something else about it, the soundtrack… No, I've forgotten it now, it's gone. Sorry.

0:21:21 MIKE: Here you are in 2010 and you sort of look back at the sort of things that you've [inaudible].

0:21:27 JOY: Well I think talking about it being unreal, to me, it's my other life and it's almost like it was really me, you know? It is, it's my other life, it's really strange. But it's quite nice because you've got that and I mean, I wanted to bring my kids up and when you work on the films, you do sell your soul. Quite rightly so because they wouldn't be

that amazing would they? Because you put in everything, every bit of energy you've got in it. No, and I've been quite lucky to have been at that particular period in time. And I've just suddenly thought when you said what will I feel like when I'm watching 2001, when I was introduced to the archives – this was quite amazing – I went there…

0:22:15 MIKE: Can you tell me, explain the archives, I mean, we're talking about the Stanley Kubrick Archives. Describe about your work there.

0:22:22 JOY: My daughter-in-law said that she belonged to London College of Fashion and part of that is The London College of Communications and in there, there is an archive for film, and they decided they'd like to house Stanley Kubrick's boxes, his archive boxes which were actually offered to someone else. They didn't want them so then they jumped in and said yes, we'll have them. And actually I think the BBC, I've seen the film on Stanley Kubrick's boxes that they made but before that, in '07, I go along and the boxes haven't been there long and they're in the old, original, tatty boxes and they're like, you know, well films boxes, not necessarily the cans, the film sometimes went in Kodak boxes and all kinds of things, all different shapes and sizes, and

they are actually listed and the guy says to me oh, pick a couple of boxes and see if you know what's inside them. So I'm thinking oh God. I mean, all miscellaneous and miscellaneous and miscellaneous and I said I'll have that miscellaneous slides and I'll have that one, miscellaneous polaroids. So off they go and I come back and open the box up and I just start flicking through and there's some of my work! And it's not only my work, it was one of my drawings, just a pencil sketch with a bit of colour on it and showing a crater and different numbers all over it, which actually I can't remember what the numbers meant now. I think it was to do with the… I don't know. Anyway, ah blimey, you know? So I could tell them that was to do with the production, the sets that I worked on. So I go to the other one and I open that up and there's polaroids of all the moon sets, amongst other polaroids. So that was really eery because… I think they had a thousand boxes or something and I just picked two and it just happened… So I'm now destined and meant to volunteer at the archives, which I have done and so I go there, once a fortnight probably doesn't sound like very much but it's enough to kind of give a day and I'm absolutely exhausted by the time I'm finished, every time. I've been given the job at the moment to go through all the slides, 35mm, 2 ¼ , whatever size, and categorise them. Not just categorise them but tell them oh… Well, what I was helping do, they picked up what's this? It's a sausage machine. And they say something like what's a sausage

machine? Well it was like a camera mash-up which they used in the special effects and that's what they called it. And it's so that when you're working there you can identify with what you're doing.

0:25:18 MIKE: Because you are that link with that era. What I'm interested in is why you think it's so important to do these kinds of things, work there?

0:25:27 JOY: Because now you don't want to lose this wealth of information really. And quite a few since I've been there, there's lots of students that have come in, sometimes in groups when they're actually teaching and sometimes it's been a couple of PhD students, and it just helps you talk about how the films used to be made and what you used to do. It's like what I said about Stanley doing something that was done 50 years before time. Nobody does it now because of duping of film but he decided that that gives a good quality. Well I don't think that has been done since because it's a big step to do it. Lots of money involved. Well I think the technique of split-screen has not changed but the technique of how you get there has. And I know video, well, video is a completely different medium. Completely different. It's almost as though it's endless; it's not like you've only got so much footage. When I was in the

film, earlier in the 60s, 70s, they used to say documentary was 1:4 shooting, and that's probably quite a lot if not less, and filming is probably 1:10. And that's quite a lot. Hopefully it's less. Because they had so much, the money for the stock, all this, all that, but now I think well you can just wipe off shots you don't want and re-shoot it. I don't know whether I'm right, [laughter] but it's so different. It really is. Which has just reminded me, John Grant once told me that his dad, who was also in the film industry, used to work at one of the little studios in North London and Eisenstein used to come around and beg short ends and they reckon that that's why, because lots of his films are very short in their cutting and they all used to say that he probably cuts his films before he shoots them so, you know, I think they're shot… [laughter] which is quite amazing because he couldn't afford the film. Well I mean lots of the films gone in Russia didn't they because didn't they scrape the silver off and re-use it? So all those things, oh it's gone. I was always watching films from the 20s, special effects films and sci-fi from the 20s and even before that, even silent ones, because I used to think it was amazing to glean information from how they were making things.

0:28:30 MIKE: So when you're going through these boxes of Kubrick material, are you constantly discovering new things?

0:28:35 JOY: Yes, yes. Now at the moment I'm looking through shot of different scientific stations out there and I can't quite remember the names of some of them but what a boring day. I get loads of these 35mm slides and they've got the most boring shots of long, long corridors and rooms just white, just white oh… and then I came across a big conference room with a long table and chairs going down each side and a big desk at the top and a screen and where did I see that last? 2001. So those were his reference shots for the interiors of when they were having their conferences at the space station so to start with I'm wondering what on earth these are going in the archives for [laughter] but we have to keep everything because Stanley had had those for a reason. And that's why. One or two things in that… and they were all shot April '65 because, you know, you see the stamp on the cover of the little slide and it was April '65 out in the United States. So he did reels and reels and reels. And whether he, he wouldn't have shot them himself because he was over here, wasn't he? So somebody else would have been sent out there to do them. Mind you, Stanley nearly always had a camera around his neck. He used to take lots of photographs but lots of his recces were other people.

0:30:18 MIKE: Last thought, final thought.

0:30:23 JOY: My final thought?

0:30:25 MIKE: What will it all amount to, do you think?

0:30:26 JOY: I feel I was quite privileged to be a part of that part of history. That's my final thought really.

0:31:07 Rostrum shots of Joy's notebook from 2001 : A Space Odyssey

0:41:10 End of roll