



REWIND | Artists' Video in the 70's & 80's Interview with Sue Hall & John Hopkins

Interview by Dr Jackie Hatfield, 17th November 2004

SH: So the first thing is when we started working in video together it was in 1973 and the most significant thing from everybody's point of view in London at the time was the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War was a war unlike the Iraq War that the Americans started and we didn't join in. Harold Wilson, who was a sod in almost every respect, had the sense not to take his country into war and as a result of this loads of Americans came over here to dodge the draft either officially or unofficially. There were endless American psychiatrists here, there were lots of American academics, there were so many Americans here that it made for a large sort of liberal left American community, which then attracted lots of other people who didn't have to dodge the draft like women or elderly people, or the parents of the people who had come. So we were in this cultural milieu that was very international. London was very much the centre for that and we knew a lot of the leading lights from the American cultural diaspora and it affected us very greatly. The second thing is Camden Council's Housing Policy, which was basically when they decided to demolish a few square miles of West Kentish Town, which is NW5. In the meantime, while they were getting all the tenants and residents out they put organisations like the New Arts Lab, which was called IRAT, which Hoppy (John Hopkins) will explain in due course, the Filmmakers Co-op, another organisation that wasn't arts based, called Student Community Housing, a housing association for students, funnily enough, and giving them all properties up in West Kentish town in and around Prince of Wales Crescent. That attracted their friends, people like me. I moved in when I came back from Peru, I didn't have anywhere to live, and there were all these empty houses in the next street called Prince of Wales Road. They weren't that well secured. One day I went round there when somebody told me one had been opened and that was my next house. Lot's of people had that experience and that's how that community, where we found ourselves, came together. So the result of all this social planning by the Council was that there were about 6 or 7 organisations with video Portapak's within about half a mile of where I lived in 1973. This was very unusual.



JHa: Was it the community groups that had acquired them?

SH: It was everybody you can imagine. There was Interaction, which was this arts/social/action group. Action Space, which was sort of similar but different, and then there were some people who got into market research...

JH: Vertical Hold they were called.

SH: There was Hoppy and TVX who were sort of video based, but not community based from the very beginning. And there were the Fringe hangers on, let's call them, of the filmmakers Co-op, I can't remember, there were some other people.

So just about every time I went out on the street, I wasn't into video at the time, never heard of it before I moved there, you would find somebody shooting video on the street. So you've got to be really quite weird as a human being not to say "What is this? What are you doing? How does it work?" So of course eventually I did ask somebody "What is this? What are you doing and how does it work?"

The other end of the equation where the Vietnam War becomes significant is because many, kindly young liberals didn't realise that the driving force for development of the Sony-Rover Portapak, which was the workhorse in those days eventually, was actually the desire of the American military to shoot video out of their helicopters and planes. And it was them who pushed for the development of this equipment for the purposes of their war. Only later was it made available to the rest of us. So that's the first piece of context.

It was only about nine or ten months after that that we got our first grant from the BFI to set up editing, although editing was very crude in those days, you wouldn't really call it editing now. There was quite a short period of time for me, but not for Hoppy, when I worked in video and there was no editing available. But as soon as we set up the editing, which we called Fantasy Factory we were an organisation so this thing of artist doing your own stuff as an auteur versus organisation. Most of the time we were an organisation facilitating other people, and right from the very beginning we had three rates, we took commercial work, we took work from the education centre and we took arts and community work. They were the three tiered rates getting cheaper and cheaper down the line. We always facilitated other people, but we often didn't take much notice of what they were doing. If they booked our facility dry hire we'd be around but we wouldn't necessarily know exactly what they were working on in those days. Later it became more formalised.

JH: There are really four eras in our story, although we knew each other from before this video pickle, Sue was travelling abroad and I was doing other stuff. So the first 'Era' is, when I started which was 1969 through to '73 when I bought my first Portapak, although I was using other peoples' in that time. The second 'Era' is, is actually fairly short because it's covered by the use of a PortaPak. There was no available editing, or editing has to be done in a medium like film or cable TV stations or something like that. That only lasted for a year or two.



Then we get to about seventy, late seventy-four seventy-five, when very crude electronic editing was available and 'back-space' editing with the stop watch, no previews you know it was flying by the seat of your pants. And then that goes on till sort of late seventies, probably about 78 and that's when U-matic editing or U-matic based editing came in and there on through 1990 and so on we were doing U-matic editing which later became time code, three machine and all that stuff. So those four eras really are the technical background to our story.

SH: We've got 'critical feedback' and 'contextual philosophies' down next. The reason we are coming to this first is no so much the first two points, which I will come back to, but the last point. "Was there any particular contextual critical writing that you'd agree or disagree with?"

This is the best point for us really to fit in the work of Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, who informed the whole of our approach to video running projects and

everything else. And in this respect we were actually rather different from the other arts intellectuals at the time who were very interested in semiotics and semantics and for us this was only one of three levels identified by Shannon and Weaver as being crucial to a communication occurring. They identified them as equally significant and important, the technical level and the level of effectiveness or action in the world. So they were thinking in terms of a telephone call. If you imagine making a call to somebody you have a 'sender' who picks up the phone and dials the number then, if you are lucky, you have a 'receiver', who answers the phone by picking the receiver up at their end and that's the technical level of communication working. But, if they can't hear each other or if they can't understand, suppose one's speaking in Japanese and the other in English – then the semantic level isn't working, the message needs for both the technical and the semantic level to work before the message can be transmitted. There are different sorts of messages. Let's take a very simple one like "Will you go to the shop and get some eggs?" Well that message is only fully transmitted if the receiver actually does go to the shop and get the eggs. If something else happens, it doesn't matter what it is, the communication is interrupted at the level C, the level of effectiveness. Shannon and Weaver called these levels A, B and C.

JH: A, B and C – technical, semantic, effectiveness. Level C is effectiveness in the Real World. It's the most solid sort of meaning, because, to have meaning in the real world something has to happen and there has to be change of behaviour or some kind of event. That's really how the communication theory bolts into everyday life, and politics in the real world. That was our conception basis really for dealing with all sorts of communication, particularly the uses of video of which there are many.

SH: People made a great deal of fuss about you know obscure mathematical doctrines and so on but this is actually something very, very simple. And on it, the whole of the present international telecommunications network depends, even the Internet. So it works. And so, we decided to follow what was proven to work in our own work.

Yes, one of the first things that happened to us was with the squatting stuff that we couldn't edit ourselves. It got picked up to run on the news! This brings me on to another point in your list of questions which is called "What critical feedback or public attention did your work attract?" Well, if the BBC puts it on the 6 o'clock news you can reckon you've got peoples' attention.

They looked at Hoppy's camera work on the eviction that he'd shot and they complained that it was 'hose piping', by which they meant letting the camera around while the action occurred instead of doing what people did with film in those days, which was to move from frame shot to frame shot, even in the news. But if you start analysing this in the present day, you can see that everybody 'hose-pipes' all the time. What was considered to be poor practice, or bad technique, by the BBC news people then, is just absolutely normal now. Nobody would think of mentioning it at all. So, it's just to show how things move around in terms of judgement but also that our work was taken up from the very beginning though not in a way that we could necessarily control.

JHa: Did they, did they cut it?

SH: Yes

JHa: A lot?

- SH: Yes, 28 minutes down to three, plus a studio interview
- JH: There is nothing wrong in doing that because if you've got the six o'clock local news programme you're going to run for 28 minutes but you've got only three or four minutes which was a good whack in those days.
- SH: We never objected to that actually, although I did edit our own versions later as soon as we got editing. We used to run them side by side with theirs.
- JH: What about critical feedback. Do you (Sue Hall) have anymore to say about that?
- SH: Yes. Various people in the Arts Council and the BFI because we'd been looking for money - this stuff was expensive in those days. Tape costs were high for instance, which people don't realise now. And although you could reuse the tape, if you shot something good you would want to keep it and you had to go and buy another one. So we approached people like the Arts Council and the British Film Institute and basically the British Film Institute said it wasn't film. Which was true, it wasn't. And the Arts Council said it wasn't Art. Neither of them wanted to put up any money because they found that we were pushing it outside their areas. They both later changed their minds quite soon. But they soon moved on to other criticisms, for instance the British Film Institute funded a production of ours, which we called *Song of Long Ago* which was the first local history videotape. It happened because I was approached at a Christmas party by the local task force worker who said 'I've got all these old biddies who come to the Lunch Club, why don't we do a video' And I said 'Well very good idea. If we can find some money to pay for it, let's go for it.' We made an approach to the British Film Institute production board. They said 'Oh, yes it sounds very interesting. We haven't funded any video before. Let us think about it.' And they came up with some minute amount of money, which was enough to pay for it. But once they saw what it was they disowned it. They gave the copy right back to us because it wasn't political. By which they meant people weren't talking about 1929 and trade unions, travels and so on, because we didn't tell people what to talk about. We had our set of 'prompt' questions, which we agreed with the taskforce, which were about all aspects of everyday life.
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- We had a dozen pensioners from West Kentish Town in a room and we just recorded what they remembered and what they said. The programme lasted about 20 minutes. The edited programme that we made was played back continuously for weeks and weeks in Camden's Libraries. We provided U-matic copies and the Arts Council provided the U-matic player. It trucked around all Camden's Libraries....
- JH: It was terribly popular!
- SH: Local people loved it, they really did. We got we got a lot of feedback forms back, questionnaires back, and very few critical comments. So that's the gap between the funders and the local population.
- JH: About the "critical feedback and public attention", when we were in the eras when we were squatting, we didn't parachute ourselves in from the outside like some social workers if you like. We were squatters ourselves; we did steal our own houses like the rest of the people. And so, we were working for ourselves as well as the rest of the

communities that we were in. Make no bones about it. One of the results on level C, which is "Changing the External World", was that as a result of our 'activities' we got re-housed and it's very difficult to cross the barrier between squatting and getting re-housed. We got re-housed because of the work that we were doing with video.

SH: Well, it was Fantasy Factory that they really re-housed actually....

JH: Well we were Fantasy Factory....

SH: 'Sue and Hoppy' got re-housed on the coat tails of our organisation. They wouldn't have given us as individuals another house.

JHa: So they gave you somewhere to physically contextualise Fantasy Factory?

SH: Yes, after a lot of blackmailing and pressure, and help from Action Space. We ended up, to cut the long story short, in Theabolds Road where we stayed for the next 20 years.

I think you should say something about the tapes as opposed to the publications. What about 'Era One' – Hoppy and TVX?

JH: We started in 1969, and looking at the significant work in that era the first one was the first tape that was ever shot by me. It was in about April of 1969 in Notting Hill, on the street, on a Saturday afternoon, a housing demonstration, street theatre and some other stuff. Because it was the first one there were no rules at all. That's a significant tape. The next one really was an experimental pilot programme we made for the BBC called Video Space and that was in, that was in 1970. But there was a lot of work that went on in between.

JHa: How did this happen?

JH: BBC2 hadn't been around very long and that was where the progressive people were. There was a programme called Late Night Line Up. One of the directors there was called Tom Corcoran and somehow we made contact or he heard about us and he was progressive.

JH: When I say *we* I am talking about the TVX gang, which was Cliff, Steve, John Kirk, myself and a lot of other people. Till Roma, Jo Bereweb, all sorts of people. We were trying to see what we could do. Anyway, Tom Corcoran said "Why don't you bring a bunch of people along and we can make this studio available to you and see what you can produce in some time he's booked. This was one of the BBC 2 production studios, a small one with its own production gallery. We were recording onto 2 inch...

SH: ...in colour! That didn't happen again for 15 years.

JH: So, what we did was to treat it like a 'happening'. A happening was an idea invented by some artists called Fluxus in the 60's where you brought a bunch of components together and you didn't quite know what was going happen and it was the "not knowing what was going happen" was really part of the thrill. So we got a bunch of people together including Richard Neville who was the editor of Oz and some musicians and

friends and hangers-on and some of us were technically minded. We 'roughed out', not a script, but who would do what and when. Different people were on different bits of equipment which none of us had ever seen before. Cliff was a BBC cameraman so he actually knew how to operate these huge pedestal cameras. And, it is important to say, a lot of the people who came along were from the new Arts Lab, which was the framework out of which we were working. Also called the Institute for Research in Art and Technology. Those two sort of 'front doors' are really important because one was straight and official and the other was unconstrained. So, we did one take that lasted 20 minutes and played it back and had a look at it, then we did another take which again lasted 20 minutes. Unfortunately all that remains is a rather battered copy of one of the two takes. But it was very exciting for us because we were doing visual feedback. There was a light show there, done by a friend of ours called Dermot Harvey, who did light shows with the rock bands and other things. There was a studio discussion, but we also experimented in the control room with a vision mixer and there was an elementary synthesiser or colouriser and stuff like that...

SH: This was really very high tech for its time...

JH: The other one was in 1973; called *England Spring '73*. Cliff Evans and I applied to Thames TV for a bursary. What happened was we applied together for a bursary but they looked at our proposal and they gave us each the bursary so that we doubled the money. So, between us we had a thousand pounds, £500 each! We spent the spring of '73 each of us shooting material...

SH: That was just prior to the introduction of the Sony Rover...

JH: Yes in fact...

SH: They were half inch open reel format

JH: Yes, I've left out all the stuff about whose equipment we were using but basically we hired some equipment from a company, which was low density tape, it wasn't the Sony Rover format quite but almost. Each of us went around shooting what we felt like for a few months and then it was edited at Swindon Cable TV Station, I think, because we got on quite well with the Cable TV companies, but it was edited onto a one inch C format.

SH: C? ... D. Or was it B format?

JH: It was edited into one inch and then transferred back to half inch so that we could 'truck' it around. So we made this half-hour programme, *England Spring '73*, which was a lifestyle programme, 'This is what it's like to be us, now' sort of thing. Some stuff in the country, some in the town some sex, some rock-and-roll...

SH: Must have been some drugs...

JH: Must have been some drugs. I don't remember that... Perhaps that's why! We went back to Thames and they wouldn't look at it! They commissioned us, they'd given us this grant and we produced the programme, but we couldn't get anybody to look at it!

SH: This is because of the idea of large companies, about art, is that they thought they were funding 'art'.

JHa: So they had a fixed idea of what art was?

SH: Yes, art was something that had nothing to do with the television, even if it was on video; it had nothing to do with their daily life. That's how I saw it so when these guys turned up and said, 'Here's what you've paid for', they said, 'Oh, good, go away!'

JH: However we did have a continuing relation with Thames TV, which turned out later to be very technically beneficial in the 80s.

About cable TV. Briefly, in the early 70s there were four or five cable TV stations set up. As sort of an experimental pilot project to see if cable TV would work in the English context. They were very 'locally' oriented. They weren't networked or anything. There was one in Bristol, one in Swindon, one in Milton Keynes, one in Wellingborough I think, and one in Greenwich. Each of them had a sort of community remit. We got on very well with some of the people in the cable companies whom we knew as sort of working colleges from mass communications or social stuff, whatever. And we were occasionally able via personal contacts to use their facilities because there wasn't any proper editing out of captivity in those days. So that's how England Spring '73 got edited at Swindon Cable TV where one of the people who was very significant for us, Richard Dunn was working. He was part of Thames but we'll come to that later on. So these cable TV stations persisted for two or three years until everybody discovered that actually there was no possible way to make local cable TV viable. Of course we all knew this in the first place (laughs). But really those cable TV stations were part of the very long drawn out plan by the companies that have now taken over cable in the rest of England for commercial purposes. We could go into that but that's another story.

SH: Moving on not much later, sort of media history, the Government commissioned a guy called Lord Annan to write a report on the future of broadcasting in '76 or '77. So Annan came out with his report. Everybody was very interested in influencing what was going to happen. When I say everybody I mean artists, groups using video for social purposes, people running the five cable TV experiments, people doing pirate radio. I mean this was the group that came together and called itself The Community Communications Group. It was a national group of people interested in media and the future of broadcasting and influencing the government's decision-making process. So as part of that group we applied. This is the other way you could get stuff on TV in those days other than doing news. You could apply for what was called an 'Access Slot'. BBC's Open Door was the best known, this was not for that this was for...

JH: LWT, was it?

SH: LWT? I can't remember. It was in the London programme they had Access Slots, I think, and we applied. Usually people wanted, I don't know, half an hour or something. We applied for two minutes. We were going to do an 'ad' and did an ad for *COM-COM*, for the Community Communications Group basically saying that London had lots of radio stations, which it now has, and lots of TV stations which it also now has actually. But at that time we were being told that there wasn't room in the airwaves for all of this to happen. We put up a technical argument together with some engineers who were

checking out the stuff that we were doing to make sure we didn't say anything silly. That resulted in this ad being produced to show that this wasn't true. No sooner had we had it on TV then we got our phone tapped and because we used to write down for the Arts Council every phone call we got to do with work, where people phoned up, was called "Information and Advice". We used to get lots of things for people who didn't want to come and edit at our place, they just wanted to know how to do X to do with videos so we'd tell them. It was a free service and there weren't that many people who knew that stuff in those days. So we used to get masses of calls like that. We used the fact that we could answer these questions as a justification for part of our Arts Council or funding or GLA or whatever it was in those days.

SH: *Gratam in August* was completely and utterly different. By that time I think there was a single tube, so called, portable camera with a U-matic, actually you needed a wheelbarrow to move this stuff. It was bigger and heavier than the old the Sony-Rover

JH: The U-matic PortaPak

SH: Yeah, it was the 1800 camera – the U-matic portable. But you had to have another box in between them. I can't remember what it did, but it wasn't just a bloody great PortaPak and a bloody great camera, which was really quite heavy. But you had this third really awkward box.

JHa: Was that batteries or something?

JH: Well it was very difficult to go roller-skating in Regents Park! And I did actually do that...

SH: That was later, with the smaller one! You couldn't have roller-skated with these things, not without a wheelbarrow! Anyway so, we did use it in a wheelbarrow and we shot our first our first piece of landscape art, because it was colour! We went to stay with some friends in the country who were actually the family, it was Laura Mulvey's family, as it happens. But they weren't there at the time, I don't think, but it was her mother who did the 'voice over', which was about what had happened to this piece of land. It's quite fascinating actually. There was an old Catholic family who had this big bit of land down in West Sussex, the most charming piece of countryside. And the family was broke and had to sell the land before the War and they sold it to a couple of spinsters who died and they'd been nice to them so they left it back to them in their will! Which, is how they've got it back. Anyway, so she told him this on the soundtrack to this video, which is full of these lyrical country shots. As I say, the countryside was particularly lush and beautiful there. One of the higher points of the whole thing was a trip through their woodland with Hoppy using the camera, me pulling the wheelbarrow behind. That way you got the sense of running through the woods.

SH: Well so, back in '66. For the first time there was this cheap printing technology where you could do pictures and you could bleed pictures over words and make them completely illegible. He (John Hopkins) and some of his friends started International Times and after only a few months there wasn't enough money, but two things were done to create more money. One was to approach famous rock stars like The Beatles or various people in the rock-and-roll business and say, 'Give us some money for this paper' and some of them succumbed. But the other, was they started this first all night

underground psychedelic music club in the Tottenham Court Road. Him (John Hopkins) and a guy called Joe Boyd which was called UFO. And UFO was actually far more significant than people understand because films used to get shown on white sheets on the walls in UFO all night long, usually without sound but I saw my first Kurosawa movies at UFO aged 18 which made a terrific dent on me. My art school tutor was doing light shows down there on a Friday night, Mark Boyle, so it was like, there was my college course out in Watford and at the weekend I'd come into London and go clubbing like I'd always done, well always since about the age of 14, but it was sort of integrated with the college stuff because this guy who taught me in the week was going down there as well. There were other people doing light shows there as well who I got to know quite quickly but there was this integration of the art forms in this place called UFO – The Pink Floyd had played, they were the house band but so were The Soft Machine, Jimi Hendrix came down to jam a couple of times, Paul McCartney come to visit, you know it was very central to, I don't know, what would you call it, 'The Commercial Art Scene?' because there was no subsidy. I don't know if the Arts Council existed, but nobody I knew was getting any grants from them in those days. It was all entirely self-financed. One of the other people who did International Times with Hoppy was a guy called Miles who together with some other people had a bookshop down Southampton Row called Indica and in the basement was where the film-makers co-op started in the same year. So, there wasn't a feeling of separation between these different things. They were all felt very much part of one current of activity. There were lots of new bands forming who often only lasted for one single but it seemed jolly good at the time, like Tomorrow, My White Bicycle and so on. So, yeah music was very central. 'Fantasy Factory' was named after the words of a Stevie Winwood song called 'Shoot Out at the Fantasy Factory' on his second album. We liked Stevie Winwood; and Song of Long Ago was named after a Carole King song who was a composer/pianist and you will hear her song if you see the programme.

JH: Another aspect of that is that in '69 when I started with a four or five line Portapak that I borrowed from Sony and when I had to give it back, John Lennon gave me his equipment, which was the same model and we managed to use that for a bit and then it turned out that Ampex brought out these really huge sort of, this sort of size (indicates) one inch VTR's, which were terribly unreliable but they did one each to each of the four Beatles. John and Ringo and George each decided that they didn't know what to do with them so they gave them to me.

JHa: How did they know you? Because of UFO?

JH: Because of the cultural scene that had been going on at what Sue has just been talking about. Yes, due to that and all sorts of other stuff. And then I did some work with the Stones, I helped them set up their first club video recording in about, I don't know, '71 or something like that. Then Pete Townsend approached us. He was doing some exploratory rehearsal work, which eventually ended up in being '*Quadrophenia*' but that was a long time after that. He gave us some money, much more than we deserved for doing a small number for him and so we had good relations with those people. *Hawkwind* was another bunch of people who used to come and play in the back of the Factory in the early '70s.

SH: I remember when you did England Spring '73. It was still going on, on another level. Was it Virgin who got you the *Tubular Bells* gig?

JH: Oh, yes! Cliff and me worked for Branson. We'd shot Tubular Bells on two PortaPaks and then edited it together again I think at Swindon Cable Visual. Branson was able to use that to interest the BBC in doing a visualisation live programme about Tubular Bells and you know what happened to Tubular Bells. It got to be a very successful piece of music, so, we had a little part in that.

JHa: So the bit about the Rolling Stones and their video shoot. You'd helped them do a live recording?

JH: I helped them figure out how to do their first recording in a club with, again, these big pedestal video cameras. I think in the end, although the recording was made, I don't think it was ever distributed. But later on when some friends of ours came over from San Francisco in about '71, I think, that was the time when Timothy Leary, who was the apostle of LSD, and Eldrige Cleaver, who ran Black Panther Party were both in exile from America on the run. They 'holed up' in the Black Panther Embassy in Algiers and these two friends of ours that were both white, Glenn and Steve I think they were, wanted to go and make and record some video with Cleaver and Leary. A hair brained idea, sort of late night thinking... 'Oh, why don't we do that?!'. But they didn't have enough money to do it. I thought that this was a good idea, so I went to see Mick Jagger and I asked him if there was a way that he could help because, it seemed to be an interesting thing to do and might have some benefit in the end. He is a very sharp guy, he paid for some videotape and via the travel agency the Stones used, he got the travel paid for and then the guys had to look after the rest. Anyway to cut a long story short, one of them went to Algiers made a recording. He had a pretty hair-raising time because he was in a country where they didn't speak English and he was being virtually held captive by a Black American. They seemed very tight on security. You couldn't do that sort of shit nowadays. Anyway, he came back with a recording of Cleaver and Leary having a conversation with each other about different things and he took them back to the States and some pieces of it would go across on Public TV Network, which was the 4th network, and in the other room, I've got a letter from Eldrige Cleaver's father asking for some more programmes and so on and such like. People don't know about that, we never talked about. It was good of Jagger to help with that but to stay at arm's length.

So, you know, ones relation with the music community is, sort of... before I got into all this stuff and I hung out with, in the early to mid seventies, with the New York jazz avant-garde and when Ornette Coleman first came to England he stayed with me in my flat because I had this spare room and stuff like that... that still leads me to talking about relation of music.

SH: Whereas I was clubbing in Soho in 1962. People think clubbing was invented in the late '80's but actually there was always clubbing!

JHa: So what about inspiration and influences?

JH: Well... confining myself to the video era, perhaps, its fair to say the video works that I found particularly inspiring, the first one really is actually a manuscript, it's called Video Space and it came from the guy who ran the National Centre for Experiments in Television called, Bryce Howard. Their first year of operation was 1968, I went to California in mid to late '69, and he was running some sort of experimental studio there

under the remit of training people to work in cable TV across the States. His manuscript, which I've still got, was a really inspirational piece of visionary poetry about video and what it meant and what you could do with it. That's why the first programme that we made for the BBC was called Video Space and all of my 'gang' were turned on by this manuscript that I'd brought back. So, there was Bryce Howard from KQED and the National Centre for Experiments in TV in San Francisco. Another one was Nam June Paik, who was one of few people operating in the 60s. There wasn't portable equipment then but he was into bending beams of electrons and stuff, and is well known in his own right. Another guy who was doing that was called Ture Sjolander who was Swedish. He made a dent on me. One of the things he did was to take an image of the King of Sweden and to distort it grossly by bringing magnets around the tube, this was thought to be very experimental at the time.

I had publications coming in all the time and exchange subscriptions it was just part of the 'scam', but it resulted in a continuous flow of new information which was interesting on all sorts levels.

SH: His organisation at the time was called The Centre for Advanced TV Studies and it published a journal, which a lot of academic stuff was published in for the first time to do with video and he has, of course got a complete set of that as well which is very, very interesting reading. It is quite high level academic stuff from people in Europe, which doesn't exist anywhere else, I mean you can get the American and Canadian stuff elsewhere but not what's in J-Cat. But he also did an issue called 'The UK Video Index' in 1972

JH: There were two of them actually.

SH: That list had everybody in the UK who worked in video outside of broadcasting, which were mainly colleges in those days. I had access to all that stuff so if I wanted to know something I could look in the UK Video Index and phone somebody up and ask them because it was such a small world. If you mentioned the word video, people would spend hours talking to you even if they didn't know you. So that was my introduction early on, it was really quite different.

JHa: Could you talk a little bit about the Ben's Arrest tape?

SH: Ben's Arrest. We were in the middle of this large community of squatters. Relations were bad with some of the people in the area who were members of the National Front i.e., fascists. You could imagine they didn't like us very much. We were getting stick from the council and in the newspapers. We decided to fight back with a publicity campaign of our own. So, we started off by arranging to buy paint and to paint the fronts of the houses in Prince of Wales Crescent which was an entirely independent street, I mean, it was partly short life housing by council grant and partly squatted but there were no, sort of, ordinary tenants in it. So it was a good place to start this particular activity. It had been arranged that volunteers would turn up to use the paint on the houses on a particular day. People did, they showed you a picture of the titbits of me painting away, and because I'd get up so late I wasn't there in the beginning which was the morning. I got up around one o'clock, and went out to join in but I never got as far as getting a paintbrush. As I got to the corner of the street I saw a police van draw up and I knew, because of what I had been told about the Special Patrol Group

and the Siren earlier, there would be trouble. So, I went home to get the Portapak, thread the tape and put the battery in. It took a few minutes. I went back as fast as possible just in time to see the police coming out with what they claimed were stolen goods, and violently arresting a young black man before apparently beating him up in the back of the Transit van while I was still shooting video and other people were standing around trying to ask the police 'why are you doing this – what's going on?' But they will never tell anybody anything. But we managed to get the van number, somebody got the guy's name and went to the station to try and bail him out and eventually that video recording, which was only two minutes long, it was just a single take, was accepted as evidence at a court of sessions in South London and the tape was played to the jury. I had to leave the room when it was played – I'm not quite sure why that was actually but then later they wanted me to testify and give evidence. So it was some technical legal point about not being allowed in the jury room while they were considering something. And Ben was acquitted we were all very glad to hear. Earlier with 'Dr. John's eviction', which Hoppy showed, mainly, there was an attempt to use it as evidence in court but the prosecution managed to argue it down.

JH: Interestingly, as well as getting that broadcast on BBC all of the squatters, and there was quite a bunch of them probably 10 or 15, they were all charged with offences as they were hauled off in a police bus. Because we'd videotaped what happened during this whole arrest process, the squatters were able to brief themselves in absolute detail by playing the tape again and again and again...

SH: About who was where and when...

JH: ... so they had an accurate chronological account of what happened and when they came up against the police in court, the police had got, sort of notes like 'Damaged my uniform - 9.32pm', 'I was proceeding to, you know, road so and so' They completely demolished the police evidence and everybody got acquitted. If we hadn't had the videotape, I think it would have been....

SH: 15 people would have gone 'down'

JH: ...that would have been the worse...the worst outcome

SH: ... no doubt about it, because they really wanted to get those people, the local police. They were very cross about it. So those were both quite important legal milestones in their way.

JHa: One thing that may be I'd like to ask specifically, perhaps to Hoppy, you've described why you started using video, but specifically why video, and not film?

JH: Well, I have to go back a bit. I will try and keep it brief. In the early 60's I earned my money by being a photographer in Fleet Street. By about the middle of the 60's I got more involved in organising underground events, so much so that I put down my camera. Then the 'Summer of Love' was very psychedelic and I spent six months in jail for dope and various other things happened and I went travelling in Europe with my then wife called Suzy Cream Cheese. About early 1969 I was in a town called Riete, near Rome, in Italy, helping to organise a carnival. Imagine February, and the snow in the mountains, some crazy friend of mine from Rome, an Italian guy, and a bunch of

other people, including some people from the original Arts Lab in London. I hadn't been there for a few days before I ran into Jim Haynes who was the guy who ran the original Arts Lab, and he said 'there's something new on the scene which was called video'. He explained to me in 5 minutes what video was and I knew something clicked. I went more or less straight back to England and went to see Sony. I persuaded them with all the muscle I could bring to it, which was my previous public persona, to let me borrow an open-reel Portapak. What I thought I knew before I picked one up was incredibly amplified by the first use of it and that's what started me off. That was in early '69 and I persuaded, some branch of Camden Council to let me take part in the Camden Arts Festival, where we showed some video and shot some video in Notting Hill and brought it back to Camden to show it and stuff like that. Video was clearly something very interesting and at the same time there was bunch of artists, about 25 of us who, as Sue previously explained because of Camden's housing policy, found Camden receptive to give us a short lease on an empty fire station, in other words factory type premises. We did it under the name of The London New Arts Lab, the alternative title of which was The Institute for Research in Arts and Technology. That turned out to be quite a suitable vehicle for getting on with video.

With video you got instant feedback, you could see what you were getting and videotape, although it was relatively expensive it was basically cheap, and of course you could use it again and again. And it moved being a photographer mainly working in black-and-white, well you could do all of the same things but the pictures moved.

I was struck, and stayed struck for about the next 20 years.

At IRAT, The Institute for Research in Art and Technology, among the artists and organisations that came together to occupy this factory, was the Film-makers Co-op among them were Malcolm Le Grice, Dave Curtis, Annabel Nicholson and John Lifton, There were various departments and my gang was called TVX as the video department of this burgeoning institute and the people who were involved in that were, in the beginning, Jo BereWeb who was a lawyer and helped write the Constitution for the thing. Till Roma who was German friend of mine, who was a bit of bad boy, got busted later. The other three members, we were originally a gang of four, was Cliff Evens who was a brilliant cameraman - young guy; Steve Harman who was diabetic and had rather poor eyesight, but he compensated for this by being very interested in film and John Kirk, who came from Australia. He'd been doing some teaching. There were various other people, we weren't a closed group, we were an open group and we did some theoretical thinking. I speak mainly for myself if not entirely. As soon as we started using video and going around the country really, we analysed our perception of where we'd been, what people were doing and we came up with the concept of the 'Social Matrix' being an idea into which one could put any piece of society, with lots of little bits and communicating with each other. We then came up with the idea of interface and the 'Communication Matrix', which was made up of pieces of the Social Matrix communicating with each other via this conceptual thing called 'The Interface'. So Social Matrix and Interface were two concepts that were very important to us in understanding what was going on with video and did a lot more conceptual thinking after that but that was, for me, on some of the readings I'd done while I was in jail, particularly cybernetics, Ross Ashby, Norbert Vina, Ron Berthalanthy, who were the cybernetics in general systems theorists. Also, Marshall McLuhan, who did a lot of writing about the media. So, the group of us had got some sort of intellectual ability to understand what was happening. We developed our intellectual models of what was going on and our analytic techniques as we were developing the use of video. To put

that in a perspective, if you look back and you look at what remains and what was shot, none of the actual footage is particularly impressive, although it does indicate, dipping ones toes into different pools. We've come to the point where some of the best tapes that we shot then, for instance Rolling Stones in the Park; the signal has completely disappeared from the tapes and it's gone back to granules of de-magnetized ferric oxide and, I am afraid that unless something is done fairly quickly, this is what's going to happen to the rest of the tapes that we shot in the 70s. I was shocked when a month ago I discovered that Rolling Stones in the Park does no longer exist.

JHa: So what happened to IRAT though? Why did that disband?

JH: I think that IRAT disbanded really because there wasn't another place, like another vacant factory. IRAT started off in Robert Street, which is near to the Euston Tower and it had that for a couple of years, then Camden wanted it back to redevelop it and make another of their Alcatraz-like housing schemes. So the next place where there was a vacant factory used to be a dairy in Prince of Wales Crescent. So the Film-makers Co-op took the top floor of that and there was enough empty houses and premises around that the main bits of IRAT could still find places, We had one on the corner and there was another one up the road. So, IRAT was still geographically together while not all in the same building. When that whole area was repossessed by Camden Council in about 1975 or 6, the different partners moved on. The Film-makers Co-op went in one direction and we went in another and, it was like growing up.

SH: There is another side to all of this, which is the Arts Lab Movement. It was about the synthesis of the different art forms and the arts bodies never liked it although now I think somebody funds the so called Art Centres where more than one art form is allowed to exist but may be they don't anymore. At that time it wasn't possible to get funding for that sort of activity in the '75/'76, not at all and all the different bits of IRAT got fed up with being so poor and they'd gone off to get their own funding for their own activity whatever it was. Some had become university academics at the Royal College of Art.

JH: There was theatre, there was printing, there was all sorts of different stuff.

SH: So different bits of it went off and got funded for theatre and we got funded for video and so on. It was really the arts bodies and the way they were organised that forced that dissolution as much as Camden not coming up with anymore factories.



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