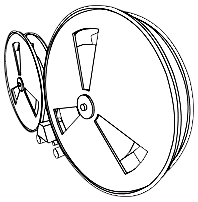

REWIND | Artists' Video in the 70s & 80s
Interview with John Adams

Interview by Jackie Hatfield, 10th May 2006

JH: Thinking about your work chronologically, and given that you've worked across a wide area of practice, which of your works do you consider most important and why?

JA: There are probably 3 or 4 tapes that I consider to be good but all my works are important to me. *Intellectual Properties* is probably one of the most significant pieces of work for me because it allowed me to make a leap and learn something about making film. That piece was 1984/'85. It was made in America, in Boston. The idea was that I'd go to America to find out everything there was to know about America in a few weeks and then write the script. In the end I was there for about a year, on and off, backwards and forwards. But it was a very enjoyable thing to make and for me, it was quite a successful piece of work. It was originally designed as an installation. The idea was to have a 6-monitor installation. Because it's in 6 chapters, people could visit each chapter in any order they wanted. The order in which they visited these chapters would influence their understanding of the film as a whole. The original idea was to use laserdisc to play it back, that technology had just come through at MIT, but of course it turned out to be too expensive. So, I had to use video tape to do it.

JH: So, you used it as a linear piece in the end?

JA: *Intellectual Properties* lasts 60 minutes, but actually there's probably, only about 10 minutes of footage in it. Formally, the film was about the way sound qualifies image. In fact, most of my work is about that one way or another. I was always interested in the way that you read a painting or a photograph in terms of what it's called or whatever the caption is underneath it. So, for example you could see a picture of yourself and it could be "Mother of one saves neighbour in fire" or something or it could say "Mother of one murders child". Because of its caption you could read the picture in a completely different way. I extended that idea into a video really so the soundtrack would qualify your understanding of the image.

JH: It was produced in the States, but did you make it in the States as well?

JA: Not all was shot in the States, some of it was shot here in Newcastle, but most of it was shot in the States and we edited it back in England.

JH: How did you manage with that because there were different formats then? Was it in U-Matic or was it Beta?

JA: Well, it was actually shot on 16mm.

JH: So, in your career, have you worked across media a lot?

JA: Yes. To begin with, I had started out using reel-to-reel black-and-white tape moving on to U-Matic, which became an almost universal format for education and video arts, but of course everybody aspires to shooting film. My son now, even though he could shoot on high definition video, wants to make his final student film on the 16mm. Because of the Hollywood connotation or whatever, everybody wants to shoot on film, apart from George Lucas of course. I happened to get a big enough grant to do that. I just thought, "Why not? Maybe I will learn something about that craft" So, it was all shot on film and edited on 1-inch video back in England. So there was no problem about different broadcast standard because it was telecined back to PAL.

JH: Did you have a large amount of funding for that project?

JA: For me I did, yes. The first grant I got for a tape called *Sensible Shoes* was £250 from Northern Arts in 1983. I was very grateful for that at the time. But the first grant I got from Massachusetts Arts Council was for $12 000, which to me, seemed like a huge amount of money. It still does actually. That just allowed me to do something that I've never done before. I suppose in a way, I had to scale up my thinking in order to meet them. But there's still the usual thing with independent filmmaking, a lot of people work for nothing etc, but it did allow me to travel around and spend some time really thinking about what I was doing and writing.

JH: Looking at your CV, you've worked across a lot of different areas and you've constantly made things. You've constantly been involved with exhibition. Is that aspect of your work an important part of what you do?

JA: Yes, over the last 20 or so years I've made hundreds of films, but of those, a handful are what you would call video art. The rest of them have been commercial work of all different kinds, including interactive DVDs and CD-ROMs. I've worked on a whole spectrum of commercial work and done a lot of corporate work, but I've only ever made video art that I received a grant for. So, I guess by inclination I didn't apply for many grants or I wasn't very successful in applying for grants. In that sense, I probably regard myself as a failure as a video artist because I only managed to make a handful of work. There's probably less than 10 hours work in total.

JH: One could say that about a lot of artists. Personally, I don't see that as being an issue of failure, because you are key to the practice. The practice that you made was key. You won the award at the San Sebastian festival for Sensible Shoes, is that correct?

JA: Yes that's right. The work has won quite a few, different awards. I think one of the reasons that I haven't produced that much work is because I developed a lot of the work in my head before I made it and sometimes I would come to the end of that head-work and think, "You know what? That idea's just not good enough, so I'm not going to bother making it." Personally, I would prefer that, rather than make some stuff that I think is rubbish. I don't mean to sound arrogant at all about that. It's just a personal thing. I really thought some things through, and then in the end, just thought "Well you know what? That's not a very good idea really. Maybe I shouldn't do it".

JH: I don't think it necessarily qualifies to say that an artist needs to produce a lot of work to be successful, because a lot of the time there are key art works that are recognised and that's maybe one or two. I think that is what you've made. Can you talk a little bit about the Basement Group and how you started that off, going back to that early period?

JA: I was a student in what was then Newcastle Polytechnic in 1976 till '79. It was a really exciting time then. This new kind of video technology was coming through and there was a lot of talk as to why people were making art works to sell. People were questioning what all that was about and whether or not that was what art should be about. There was a lot of debate going on and for me it was probably one of the most exciting times of my life.

I'd worked on building sites for 4 years before going to college and this world that I didn't even know existed just opened up for me. It was unbelievable and I felt so privileged to be able to do whatever I wanted for 3 years. So, there was all that debate going on at that time about what was art and it was also the time when performance started coming through. It was questioning why art should be worth a lot of money when the performance was just ephemeral and then it was gone.

Some students before me, Keith Frake and a couple of other people, had set up something called Ayton Basement down in Newcastle Quayside. That kind of died away and Roger Wilson who was then the head of the course that I was on suggested that we try and revive it. So, myself and someone else started the Basement Group and then other people joined and that, in one form or another, has been going for over 20 odd years.

It's now Locus+. My connection with Locus+ now is only that I am on the Board of Trustees. All the work and inspiration is done by Jon Bewley and a few others. It's run by a handful of people really. But, for me it's a really important organisation now. It helps artists of all different kinds develop their work. When you are in the middle of something at any given time it's really hard to see what's actually happening but looking back that really was an amazing time.

London Video Arts was starting up and lots of people doing things that they were really excited by. Some key things that went on when I was a student were events that went on in Coventry and Wolverhampton that we went to as students. We would take part and compare ideas with other students. Steve Littman was one of them. Steve Partridge was teaching at Coventry at the time, it was a very exciting time.

I think Steve partridge was really instrumental in helping create that critical mass of people that were trying to do stuff and try things out with the experiment. It was actually very basic equipment but people were really trying to push the borders of what it could do and so on.

Personally, when I was a student, I saw a lot of 16mm work, which I guess you could describe as formal work. It always disappointed me. I always thought, "Something is going to happen! Is something going to happen?" Then the film was over and nothing had happened. So what was that all about? I don't know, but of that whole genre of work, one

piece sticks out for me and that was *Wavelength* by Michael Snow. One of the reasons I love that film so much was because it actually had a narrative in it. That's what I was interested in really, telling stories.

I knew that I didn't have the skill or the resources to make films like the BBC or Hollywood, so what I tried to do was figure out a way of making films that nobody could compare to the BBC and say, "Well they are not very good. I think it's not as good as the BBC". That was a big part of my thinking. I was trying to make pieces of work that nobody would want to compare them to broadcast work because it wasn't broadcast work.

Also, I seem to remember around that time there was a big complaint from video artists because none of that work got on TV. There was that debate about whether they were not technically good enough quality. That argument has gone away now because anybody can pick up a camera and make a broadcast standard piece of work, but is the work shown on TV? No. But, who cares?

Now, if you really want to get work out there, there are tons of ways to do it: you can publish your own DVD's or publish work on the Internet and so on. So I guess now, even though, I am not really involved in it, it must be an equally exciting time for students to come through because of the real possibilities of distribution that didn't exist before. For me, the issue is not making work. The big issue is distribution. If you can't distribute your work you might as well not bother making it really. Now we can.

JH: When you talk about distribution, the concept of streaming means it is possible to distribute work in the same conceptual way as broadcast. But with broadcast, there were not many chances for artists to have anything on TV. Has scale ever been important to you in terms of the way that you present the work, in terms of the place or the context in which you put it?

JA: Well, I started out being a performance artist and performance art is very ephemeral. So, we'd go down to the Basement Group and put something on. Maybe 20 people might show up or 100 people or 150 people. So you do this thing. You'd put a lot of work into it and then it was over. That's why I gave up performance and did video, because you can put a lot of effort into making a film and it can be shown all over the world. The outlets then, and now, were festivals. So, the work did get shown all over the world. For the most part though, I've got no idea what environment it was shown in or who would see it. Sometimes I did get to travel with it and meet people, like going to Berlin Film Festival and so on. That was fine, but most of the time it was sent out to events by LVA or some other distributor, and I would just get a letter saying it was shown here, there and there.

JH: Do you think it was probably projected most of the time?

JA: It probably was, yes. It depended on the venue I suppose.

JH: But it didn't matter to you? It didn't matter as long as it was seen? For some artists, it was important whether it's on a monitor or whether it was projected. Different people had

different ideas about that. You didn't mind that? You were keen for it to be seen and it didn't really matter about the size of it when it was shown?

JA: When I made the earliest work, there was no such thing as video projection, or it was so expensive that nobody could do it. These days it's different of course. But I've actually only seen *Intellectual Properties* projected once at the Tyneside Cinema in Newcastle and it is a different experience. But, as far as I was concerned when I was making it, you watched video on a TV and that was that. In terms of an installation though, there's much more of a consideration about environment and so on but if people wanted to watch my stuff in their front room, I would be quite happy about it.

JH: I am interested in the shift between what you've described as "formal film" during that period of time. I am sure there were a lot of students at that time who saw all of that work, and particularly Michael Snow's piece, which was key and still is key because it questioned, through narrative, that issue. It questioned that shift from the formal, but there were blurred areas. I am interested in that narrative because it was an experimental narrative. It was not narrative in the conventional sense. It was something else.

JA: It was certainly about telling stories but in a way, there was always a formal aspect to the work as well. Maybe it was what was possible with the technology or it was what this device would make the audience think at this particular time. A very early work that I got an opportunity to make was called *Stories.* At the time, the cameras that we used at college, you couldn't point at a bright light because you would get a burn mark [on the pick up tube]. That was a big issue. So, just after I left college I got an opportunity to make this piece called *Stories* at a proper TV studio with proper big broadcast cameras on pedestals, which you could point at a light. So, I had a light bulb in shot just because I could do it. In terms of narrative it added to the ambience of the piece, but partly it was the fact that I could do it.

I guess a lot of people were doing whatever they could with the technology at that moment, including threading the tape through a few machines or whatever. We were trying stuff out and trying to see what we could get away with.

JH: With the issue of narrative you were aware of the formal work. Seeing the Michael Snow piece presumably triggered the idea that you could make moving image artworks that had an experimental narrative at the core rather than it being a formalised core?

JA: A film that was about pulling focus, that lasted 20 minutes, really didn't interest me at all because that was just an idea that you could incorporate into a narrative in 10 seconds. That's not really interesting at all. But, to incorporate those ideas into a narrative that would affect the audience and so on, then that is interesting. My feeling was always that people love being told stories, and that's universal. It's always been true and it always will be true. But, the stories that I wanted to try and tell couldn't be conventional narratives. They couldn't be conventional because that invites comparison to a standard that I couldn't achieve. So, I had to take a different line on a narrative and try and tell stories in a way that Broadcast weren't doing. I mean things like cutting up time and so on and so on, which became hugely mainstream after the success of Pulp Fiction. But, that idea is not a

new idea. Tarantino managed to do that very successfully, but video artists had been playing with that idea for a long time.

The other big obsession with me, as with I think a lot of video artists, was time and memory. I was interested in playing with the memory of the audience in terms of the piece of work. So, there might be a piece of narrative that later on you would hear something that made you reflect back on that piece of narrative and re-evaluate it. That's what I was trying to do in *Intellectual Properties*.

JH: You went to college in Newcastle, so did Stuart Marshall teach you?

JA: Yes, Stuart was teaching there then. He was a very encouraging figure, who would flit in and out of the place because I think he lived in London. He gave the most amazing theoretical lectures, but it wasn't until later that I found out that he wrote as well. He never really advertised that fact. In a way, you take people for granted. The people are there and you know them and you don't think about what their reputation is. You only think about how they are relating to you in that selfish student way. You only think about how they are helping you.

Another really influential figure on me was Roger Wilson, who was the course leader at that time. The help that he gave me was incalculable but very simple. He gave me the keys to the video studio and allowed me to go in there 24/7. I couldn't have asked for a better piece of help from anybody really. It just allowed me to play around, because in truth, there weren't that many people around who knew enough about video to teach me anything. So, that opportunity to play really was really important.

JH: When you say video studio, does that mean that you had access to editing facilities and things like that, or was that the live recording event?

JA: No, there was no editing at that time**.** As a student I made a few installations, which we showed at other colleges and so on. In my own way I thought they were really successful and they really did push the boundaries of whatever available technology there was.

JH: Those pieces included video?

JA: Yes, one piece I could talk about is an installation called *Kick in the Eye (or Satori in Japanese)*. It takes a monitor with its picture compressed down to a line so there is a single horizontal line across the screen. That single horizontal line contains the whole picture. Then that monitor is turned on its end so it becomes a vertical line. On either side of that were 2 monitors, which went on and off alternately. They were showing Japanese prints, like Hokusai's prints for example. The image was clicking on and off using an ARP synthesiser to switch the video signal to one and then the other.

It was shown in a completely darkened room and people were given no information. They just came in, sat down on the floor and started looking at the installation. Quite naturally they would look from one side to another, from one monitor to the other, then all of a sudden instead of moving their head they might flick their eye. When they did that,

because of persistence of vision, (or actually another physiological phenomenon which I cannot remember the name of), their eye flashing across that single line, which contained a whole image, the image would suddenly appear in mid-air. It's quite an extraordinary phenomenon really, and that's why it was called *Kick in the Eye.* You could see people jump.

JH: It hovered did it? It was like an optical thing?

JA: Yes, it would only be almost subliminal really, but once you'd figured it out, you could do it at will, by just flicking your eyes. You can see a similar phenomenon if you see an LED light in the darkness and flick your eyes. It's a similar kind of idea. I came across that by accident because we had a TV that wasn't working properly. It took a few minutes to warm up and while it was doing so, there was the horizontal line. One day I just happened to see this image and that's how the work was born.

JH: Where was that shown?

JA: It was shown at a few places. It was shown at Newcastle, Coventry and Wolverhampton. I still think it's a very interesting piece.

JH: Was there any critical response to your work? Or was there a critical dialogue, or any writing at the time, that related to what you were trying to do as an artist?

JA: I am almost ashamed to say this, but I'm not that interested in theory. In a way, I always saw that as the job of other people. It's a personal belief, but I think that, for a large part, art is sucked out of instinct. Take stuff out the Zeitgeist and so on, I don't really think about "Well, this is how the theorist is going to analyse this piece of work". The truth is, you put a piece of work out there, and there have been quite a few dissertations written on *Intellectual Properties* for example, see the critique and you think, "Wow! Where did you get that from?" Once you put it out into the world, then it's for other people to interpret. The other truth is that while I was a student, I was a Fine Art student not a filmmaker. I didn't know anything about filmmaking.

JH: Do you see that as separate discipline then?

JA: Yes, I do. Because I've learnt my craft over all these years, I know there is a skill and a craft to anything. It's one thing having ideas and it's another thing being able to execute them in the way that you want to execute them. With the early work that I did, we didn't have any editing facilities anyway, so there was no demand for editing skills. People might have produced work by doing crash edits and stuff like that, and that was an accepted practice because there was nothing else we could do. I didn't learn to direct, edit or write for years after that. I learnt that in a commercial environment.

But, in terms of theory, some years ago I was a fellow at the Saltzburg Seminar, which was a really interesting experience. The seminar title was *Do Films Matter?*. There were quite a lot film theorists there and there was a big debate. Actually some film theorists I've got a lot of respect for. But, there was a huge debate as to being a practitioner and "who cares

what you say about my films or any other films? That's not going to influence the way we carry on making films. The way that we carry on making films is to pooling the ideas that are around us, not by reading a book." In a way that's oversimplifying the matter, because there is a grammar that you can learn, and rules that you can learn and rules that you can break. But, theory never really concerned me that much.

JH: I think for some artists it does and for some artists it doesn't. The question is interesting because regarding your work; the concept of narrative is an interesting issue in avant-garde or experimental film and video. It's an area that has not really been explored. There are lots of uncertainties there.

JA: When people write about your work, if you see that piece of writing, the only thing I think is, "Do I agree with what they are saying? Did they like it?" and if they don't like it, "What are they writing about it for?" Once the work's done, it's done. Whatever anybody wrote about anything that I made, it really wouldn't make me think, "Well I better start making things in a different way".

JH: But you were part of the academic context, so there must have been a lot of dialogue, if not in writing, in a verbal dialogue that was important to the practice.

JA: We did have a lot of really fantastic visitors at that time. Tamara Krikorian was one of them. Another key person for me was a guy called Stuart MacKinnon, who worked in independent film. He introduced me to the work of Godard, which was a bit of a double-edged sword really. I loved the films of Godard, but the bad thing about that, was that every idea I came up with, was just like a Godard film. It took me a while to work through that in a way. I took me a while to not think of pieces of work that were not like Godard's work. But I thought that work was so exciting, and full of ideas. I still do really. So the kind of dialogues we were having were because we were looking at stuff and talking about it.

I wouldn't say it was in a very intellectual way, but there was a lot of dialogue going on between the students about making changes and a feeling that something was happening. Nobody really knew quite what was going on, but we knew something exciting *was* happening.

JH: Were you ever part of the LVA crowd in London, or being located in Newcastle, was that where you had your stomping ground?

JA: I knew people who worked at LVA then but Newcastle is a long way away from London. I assumed that there was some kind of social scene going on around LVA but of course, I was up in Newcastle and we were doing the Basement Group, so people were coming to us really.

JH: They came up to you?

JA: Yes, that was very, very exciting. One of the first to come up was Stuart Brisley, regarded by many as the godfather of performance. He came for the price of his train ticket and a cup of tea, effectively. Amazing. For the most part it was performance work that we

showed, but some installation and some video, but of course that was a huge opportunity too and a huge honour that all these people did want to come to Newcastle and put on work.

JH: Did you have a big space then?

JA: It was not a huge space.

JH: But you had a venue?

JA: Yes, we had a venue [called the Basement naturally enough]. Once or twice a week we would put stuff on for a good number of years.

JH: Was it a permanent building or how did it work?

JA: Yes, it was actually a basement underneath an arts lab called Spectre of Arts Workshop, which is an old fashioned term. For a long time we put on regular events there.

JH: Did you just hire the space or did you get core funding?

JA: We rented the space. Our original grant from Northern Arts was fifteen hundred pounds, which we were hugely grateful for. It just developed from there. We were all working for nothing, that usual thing, but then a couple of people, Jon Bewley and Ken Gill managed to get grants so that they could pay themselves some wage and kept it going. So the Basement Group became Projects UK and that became Locus+, which it is now.

JH: So Jon Bewley has been there since the start?

JA: Yes, absolutely.

JH: So was he a founder member with you?

JA: Yes, there was John Kippin, Jon Bewley, Richard Grayson, Ken Gill and Belinda Williams. That was the core group that assembled. People came on board at different times. A guy called Simon Herbert (now living in America) got involved in it and became a key member. I realise looking back, a huge amount of dedication went into the Basement Group. We were all doing it out of love and respect for the work that other people were doing. I don't think we ever really capitalised on it in terms of using it as a showcase for our own work. We were too focused on putting on these events.

JH: Can you talk a bit about when and why you started making work, using video? What the reasons were for that?

JA: I was brought up in a working class family, who believed that what you do is go to school, leave school and get a proper job. That's what I did. I got a proper job. I've had in fact a lot of proper jobs. I ended up working on building sites for a long time. I was 21 or 22. I was engaged and the person I was engaged to was a student at Bath. I think she was

quite ashamed of me really. I'd go down there and stay with her and her college friends. I was this guy who worked on a building site and the truth was, she found that a bit embarrassing. So, she suggested that I go to Art College.

I thought you needed qualifications to go into Art College so I did a night class A level art and then went for an interview at Jacob Kramer College. It was one of the best years of my life. It was just a fantastic place, and a complete revelation for me that these people existed in the world and this is what they did and so on. I had all these romantic ideas about being a painter, but of course I'd never really had any art lessons. I studied science at school and when I went to foundation college I realised that all the other people were really brilliant painters. I realised I would never be one of them. I just didn't have the skill and I would never have the skill.

So, I thought, "Well, I'm going to work with ideas instead." I made things. I made objects and stuff like that. Then one week, this guy called Steve Bell, who was a visiting lecturer, brought in a PortaPak camera. It was just unbelievable. We did all kinds of things with this camera. We did all kinds of stupid stuff probably.

JH: You played with it?

JA: We played with it, yes. We played with it for two weeks. Steve Bell is the guy who turned into Steve Bell the cartoonist. So, thanks to Steve, that's how I got involved in video. It was so exciting.

JH: But you'd seen film work, so was it a special quality that video had that excited you? Was it the spontaneous element? There must have been something about it that was different from film?

JA: Well, when I went to college, I hadn't even used a still camera before. I thought that I would never be able to do film. Why would I be able to do that? My thoughts were just the possibility of making something interesting, that I thought I could do *something*. I didn't know anything about films. I'd just watched telly before then.

JH: I suppose it shared that element didn't it? It shared that with televisual. I suppose it was as familiar to you as maybe painting or other forms. There must have been a familiarity with this moving image thing in the monitor. Maybe it was exciting because you could have access to that?

JA: I suppose at that time, until about 1975, which was when Nam June Paik allegedly bought the first PortaPak in 1974 or 75; the fact was that before then, you watched TV and TV was delivered to you. It was made by other people, by some magical process that I didn't even know anything about. That's why the PortaPak was so amazingly revolutionary. Anybody could go out with that thing and come back with something good, bad or indifferent, but that possibility was there. That had never been there before.

JH: And it was instantaneous. People had had film cameras for years. But that wasn't the same was it?

JA: No that's right. People had been experimenting with Super 8 for a long time and I guess well-off people were making their own cine films at home. But certainly the family that I came from, we didn't even own a Box Brownie never mind a cine camera. But even with that, you were limited to 2.5 minutes. You have to send it away and then you have to have a special projector. With this, you could shoot it and you could see it straight away.

JH: So Steve Bell brought it in for two weeks, and then what happened after that? Did the art college get one?

JA: He went away and then I had to go back to drawing with charcoal. No, the college didn't get one. I guess it was because they were so expensive. There was a great lecturer though, Glyn Thompson, who then allowed me to experiment with still photography, gave me a camera, film stock and so on. So, I carried on using what was available. Then, when I got to Newcastle later on, they did have cameras.

JH: How have your artistic processes shifted with the changes in technology?

JA: My practice has changed. I couldn't call myself a video artist any more, as the last piece of video work I did was in 1995. A couple of other people and myself, started up a multi-media company 10 years ago. It coincided with the last piece of video art work that I did. Shortly after that we started up a company, and prior to that, I took a temporary post as a researcher at the University to develop what was then the first interactive prospectus on a CD-ROM. It actually went on to win a big award in Frankfurt. We beat Microsoft, which was quite extraordinary. There was a life changing moment, which happened for me in about 1993 or 1994.

I'd been doing some research into computers and multimedia, although in a way, I didn't really know what that meant. I didn't really know what multimedia was. For a long time, I'd been making promotional films for the university. I'd been making student recruitment films and stuff like that. To be honest, I was a bit bored doing that.

So, I went to this conference in Edinburgh, where this American guy called Bob Stein walked in. He had a very successful company at the time. I think they were called Voyager or something like that. He walked on to stage with this little wallet and out of it produced a bunch of CD ROMs, which represented the whole output of his company. In fact, I think he talked about the output of General Motors as measured in millions of toms of steel and this wallet full of stuff was the output of his company. It was a very cathartic moment for me.

I just thought, "I am going to give up filmmaking. I've got to get into multimedia. It just seems such amazing and exciting thing to do." So, we made this interactive prospectus. It won this big European award, and we asked the university to set up a company, thinking we would make a good pioneering company. They said no.

JH: Even though you'd won the award?

JA: Yes. But, for what it's worth, there was a lot of politics involved. There were a lot of people working on printing catalogues and prospectuses in print and so on. They were really threatened by this. There was a lot of politics and it all got shut down. So, we secretly set up this company. I was only working part-time, so it was quite legitimate for me, but there was another guy who worked there full time, who had worked with me on this prospectus and at lunch times, we used to run down the road, answer phones and operate this company as almost a part-time hobby really. But, eventually it really started to take off and now there are 15 people working for us.

The company is called Indigo. It is a multimedia company, where we do a lot of Internet work, DVD, CD-ROMs and interactive stuff. We do all kinds of stuff across all kinds of sectors. Ironically, as I've left higher education now, we do a lot of educational work. So, in answer to your question, my practices have definitely changed because the environment that I am working in demands that it does. It changes constantly because the technology and possibilities change all the time. So, for example we've just produced a DVD that's totally interactive. It's not just the menu on the front and the end but as you wade through it. It's an interactive drama and you choose different routes which result in alternative outcomes. But, it's not video art.

JH: There is a question as to what constitutes video art. It's a complex issue. Is it a terminology that's relevant? It might just mean a historical moment in production. But it's also a shifting technology. It always has been.

JA: Yes, it's a good question. How do you define video art? One way you might define it is whether you get a grant for it or not. Does it make money or not? If it makes money it must be something else. You could class Honda adds as video art really. They are beautiful works of art. But of course Honda didn't get a grant for making them. They make them for a very specific reason and that's to sell cars. It's the same with Pop videos. Are they video art? Actually they are there to promote the sales of artists' music. So I don't know. Maybe one way to define video art is by saying it's something that you need a grant for and you don't make any money out of it.

JH: I think there are questions around it and I wouldn't necessarily say, that because something is participatory or interactive or it's on a computer that it's not video art. The technology of video was never fixed. It's been changing over since it was invented, so if you were a real purist, you might say, "It is only video art if it's on a monitor" or "if it's black-and-white." Personally, I think that's not true because it shifted massively. You can still be a filmmaker and be a video artist. There are so many complexities.

JA: At the end of the day, who cares what it's called? It matters if people want to watch it and they can relate to it on some level, ideally more than one level. You could say that *The Simpsons* is video art. At the moment, one of the most interesting programmes on TV for me is *The Green Wing*. It's experimental, but at the same time it's mainstream. I think it's perfectly possible for something to be mainstream art, if there is such a thing as mainstream anymore. If it's not mainstream, but it's on the Internet, then there's enough of a niche core of people to actually give you an audience. Whether that audience can find that work or not, is a different question.

Now you've raised the question, and it is like, "Who cares what they call it?" In a way I'd be happy with the term Experimental Work rather than Video Art because surely that's what you're trying to do. You're trying to experiment and push borders. You're trying to do something different. But, there is some TV which is experimental and some Cinema, which is experimental too.

JH: How else have technologies changed your output in terms in terms of narrative and interactivity?

JA: *Goldfish Memoirs,* which is the last piece I did, was definitely a narrative piece, but again an unusual one because it was partly conceived as a documentary, which involved interviewing various people. It was mainly artists talking about their memories of a photograph that they'd selected and that I'd taken in a particular place. So really, the narrative was staged as if their memories of that photograph were really my memories of that place, which might make sense when you've seen the thing.

It's obscure, but in one sense it's a straightforward narrative, which is really about madness. It was designed for an installation from the outset for the Tyne International Exhibition in 1994 or '95. It was staged as a single monitor piece, immersed in a big tank of what looked like water but in fact was oil. This monitor could still operate even though it was submerged. One day I went in, and a woman was in tears watching this thing. She'd had a sister who was manic. She'd gone crazy. I didn't really care whether anybody else liked it or not, because that person was who I made the film for. Anybody that had experienced madness, either first or third hand would understand what that piece was about.

JH: Was there a soundtrack to it as well?

JA: Yes, there's a voice-over, music and interviews.

JH: But how did the sound work if the monitor was immersed in a tank of fluid? It must have been complex to set it up?

JA: It had separate speakers and the monitor was suspended by steel wire, so it hung in the tank. It was called Goldfish Memoirs. The joke about *Goldfish Memoirs* is based on the myth that goldfish have only got a 10 second memory, so how can a goldfish have memoirs?

But, it was really about the memories of this person who was insane. It's quite common amongst young men, particularly in their 30s, to become manic. That's what happened to me. For a while I became another person. I regard myself as being quite fortunate in the sense that I've got the memories of two people. I've got the memories of me and this other me that lasted a good long while, a year or something. This other me had a really exciting time getting in all kinds of trouble, spending huge amounts of money, running away to live in Florida for a while and jumping off roofs and all the things that you do when you are in that condition.

Really *Goldfish Memoirs* laid the ghost of that for me. It was a very traumatic time for the people around me. I thought I was fine, but the people around me were scared to death. Of course the down side of that mania was then the depression that followed it. Coming out of that second phase, that piece of work was a release from that. Really it's designed for a specific audience that have got some experience of what that means.

JH: Is there a single screen version of the work?

JA: Yes, it was made as an installation but then I released it as a conventional stand-alone tape as well.

JH: I just wondered how the sound was working, whether it linked to external monitors or whether it came through the water or oils?

JA: That's an interesting idea, but no, I added external speakers so that people could stand in front of this tank and hear the narrative, you know and see the monitor.

JH: Was there was a natural movement towards interactivity from the works that you'd already been doing with the multi-layers of narrative or multiple structures? Did the technology evolve at the right time, so you could actually then experiment with that?

JA: Some of the early work I did as student was interactive, but I suppose it was the idea of interactivity or the possibilities of that, which multimedia offered, that made me want to get involved in it really.

JH: How were the early works interactive?

JA: The *Kick in the Eye* installation was certainly interactive because the audience has to do something to make the thing happen. The first performance I did was a delayed video recording using two reel-to-reel video decks. The first was recording, the second was playing back a few seconds later, feeding back to a monitor, which I was drawing crosses on. Then we got this visual feedback going back. There was also audio feedback because I was speaking at the same time as painting. So that was very interactive in that sense. But of course, the kind of work that we are doing now is highly interactive.

JH: Did funding stifle or enable you to realise your ambitions?

JA: There is no question that funding played a part in the work I did, because if I hadn't received any funding, I probably wouldn't have made the work. To be any kind of artist in this country is quite difficult in a way, because it's generally quite difficult to get funding. I definitely found it very difficult to get funding, so apart from a couple of small grants from Northern Arts and maybe something from the Arts Council, I think my major funding came from America.

JH: When you left art school, was applying for funding the first thing you did? How did that work, because as a person making video, it must have been expensive?

JA: I think the first grant that I got was an opportunity to make this piece of work called *Stories* in what I would say it was a proper TV studio in Carlisle. That was the first piece of work that I made after college. Then I got a small grant from Northern Arts to make *Sensible Shoes*. The thing about Sensible Shoes was part of it was pragmatic. The grant was £250. I didn't have much money to shoot stuff and I had virtually no equipment, so I used television adverts as source material for the most part.

For the idea, I was thinking about what people do when they are on their own. When they are really on their own and nobody can see what they are doing, what do they do? What do they think about? It is a question that still fascinates me now. We've all got this public face that we put on instantly when someone else is there, but when we are on our own things are different. That fascinated me. I've seen quite a few examples of people who compulsively hoard things in their house. Generally you associate that with older people, because at some point they die and all their stuff is discovered. I think in fact people of all ages do it.

For me, stuff like that is quite fascinating. *Sensible Shoes* was itself about what this woman was thinking about on her own, watching TV in a flat, just finished with a guy, watching adverts. The formal aspect of the piece was of adverts that at the time were very well known to everybody who might see the piece. But, because of the narrative that was imposed on those adverts, you read them in a completely different way and that was the idea.

So, this piece *Sensible Shoes* won an award at the San Sebastian Film and Video festival. I was approached by the Massachusetts Council for the Arts inviting me to apply for a grant there, which I did and then went out to America to make *Intellectual Properties* and they actually gave me a second grant then to make another piece of work, a feature-length film called *Jamaica Plain*. So, I suppose the honest answer about whether funding stifled or held my work, the answer is yes and no, because the work that I've done was funded but I wasn't very successful in getting any more funding. So, you could argue it both ways, I think.

JH: Did you apply for other funding, to the Arts Council for example?

JA: Yes, I applied various times.

JH: Why do you think it was that you weren't funded?

JA: Maybe the ideas weren't good enough, I don't know. Who knows why? Who knows why you get this job? Who knows why you get the work? Ultimately whatever check boxes people tick, it's on the whim of somebody. It's somebody's whim.

JH: If you had received more funding, do you think you would have carried on being a full time artist, specifically an artist making moving image?

JA: Yes, I think so. If I could have paid the mortgage, I would have.

JH: That's another question. It's always an issue. It's like how funding played a part in the continuation or the realisation of your practice throughout that period, or this period of time, as an artist. And whether or not you supported your work through being an academic, or working in the commercial sector. That becomes quite crucial during the 80's for most artists. There were more artists producing moving image works and there were less teaching jobs. It become much more competitive during that period, I think. For the 80's artists, it was different from making moving image in the 70's. If you started out in the 80's, there were some really crucial questions about surviving when it comes to funding.

JA: Sure, I was like a lot of other people. I found the ways to pay the rent by teaching and working as a freelance editor and director. But, if somebody offered me the money tomorrow to make a piece of video, I would snatch their hand off. No question about it. As for actively going out and looking for grants, I've got too much to do. I like to think one day, I will probably go back and I am pretty sure I will make something called Video Art again, or however we are going to describe it. It might not be until I am 65 though.

JH: Can you just describe how you supported your practice over that period of time?

JA: For 20 years I taught part-time. I taught first at Newcastle Polytechnic teaching in Fine Art, and the media area of Fine Art. Incidentally, I think I got that job originally because shortly after leaving the course, I set up a video company and we used to video weddings and corporate events. I think the Poly was so impressed by that, that they offered me a job teaching. In fact, I think it was one of the first courses to do it.

It was quite visionary of a guy called Tom Bromly at the time, who hived off the media and started the first Media Production course in the country. It was an interesting time because the people who were teaching on that new course were all fine artists. In a way, we had to change our thinking and there was quite a resistance because it wasn't the fine art course anymore. It was about commercial and independent filmmaking and you had different disciplines.

It actually became a very successful course. It was a really interesting course to work on. But I only ever did that part-time. The rest of the time I worked as a free-lance editor / director / writer making corporate stuff. I also did a lot of work for a company called Trade Films that used to make films for trade union distribution and so on, that was a really interesting period.

JH: And that was based in Newcastle?

JA: They were based in Gateshead. It was one of the first Channel 4 workshops. There were actually two in that area. One was Amber Films and one was Trade Films. At the time of the miners' strike we were making loads of documentaries. It was a really interesting time for me and really, I learnt my editing craft doing that work.

JH: Was the workshop collective?

JA: They were called Co-operatives. There were all kinds of politics involved and stuff like that. But, for a lot of the people involved in that Channel 4 workshop, it was a really important change in broadcast media, and they had created this opportunity that wasn't there before. So, it was a really interesting time for me. At first, I was editing and then I was directing and then I was writing, directing, editing.

That's what I still do for the most part. Apart from running the business on a practical side, that's what I do: multi-media authoring, filming, writing, producing, directing, editing and so on. If I'm lucky, and the client allows it, which a lot of them do because their brief is so broad, we can inject some experimental ideas into what is essentially commercial corporate work. We just finished a programme for UK Sport about drug taking in sport. It's quite an epic production of a 90-minute educational DVD for elite athletes, but there are some really experimental ideas that we've been able to incorporate into that. It was great that the clients bought into it. So it's good.

JH: Were there specific facilitators or curators that were important to the exhibition or production of your work?

JA: In a very broad sense, there are a lot of people who without their kind of input and indulgence, things wouldn't have happened the way they happened. The person who gave me the commission to make *Goldfish Memoirs* curated that show and so was a key person. A wonderful French woman called Corinne Diserens . She came over to curate that show. Other key people, in terms of allowing things to happen, were the funding body, Massachusetts Council of the Arts.

People like Steve Partridge are really key in how I managed to do what I was doing. There is no question about that. The work of artists that visited the Basement Group were a great influence and encouragement to me as well. Steve Hawley springs to mind. I really admired his work. I thought it was very inventive and funny and everything that I admired about any kind of work really. But, generally in terms of curators, they didn't really resonate with me. I guess I must be too maverick for curators. What a dusty word.

JH: Looking through your CV, you've had a great number of screenings and shows. The work was seen all over the place during that period when you were making works up until the 90's.

JA: There was a period when people wanted to see that kind of work, and yes, it did get shown all over the world.

JH: Plus the work was purchased. That's really amazing. I don't think that happened to that many people.

JA: I was really flattered that the Museum of Modern Art in New York wanted to buy the work. Not that they paid a great deal for it, but I remember just thinking that it was a great compliment.

JH: Which piece did they buy?

JA: They bought *Sensible Shoes* and *Intellectual Properties* and a couple of other tapes. The best thing in the world is a royalty cheque. You can't have better money than that. So, whenever a royalty cheque popped through the mailbox, for however minimal an amount of money, it was always a nice feeling. Sir Paul (McCartney) must love opening his mail.

JH: Were you aware of works by the previous generation of artists from the 70's period? Did you see their works? Were they visible at the time you were making work?

JA: Yes, there were quite a few events going on in this country at that time. There was Bracknell and other regular events. For a few years there was quite an important video festival on at Biddick Farm, Washington, put on by Brian Hoey and Wendy Brown. That was very influential at the time for me. I was still a student when that was going on. It was a great opportunity to see lots of work. It was quite important and quite pioneering of Brian and Wendy to do that.

JH: They did that for 5 years didn't they?

JA: Yes, it achieved quite a reputation. In Tyneside, at some point, they also had a film festival every year and they were showing video art there as well. So there were a number of things going on throughout the country at that time.

JH: So can you be specific about what ideas and other artists' work influenced your work? Who was inspirational to you? You talked about Godard and you talked about the Michael Snow piece, *Wavelength*. Were there any other specific works or artists that inspired you?

JA: I really liked the work of Steve Hawley and a few others. It sounds terrible to say this but I wouldn't say that any of them influenced the way I was thinking. I didn't want to be influenced. Again, that sounds a bit arrogant but if anybody is really into doing something, they don't want to be influenced by other things.

JH: What about inspiration though, you can be inspired?

JA: Yes, there was certainly inspiration. To see another person's work that you admire is great. There were a few performances that were on at the Basement, which I thought were incredible. To be honest though, inspirational works are few and far between in my view. But, every so often it happens. I really admired the work of Laurie Anderson, for example. But, it's like everything isn't it? If you are interested in buildings or music or books or anything, most of it is just average and then every so often there's this little gem that makes it all worthwhile. Only, I wasn't looking for influences. Occasionally, there were certain people's work I really did admire.

JH: Can you be specific?

JA: Nigel Rolf did a really interesting performance. It was probably the most interesting performance I've seen. He put ropes on his wrist and several members of the audience were asked to hold these ropes. There was a mousetrap around, and I think he was talking

about the way that we use mousetraps to catch and kill mice. There was this narrative that went on and then all of sudden he took this mouse out of the cage. He was going to cut its head off with a knife.

It was really interesting focussing on the reaction of the audience, because they stopped him doing it. Isn't that interesting? He can't have been sure that that's what they were going to do. He was really, genuinely, physically struggling to kill this mouse and the audience was stopping it. Of course, in a way he made you think about the way that we all eat meat and how we kill animals etc. Yet when it came down to it, people instinctively wanted to save the life of this insignificant creature. Maybe he should have done it in an abattoir.

JH: There is a bit of a hypocrisy in that isn't there?

JA: Yes, of course. When I was a student, the work of David Hall and Steve Partridge and other people who were there before me, was very inspirational because they were showing that something was possible. It was inspirational in the sense of, "Well they can do it so can I".

JH: But you must have seen other work when you went to the States? Did you get to see work there or was it not very visible?

JA: Boston has got a massive population of musicians and it seemed like almost everybody I met there was a musician but for the most part, their recreation there seemed to be watching films in a big way. That was the thing that they did. So I did too, I saw tons and tons of movies while I was there.

JH: What sort of movies? Was it Mainstream or Art house?

JA: It was all kinds. A couple that stick out were low budget - Alex Cox's *Repo Man* and John Sayles' film, *Brother From Another Planet.* That was an interesting film. It's about this alien that comes down and can't speak - but the real reason he couldn't speak is completely pragmatic in the sense that John Sayles didn't have the money to hire a sound recording equipment or the crew to operate it. That was an inspiration too as well. We've all got our limitations of budget and resources and so on, but the challenge is what can you do with the resource that you've got. So, we've got one camera, we've got no money, we haven't even got a tripod, and what can we do? As an idea that's really inspirational I think. Just generally the fact that work was going on, that encouraged everybody to do more work.

JH: In terms of dissemination, you didn't mind the scale of what you were doing. You didn't mind whether it was projected or whether it was on a monitor, but have you shown work on television?

JA: No, never.

JH: Is that because it was something that you weren't interested in?

JA: *Sensible Shoes* was really, quite successful and I wanted to show it on television, but then it couldn't be shown because of the copyright issues.

JH: Because you'd used found footage?

JA: Yes, I'd ripped off all these adverts and after that, in one sense, it didn't really interest me that much whether it was on telly or not. As time went by, I actually thought TV was a less and less interesting place to be and in fact even more so now thinking of it. I wouldn't want to work in TV at all.

JH: There are so many other different, more exciting contexts. Blogging is quite interesting at the moment. I saw some when I was in New York recently I saw these amazing blogging works, which were just literally layers and layers of ideas that you can access on the Internet. You just can't do that on TV.

JA: That's right and however obscure or niche your output is, there are a lot of people in the world and there are a lot of people that got access to the Internet and it's quite amazing the way things get found in a viral kind of way. If they are any good and if they resonate with a few people and then they spread like wildfire, it's quite interesting.

A great example of that is Homestar Runner, which I think was really funny and really clever cartoon site. It was a viral thing. All of a sudden, everybody knew about it in my kind of sphere. That was created by two brothers who, when TV saw how successful it was, wanted to buy it and they refused.

Then they made their income by selling DVDs, t-shirts and mugs and stuff like that off the back of this thing. I think it's a perfect illustration of what, 'if you think you are hard enough get on the internet', because if it is good enough, if it does resonate with enough people then nobody can complain about distribution.

JH: Did you collaborate with other artists on any works?

JA: In the sense that in *Goldfish Memoirs,* a lot of the artists who were exhibiting at the Tyne International were kind enough to be interviewed, to take part in it. The whole Basement thing was a collaboration in the sense that we were working for and with artists, although not really to produce our own stuff. The films that I made in America were an incredible collaboration, because I went out there knowing nobody and I was adopted by a bunch of people who introduced me to other people and helped me and so on and so on. I have to say, that even though I will probably never go back to America again, but the American people or the people that I came across in Boston had such an amazing generosity of spirit that I found quite overwhelming actually and forever am grateful to them for that.

JH: What do you believe were the collective goals of the Basement Group around that period of time? Did they change?

JA: I think the goal was always the same. In a way, considering the personalities involved, the whole thing was a remarkable sacrifice of ego to this idea that we wanted to present artists

work. Everybody in the group was an artist in their own right, but they put that into the background in order to make this thing happen and work.

In the end this incredible degree of trust existed and still does between the Basement Group and the artists that were put on there. At all times, every consideration was given to help the artist realise what they wanted to do and that is still true of Locus + today. That's quite extraordinary really. I'm not personally claiming any kind of credit for that but that's just the way we were as a group of people.

JH: Did you document the works that came through the Basement Group?

JA: Yes, there's over 20 years of archived stuff, but there is a very sad story attached to it. Locus + applied for New Opportunities Funding to digitise all the stuff. They didn't get the money, but Locus + made a deal with Sunderland University to house the material with the intention of digitising it at a later point. It was housed in a building, which some burglars broke into and set on fire. It was a really bleak day. It was really like somebody had died.

JH: So was it destroyed?

JA: As it turns out that while some of it was destroyed, some of it was only partially destroyed. It is possibly recoverable and a lot of the stills photography still remains, although I don't think I can say how much of it remains. The Basement Group was essentially started in 1977, and from that outset, recordings were made, in one way or another, of all the work, including all the performances and all the events that went on. It was either on tape or using still photography.

So, as you can imagine it's a huge archive. Unfortunately, when the building was broken into, a lot of the material was destroyed. At the moment, we don't know what has been saved and what hasn't, but there's a definite plan to stage a retrospective next year in Newcastle.

JH: They got funding and everything to do that I suppose?

JA: Yes, they've got funding now. Actually, I think it's going on tour as well. It should be quite interesting because there's so much history there.

JH: Are they going to restage the works?

JA: Richard Grayson, who was originally a member of the Basement Group is curating the show, so he is assembling all the material and whatever way he is going to present it. I would imagine that they would probably do some new interviews of the artists that were in the Basement Group. So that's interesting.

JH: So it is still housed in Sunderland is it? Is there anybody sorting it out?

JA: It's been made safe. The insurers have agreed a settlement. Some of the work can be restored. I think it'll have a reasonably happy ending. Just as a by the by almost, but the

other area that Locus + has got deeply involved in now is publication. In fact they've got a really incredible book coming out on Chris Burden's work. It's an absolutely beautiful book. I mentioned before the kind of trust that's been established between artists and us. Chris Burden wouldn't do that book with anybody else other than Locus+, which is a great compliment to the organisation.

JH: Are you still involved with Locus+?

JA: I am on the Board of Trustees, as is John Kippin, who was another founder member.

JH: What's John Kippin doing now?

JA: He is a professor now at Sunderland University. He still does his own work. I think largely involved in research.

JH: What about Belinda Williams is she still making work?

JA: I've lost touch with Belinda. She might still be working with a community video company called A19. I think she still is working, yes. Broadly speaking they work on community projects using film and video.

JH: What were your main concerns, in terms of subject matter, aesthetic considerations or content of the work itself, particularly with the works that you've cited as being important?

JA: My great love has always been editing. I think the key to great directing is to assemble really talented people around you and then you don't need to do that much, but editing is where the power lies, I think. So, if there is an aesthetic in my work, it's in the edit. I work with people whose job it is to be able to write beautifully and frame well and record really high quality sound and so on. If you can explain the vision of why the piece of work is the way it is, I trust those people to create that kind of visual aesthetic. The rest of it is down to telling the story and that is done in the edit. My great concern has always been that.

To be honest, I was always more concerned with the narrative than the visual in the sense of the audio narrative. In fact, my thinking was leading towards writing books. My latest thoughts regarding work I might do, would be some kind of interactive novel, but again not in some kind of cheesy interactive way, but in a way that I would hope had never been done before. That idea really interests me. There are many, many ways to visit and revisit a piece of work.

One of the things that I hope for in all the work that I did was that people would want to watch it more than once, but with the idea of the work being somehow interactive, they could have different outcomes. It really interests me, in the sense that actually you could view the same work many times, but maybe never see it the same way twice. So, if there's an aesthetic that I'm interested in, I think it's the aesthetic of the written word. That's largely what I'm interested in now. I do a lot of writing for Indigo and to be able to craft a piece of writing is really quite important for me.

JH: Do you think that's similar to performance where the audience would view it and it would be different each time? Do you think that's the same with writing?

JA: I suppose you could say that. In a way that's what is interesting about performance or theatre. It would never be the same twice.

JH: But isn't that the same with the written word? If you are thinking of the narrative, we are talking about fiction aren't we?

JA: It's fiction yes. To be able to revisit something, and yet for it to not quite be the same and at the end of it the way you think about that thing is not the same either, that's a really interesting idea for me. You go through what seems to be the same experience but the outcome is different. Maybe that's what life would be. So, for me that's all I can say is really interesting for me, whether it's interesting for anybody else is a different question.

JH: But what about subject matter because you've obviously made works that have narrative and you described a couple of them, but is there anything that you found as a general train of thought through the works?

JA: I don't know whether I've really thought about it that much to be honest, but if I am forced to think about it now, I think Gender is probably a train of thought. Even though it's not overt in the work, I think that's always been an interesting area for me to consider. I suppose in its broadest sense, in the sense of, 'How do other people think?' and 'How do women think?' but, maybe it's not about gender at all. Maybe it's just about the way that other people think. Do other people see the world in the same way that I do? No, probably not.

So, how do they see the world and how can you construct a narrative that reflects their view of the world? My view of a great piece of art, whether it's video or books or theatre or music, is that it requires an interpretation and if it can't be interpreted then it's bad art and if doesn't need interpretation then it's bad art as well. I think part of the joy of experiencing any kind of art form is the interpretation of the work into your own life experience. That's why, when you throw a work out in the world, it is going to be interpreted differently by different people because of they bring their own life experience to it. Largely speaking, my work is delivered in the form of a voice-over narration, which for the most part, reflects a train of thought by one or more people. So, it's an attempt to test that train of thought with the audience and see if it strikes a cord with any experiences that they might have had. If it strikes any cord whatsoever,

I guess that's what anybody is trying to do if they make a piece of work. Again, the reason I haven't produced that much work is that I'll test these ideas out in my head first, and then come to the conclusion whether to make it or not. In recent times it's very, very, very hard to resist the idea of making work about being the age that I am. I don't really want to do that. It seems too obvious. But, to be able to make a piece of work about the experiences that life so far has brought with me, then that's interesting. It would not be to overtly talk about what it's like being old.

Funnily enough you were talking about inspiration before and the person that's really inspired me recently is actually my son who's just finishing as a film student at Sheffield. I'm not sure where it comes from but a few years ago decided to teach himself to play the guitar and write songs. I would say this, but I think his lyrics are unbelievable. I think that he's really got something special.

For me, it's an inspiration to do work, because what he's doing is telling stories. He is doing it in a different way and he is doing it about being the age that he is, largely speaking. Actually some of the things that he is talking about are a bit more universal than that. So, to try and answer your question, and it sounds a bit poncy to say it, but if my work is about anything it's about the human condition. You could say that about any work though couldn't you?

JH: Not necessarily. When you look at it historically, looking at your contexts and what you'd said earlier about that situation of formal art works, you were creating a shift in thought from that period. It's always relative to other things. None of us work in a vacuum. We are all influenced by all kinds of things, including TV or cinema or music or the environment.

JA: Yes, that's true. In fact, probably the films that interest me most and that have inspired me the most and that I've got the biggest collection of, are documentaries. They are by and large documentaries about people. People are what I find interesting. For a project that we've just worked on about gender, we were interviewing more than a 100 people. There was one person in particular that we interviewed who was a black guy. He was born in Britain but he went to live in America. He was a marine. He looks like a bouncer but is a 24-hour care nurse for people who need absolutely 24-hour care. Whether you are interested in nursing or not, this guy could inspire anybody I think. It's unbelievable how a person can be that way. He is just incredible. So maybe that's what I am interested in: people and what are the stories they have to tell. Whether or not I will get around to tell any stories any more I don't know.

JH: Where was this Role Model piece distributed? Is it on DVD?

JA: I guess thousands of them would be sold to businesses, Connexions, Partnerships, the LSC, the DfES.

JH: Is it like a learning package?

JA: Yes, it's an educational package. What's happening now, is that there are various pieces of legislation in place that mean employers have to embrace this. They can't just play it lip service and say, "Yes, we are an equal opportunity firm". So a lot of this material in different ways addresses these issues about gender and cultural equality and diversity and so on, in various forms: dramas, interactive CD-ROMs, Internet stuff, printed materials, training workshops and so on. There is a complete package of stuff that has achieved great recognition. Right now there are road shows going all over the country where people are attending these workshops and getting hold of these materials.

JH: Do you think you are a political artist?

JA: In some senses, there are definitely parts of *Intellectual Properties* that are political and actually the things that it's talking about were happening in America. They are the same things that are happening in America right now. So, I suppose I have to say that I am political, although I wouldn't say I'm overtly political.

JH: You've made visible stories of individual people. We are expected to see things in a particular way when things are shown televisually or in the media, so we never get a true picture of what individuals are really thinking. What you've done is to actually take it into that direction where you are making those individual stories visible across a wide spectrum. In a political sense, you are reacting against all that is relative to us a wider cultural context.

JA: Yes, I am definitely political with a small 'p' that's for sure. One project that we worked on involved interviewing several sports people who had tested positive for drugs. One of them was only 17. He was an England International rugby player, but because it was so young, I interviewed him and his father. The interview with his father was really traumatic, and between the lines I could see his father was really guilty about what he'd done. The whole experience was really quite fascinating. It was fascinating to let this guy tell his story and see the raw emotion that that guy displayed. He actually broke down a couple of time in the interview. Part of me is thinking "How sad? That poor guy!" while another part of me was thinking, "This is great!"

I strayed away from the crush I think, but I am actually completely fascinated by interviewing people. I am fascinated with the idea of interviewing people and the idea of putting their stories together somehow in a particular way. I guess everything is political in a way. When you find out people's view of the world, sometimes it surprises you.

For example, if somebody suddenly reveals in an interview that they are incredibly racist for example and yet on the surface they don't betray that at all, or they just let something slip that makes you think "Oh Wow! This is what they are really thinking?" You trying to make a decision about "Well are we going to expose that?" by asking them some more questions or by allowing that to be in the finished edit.

JH: Yes, it's a definition what political is, but I think interviewing people, even with this situation, there are always agendas and the language of interaction is always interesting and how people react.

That's why I say to people, 'It's informal. Of course you're sitting in front of a camera, while I am sitting behind the camera. I am not sitting with you, so of course there's an interaction there already. There's an intervention there that you can't avoid. How many interviews have you done? Hundreds?

JA: Hundreds, yes. In fact maybe one of the starting points for that fascination was with *Goldfish Memoirs*, which involved trying to lead people through an interview and getting

them to say the things that I wanted them to say. I realised then that there is a great skill in that. I'm really interested in that skill and how to use that skill in order to get people to reveal their true selves. I suppose part of the trigger there is getting them to do that. Sometimes that can be quite difficult.

JH: Yes it depends what you are talking about I suppose. If there was a difficult subject matter like the young man and his father, that's the first time he'd ever been interviewed as well. It's like sort of psychoanalysis in a way.

JA: Yes, although there were probably 9 people in the room, lawers and representatives and so on, but when it came down it there were two people - me and him, he completely forgot about everybody else. So that was a really interesting experience.

JH: Is that on another educational package?

JA: Yes, that's a DVD that's going out to thousands of elite athletes and clubs all over the country. It's about anti-doping and sport at league level because up until now athletes haven't really been educated about that. So, they end up taking tons of supplements, which turn out to be contaminated with Nandrelone for example. Then they go "Well I didn't know", but actually it's tough. They are still positive and therefore banned.

When you get to that level, you test positive and it's the end of your career, or it can be. So, it's a very, very important initiative by UK Sport to make sure that people can't say "Well I didn't know". Now they will know. That's been fascinating to work on because it involved the interviewing loads of athletes at quite high levels and about how they feel about drugs and that argument about should there be drugs in sport, why don't just legalise everything etc. That's been a year-long project.

JH: Did you set the questions for that?

JA: Yes, I wrote it, directed it and edited it. Part of that of course, as with a lot of these kind of programmes, you have to become a brief expert on the subject. It involves doing a lot of research and actually knowing everything there's to know about drugs in sport. So, it's been a really great programme to work on. I am really quite proud of it.

JH: How many of those did you in the end?

JA: Well, I am always working on three or four projects all at the same time, so this year I've done about 7 films.

JH: Thinking back, do you think you had any ideological reasons why you started to use video apart from the fact that you almost stumbled into it? You said that you came across it accidentally and it was just perfect for what you wanted to do, but do you think that there was an ideology behind it in terms of your use?

JA: Honestly, I don't think so. Probably, when I first started and when I was working at the studio, I didn't even know what the word 'ideology' meant. I was much more naïve. I

thought, "This is a way that I can express myself". It was basic as that. It was nothing more sophisticated than that.

JH: What about now?

JA: I still see myself as a naïve really. The motivation is still the same. This is a way that I can express myself and I am being paid to do it. In the end, there's a brief from the client and there's a target audience and that's who I'm talking to. It doesn't matter whether it's a film about how to play snooker or an NHS training film or a bunch of us in a basement. These are people I am talking to with this thing.

Last year, there was a big Tall Ships event on in Newcastle. I edited a film that was projected on the Baltic when all the ships were leaving. There were probably 300,000 people watching that film. I thought, "Well all it has to achieve is some kind of wallpaper against music."

It was a spectacle. There was nothing deep about it really, but yes it had to perform a certain function for the audience that must have had the biggest cross-section ever. It was just speaking to an audience and trying to say something.

JH: When you were making the works, did you feel that you were responding to part of a larger international movement, and if you were how would you define that?

JA: I definitely felt I was part of a movement but I think that that movement was driven by technology. I was always a bit disappointed that in general terms artists seemed to be trying to emulate the latest effects that they'd seen on Top of the Pops a few weeks before. Technology was always driving that medium and it still is really. In a way, that's the only movement that I recognise.

I don't see any ideology.

I think there were probably a few groups of people doing stuff. There were a few political groups. Especially because at that time there was the miners' strike and all that, so there were definitely people doing really highly political stuff using the technology that was available. But, in terms of the art, I don't think that there was anything. Can I ask you that question? Did you ever feel that you were part of an international movement?

JH: I think what you've said is very interesting because you are one of the first artists that has said that regarding issues around the development of the technology. I would agree with that definitely. I make participatory works and when I was doing my PhD, I was developing ideas in an intellectual research context, which included searching out other people doing the same sorts of things.

Despite there being nobody that I could find in the UK, I found an international tribe, a collective of artists, if you like, doing similar things, or at least covering similar ground and using similar technologies. So, the technology is important. It's an under-explored notion

that it drives the international movement. But, I think it's to do with tribes, personally. That's my view.

JA: I think it's very easy to track the development of video art against the technology. It's obvious. I think actually, if you are talking about groups and groups with any kind of political motivations, I think in a sense women were a lot more fortunate because you could hook into a movement that definitely was going on. Blokes could just sit on the sidelines and watch that happening. If you were a man and wanted to be political, then it probably had to be about party politics.

JH: It couldn't be an autobiography, was that not recognised or the idea of oneself in the works?

JA: Yes, a lot of artists explored self.

JH: But you think women tended to have that niche market? In which case, there would be a gender issue with that.

JA: Yes. I was not jealous but I was slightly envious of the fact that women had some real issues to get hold of and deal with. Men just had beer and skittles.

JH: You mean in terms of what was generally expected?

JA: Yes. Even now, if you go to the pub with a bunch of guys, they are not going to talk about their inner feelings, they are not really going to talk about anything like that. It's very rare, apart from times of extreme stress like a separation or when you really get down to it and have an under-the-skin "What the fuck am I going to do now?" conversation.

JH: Do you think that's the same for your son's generation?

JA: I don't know. I've had some great conversations with my son. But, these are very general statements. What you could say was happening at the time, was some kind of democracy taking place in terms of acquisition of technology, in order to say something to the world. That's continuing now to such an extent where anybody can do it.

In this country, the most sort of impoverished person can make a film if they want to. Whether or not that means that there are tons and tons of great films being made, I don't know. Somehow I don't think so, but the fact is that the opportunity is there now and that opportunity's increased since the 1970s and it's a great opportunity.

But, you can't really make a great film if you haven't got anything to say to the world.

If you've got nothing to say, don't bother.