



REWIND | Artists' Video in the 70s & 80s Interview with Mick Hartney

Interview by Maggie Warwick, 22nd February 2007

MW: Which of your works do you consider to be the most important and why?

MH: Most important to me is *Orange Free State*. It's the longest piece I've done. It was one of the first and I think it's the most strongly felt tape. I made it in a state of sustained anger. It says the most about video, but about people and power and relationships. I'm not sure if it's the one that's been the most successful or popular; but it's my favourite.

MW: It was a very important piece of work for me, certainly. When you made it at that time and you say you made it in a state of extreme anger. That's not a common indicator in your other works, I don't think?

MH: No, I'm not a naturally angry person. I get angry about certain things, and at that time I was angry about apartheid. I was angry about prejudices of various kinds. I was angry about tyranny, so I decided to be the tyrant in the tape. I thought, "Well you might as well take on that role".

MW: Are there other works that are important to you and that weren't necessarily that widely acknowledged?

MH: *States of Division*, has had a bit of a come back recently. I gather it's been shown in various places and I am very pleased about that, but at the time I didn't see it as a particularly significant tape. The production values were far less elaborate than *Orange Free State*. *Orange Free State* was made with a studio, three cameras, a crew, actors, and so on. *States of Division* I made on my own with just a camera and a recorder and something that could mix between the two. That was about as much as you could do at that low level. You could mix a camera with a tape that was running. You certainly couldn't mix two tapes together because you had a synch problem, but you could lock the camera into the tape. So I used all sorts of ways of making the work as elaborate as I could just using that device. It wasn't about that device, but that was a way of getting the kinds of pictures that I wanted and it was black-and-white.

MW: What kind of equipment did you use to make that piece of work? Can you remember?

MH: There were quite cheap black-and-white studio cameras, just single tube studio cameras. I used one of those and probably either EIAJ half-inch open reel, or it may have just been the early days of using Sony U-matic. I think it was Sony U-matic that *States of Division* was made on.

MW: Where were you when you made those works?

MH: Here in Brighton, it was almost literally here in this room. It was in the room upstairs. These rooms were used for video production at the time.

MW: Did you get funding to make them or did you just made them off your own back?

MH: No, I didn't get funding. I took the initial job at Brighton, in the spirit of "Well this will earn me a living while I make the work". Of course the job eventually took over, although I did manage to make some work along the way.

MW: Did you ever get funding for your work from the Arts Council or any other funding bodies?

MH: Yes I did. I think I got £800 once.

MW: Which was quite a lot of money in those days?

MH: It was quite a lot of money but don't ask me what I spent it on. It did allow me to make a couple of pieces of work. After that, I think they decided to put me on the Artist Film and Video Panel so I couldn't apply for any more. But really, I didn't want to play that game of endlessly filling in application forms. I'm not very good at that so really the University of Brighton has been my patron. It's provided the equipment and sometimes the time to make the work.

MW: Can you remember how you came to be a video artist? What was the route that you took?

MH: I'd have to go back to my school days. I was probably in the latter years of school when I was about 17 maybe. I had a slightly older friend who was already at Art School. He lived in Bromley and I lived in Greenwich ultimately, so I used to go out there or he would come to me. Usually I used to go to his place because his family were a lot better off than mine. His father and he used to restore vintage motorcycles and cars and I found that interesting and exciting. He was already at Art School and one day he said, "Do you want come out to Ravensbourne Art School because they are going to be showing some films. I think it might be quite interesting" They showed some films and among them were, *Un Chien Andalou* by Dali and Buñuel. *Entr'acte* by René Clair, Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* and a film called *Ménilmontant*, which isn't as well known as the others. The others of course are classic Surrealist or Cubist or Dada-ist films. *Ménilmontant* was by a Russian Director, Kirsanoff, who was working in Paris at the time. *Ménilmontant* is a suburb of Paris. The film is about two children who witness their parents being killed in a horrific axe murder. It was one of the early horror films. The murder itself was a real tour-de-force of editing. It's a bit like *Psycho*, where you don't actually see any of the horrible scenes but it's all suggested through the camera work and the editing. I suddenly realised that there was a side to cinema that I hadn't seen before, that I didn't see at the local Odeon or on the television. From then on I was hooked on avant-garde experimental films, what later became known as artists' film and all the other different categories that there were for them. That was the earliest moment. That would have been about 1963 or 1964. Later, when I went to University myself, one of the first things I saw was Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*, which was then quite fresh of the editing table. I saw lots of other stuff of course. Besides that, there was the French New Wave, there were the films of Louis Malle and

Goddard and so on, coming out, which I used to go up to the NFT to see. One that had huge impression on me was *Hiroshima Mon Amour* by Alain Resnais. I saw it recently on late night television and reminded me what a stunning film it is. So I knew that there was something here that I was really interested in. But that was film. In 1969 when I was just out of university and wondering what to do with my life, there was an exhibition at the ICA in London called, *When Attitudes Become a Form*. It was a touring show from Switzerland. I think it was the first real survey to hit this country exploring the new genres of Land Art, Process Art, Minimalist Art and Conceptual Art. I think Sol Le Wit was in it. I know Victor Burgin was in it because his *Photo Path*, which was a very important early work for him, was in that show. Not exactly in the show, but near it geographically in a shop or showroom in Piccadilly there was a screening of one of Gerry Schum's productions, *Identifications*, which were short films of artists performing actions. They were little vignettes, or little portraits in movements of the artists performing actions, typical of their work at that time. Among them were Joseph Beuys, Hamish Fulton, Gilbert and George and a lot of the Italian Arte Povera artists in black-and-white. Colour television was very new then, and although they were shot on 16mm film, they were made expressly for television, so they acknowledged the dimensions and the nature of the monitor screen rather than been cinematic movies. That was very early European proto-video art. Later he did make video work. He had a sort of portable video studio in a caravan that he drove around in. Schum was a real pioneer. I know there were people earlier than him who were dabbling. I know Nam June Paik had done work before this of course in America and there were other people in New York and California. But when I saw Schum's work in 1969, I started getting interested in this thing called 'video'. I was beginning to hear about it because various publications were starting to emerge to do with what was called Guerrilla Television. That was the other side of the coin really. It was the socially committed, politically active use of video. A lot of people had got the idea that if you had a video camera, you somehow had a TV station. You were powerful. You had a voice that could be heard and you could make images that could be seen alongside and counter to those of broadcast television. It was a bit optimistic of course. I think it did make a difference in the political sector to small groups of people but it didn't really make a huge amount of difference politically until a long time later. In fact I think just now with there is a connection with the use of phone cameras and the proliferation of video cameras. Only now, I think the real difference is being made in the way news is created and received.

MW: Did you align yourself with the politically active or socially active?

MH: I had a foot in both in camps, if there were two camps. Maybe they weren't two camps. Maybe they merged in the middle. In 1969 when I was looking at Gerry Schum's work Hoppy (John Hopkins) was already organising a video festival in Camden. He was very quick off the mark. He had the Fantasy Factory and he founded IT Magazine and UFO Club. He was a very important figure in the Psychedelic Underground of 60's London, but also in the development of community video. I wavered. I worked in both fields. Jumping forward 5 years to 1974 when I was working for Great London Arts Association, a lot of the clientele who were coming and applying for grants were community video activists. If you played devil's advocate and said, "Well where is the art?" you got a variety of answers, some of which were more convincing than others. GLAA was very much a politically motivated organisation. It wasn't supposed to be but that's the way it was.

MW: You've mentioned that one of the major influences was New Wave Cinema or Avant-garde Cinema for want of a better term, are there other people or other people's work in the video field that you feel have been influential?

MH: Yes definitely, but we would be talking about getting on for 40 years worth of work. I picked up influences from everything. Bill Viola impressed me very early on with those very early works, *Space Between the Teeth* and *Junkyard Levitation*. They were very early works that I saw. They were maybe not early for him, but they were among the first works by him that I saw. I think he made them around 1976/1977. I saw those in Newcastle or in Washington rather, just outside Newcastle at Brian Hoey's festival. You get little glimpses of Paik's installation works, but in reproduction. So I saw them as reproductions long before I saw them for real. On an early trip to America I may have seen Paik's work in the Whitney Bi-Annual. My trips to America always seem to coincide with that which is great for me. One of the big things that happened when I was just beginning to work with video, was the Serpentine show in 1975. Of course that was a chance to soak up all sorts of stuff. It was a pretty shambolic show. A lot of the machines weren't working properly. Work had to be put on Phillips machines. Phillips were always coming out with new formats of video players, which never took off, but they would sponsor some events. They sponsored the ICA Video Tech with their Video 2000 system. Have you ever heard of it since? No. But, all the work had to be converted to that particular format because that's obviously what was in it for Phillips. For Phillips, it was to show off their new machines. It was a similar thing at the Serpentine in 1975. That was a big confluence of the community activists, the political activists and the artists. I think it's the one event where a number of those artists met and saw each other's work for the first time. London Video Arts grew out of that show, out of meetings that occurred and conversations that occurred as a result of that 1975 Serpentine show. It was a very big show. David Hall had some installations in it and people like Tamara Krikorian and Stuart Marshall were showing work in it. It formed a group of half a dozen or so artists who, for a while, represented British Video Art. It was definitely a house style. It was rather an austere house style. It was self-referential. They were making video about video. I suppose my response was to want to break the implied rules of that house style.

MW: When you say "break the rules", can you expand on that a little bit further?

MH: A lot of the work being made in the mid to late 70's in Britain was made under modernist precepts. It was modernist in the sense that it had to be video about video and had to exhibit only those characteristics of the medium, which were thought to be specific to video. That's pure Greenbergian modernism. I didn't realise that at the time but I later realised it. You weren't supposed to have editing really because video is a continuous flow process. You certainly weren't supposed to have music or any extraneous sound. The main focus of the work was exposing video itself as an illusion, so it deconstructed itself. I think that was good in the sense that a lot of theory was written and a lot of very high-level discussion of video as an art form took place. I miss that now. It doesn't seem to be the case now that video had sort of defused into just another medium, but at the same time, a lot of the work was difficult to watch. A lot of it was based on processes, which worked themselves out over time. Once you grasped what the process was, you pretty much

knew what was going to happen and often it did. There wasn't too much intervention by the author or the artists. There was very little humour and not a lot of other emotions either, so it was quite dry. There was a rather dry regime. There were exceptions to this. David Critchley made some very funny works at that time. Some of Stuart Marshall's work was pretty funny as well as being strong. I wanted to work with colour and that was always thought to be a bit sinful I felt at the time. We were fortunate at Brighton to have had one of the earliest portable colour cameras that was affordable. We were one of the first art colleges to have colour video equipment. That was good because I wanted to use colour as another element along with sound and other parts of the picture including the editing composition and so on. It was just something to use, so *Orange Free State* began with wanting to make a three dimensional Cézanne painting. It grew out of that, hence the opening scene, which is a not very well simulated Cezanne still life with lots of oranges in it, but then you realise there are so many other implications to oranges. There was a boycott of South African oranges at the time so it grew out of that as well. The fact that I had to buy lots of South African oranges to make the piece is one of the ironies that we have to live with.

MW: Perhaps you were one of the first artists at that time to use Chroma Key, do you think? You used it in quite a few of your pieces to good effect

MH: Yes, but I didn't use it in *Orange Free State*. There was a studio in another part of the University that was a quite well equipped studio including facilities for Chroma Key. It was not for students to use. There was a professional crew who used it to make instructional videos and training. The idea was that teaching staff and academics would go along to this department called Learning Resources, which also handled the libraries. With help from expert technical people and producers, they would make instructional, educational videos, which would then go on the library shelves and be used by the students. Some of that did happen, but then after a while, the TV studio and the TV production area found it was supposed to be bringing in money. Money shortages hit the university and every area had to try and bring in income. Of course TV production area is one area that is capable of bringing in income, so it had to hire itself out to commercial and other interests, but it did have some slack time and I used the slack time to go in and make my work. That was how I got to use Chroma Key. I didn't use it very extensively, but I did a few experiments with it.

MW: One of your pieces is *Anchored State*. Was that using Chroma Key?

MH: No, that wasn't Chroma Key. *Anchored State* is with a large boat stranded on Brighton beach. It wasn't Chroma Key. I used wipes, circular and rectangular wipes.

MW: So that was done in the editing?

MH: Yes, I did it in the edit suite attached to the TV studio. It was done on one-inch but not using Chroma Key. The source was a portable camera so I wasn't using the studio for it at all.

MW: The work that does use Chroma Key is *Implied Statement*?

MH: Yes, that was an experiment. I'd come across a card in artist supply stores, I expect they still have it. The colour of the card was called 'vivid blue' and it was perfect for Chroma Key. It was the best blue that I've discovered. It was better than the one that the studio used. It gave you a very precise division and I used that to try and layer lots of images or lots of versions of the same image. I always think it's stronger if you lay one thing on another. If you collage moving pictures one on another I always think it's stronger if they are very similar to each other rather than very different from each other. It's a bit like chords on a piano. If you get notes quite close together there is a discord but it's quite a strong sound. I tried to do that quite a lot. So, often I'm taking one set of imagery, copying it, changing the copy slightly and then pasting part of that back on to the original imagery. Then doing that again. *Anchored State* does that. It's using one piece of footage of a boat, early one morning in a storm floundering on the beach, and sometimes almost breaking up along with the people who were there to see it. For a short time, it became a tourist attraction. Nobody was being killed or drowned, but it was quite a spectacular sight. So, I had this footage, but was always thinking, what am I going to do with it? Eventually what I did with it was of turn it into a kind of requiem. But, at the same time, it was a comment on spectacle and on people's need to constantly record things. There were a lot of people snapping cameras. They get turned into little vignettes or little photographs of themselves, which are then laid back on the original footage, which has been slowed down considerably. I did do it in the studio because I was using slow motion.

MW: And can you remember what kind of equipment you had to edit on at that time?

MH: If I was working in the professional broadcast studio, it would be MPex one-inch and I think the studio itself was a JVC studio. It was called Studio 2000. There were one-inch editing recorders and an edit controller. Some of the equipment was custom made for the studio because there was a genius called Roderick Snell working there then. I became very friendly with him. He was very interesting and he was very interested in video art. So he was interested in what people in the art department of the University were doing and what could be done with it. He was very interested with video and what could be done technically so he tried to match technically what we asked of him aesthetically. He was a genius. He left later and his company, Snell & Wilcox, is huge now. It's one of the biggest suppliers of equipment to the broadcast industry. I remember there were lots of different makes and types of equipment cobbled together. It changed all the time. Things were constantly being removed and replaced by other things, by better things. So it was like the boat that's been rebuilt while it's at sea.

MW: What about the way technology has evolved now and the enormous impact that has had?

MH: Yes, now everyone can have the same capacity that that studio had, which seemed like an Aladdin's cave. Of course it was immensely complex. I needed help to use it whereas I could do almost anything on the fairly simple edit suites down here, when I went up there it was a whole different level of complexity. It was a bit like getting out of a Ford Escort and into the Starship Enterprise. Now, I suppose most people can afford to have that capacity in their living rooms or studies.

MH: Most people in developed countries that is. Can you talk a bit about the editing process and your reaction against a certain strand of video, which seemed not to be edited? You wanted to edit your work and that was an important factor?

MH: Yes, I think that a lot of the aesthetic style in video has been to some extent determined by the technology. A feature, or an important strand of early video art was installations in which the content tended to be visitors to the installation. So cameras would look at you if you visited this installation and your image would be displayed in the installation, perhaps upside down or somewhere you didn't expect to see it or on a monitor further along, or in another room. Essentially the content of the installation was the installation itself and that helped to get away from the instability of video recording. These things were CCTV installations, cameras linked to monitors without any intervening tape deck. Because there was a lot of instability in videotape recording with a lot of trouble getting things synched up together, it made more sense to use what was fairly stable, which was the camera signal going directly to the monitor. So, a lot of early video work in America as well as in Europe was a bit like that. A prime example of that is Dan Graham's piece where a camera observed visitors to a room with mirrors on the walls. A monitor relayed the image that the camera was seeing but six seconds later because there was a delay loop inserted in between. Then of course the camera picked up the image on the monitor and a further delay loop was introduced of another 6 seconds until eventually the image became obliterated. Because the resolution wasn't very high, you saw layer after layer of events in time going back. That was just an extension of that notion of CCTV installations. Recordings were often done in real time because editing was very difficult at first. It was almost impossible. When edit machines became available, it was still a sort of occult science. It was not automatic let's put it that way. So to get an edit where you wanted, people devised all sorts of methods. I heard stories about people using rulers and chalk, or rulers and china-graph and so on. I tended to use the counter. You had a little mechanical counter. It wasn't even counting in minutes and seconds it was just counting turns. Editing was done for a long time until digital editing became available, by transferring the signal on one tape on to a fresh tape. Using the counter I would run the two machines forward and for a count of say 3 or 4 on one counter and then look at the other counter to see how far that had moved. That might have been 2 ½ or 5, then I would roll back the tapes the corresponding numbers on the counters and then run them forward, push the edit button and hopefully they'd arrived at the edit point at the right time to get the edit that you wanted. That worked fairly well. It was fairly precise but not automatic, you had to do this each time that you wanted an edit. So it's not surprising that a lot of people wanted to make work that just ran in real-time.

MW: What about sound? Sound is quite important in quite a lot of your work.

MH: Sound could be difficult because most recorders had automatic recording levels. In other words, in a quiet room the sound would build up and build up and build up until you made a loud noise. Then it would die down again. A very good example of this is in William Wegman's early recordings. William Wegman is an American artist whose work is very funny and very strange. He was working by himself with a single camera and a recorder in a studio, sometimes with his dog Man Ray but essentially on his own. A lot of his early work has been re-issued on DVD, which is strange because you've got the grainy rough

quality of the black-and-white video overlaid with the silky smooth veneer of the DVD. You can hear the way sound builds up and builds up and then, if there is a sudden noise it dies away again. So early video abhorred silence.

MW: You didn't use music exactly but the sound you do use, especially in *Anchored State* is very evocative.

MH: I use music in two early works. There was an early work that used Brian Eno's music and in *Orange Free State* I used Debussy and some township jazz. But if music didn't seem appropriate then you could take sound from the recording and manipulate it. There were early synthesizers and various devices that would change the sound or punctuate it. I've just been very lucky to be able to work in an institution, which meant I didn't have to buy lots of equipment myself or just borrow it for short periods of time. I could use it weekends and holidays and really get to know how it worked.

MW: Could talk a bit about *Dickler's Whammy*, which is quite different to some of your other work in many ways and a strange title. How did the title come about?

MH: The title came from a book that I'd read about Mark Rothko. It was about the estate of Mark Rothko and the gallery, which was dealing with his estate and the various machinations that went on involving large sums of money and various canvases. One of the lawyers involved was called Dickler. Dickler's Whammy was a subterfuge or trick that he employed in court. It was known as Dickler's Whammy. I just thought it such a great name. I wanted to make something that would have that name. There is no mention of a Dickler or a whammy in the tape. It is just an evocative title. It was different from other tapes in that it was trying to introduce a certain degree of narrative, or reintroduce a certain level of narrative. I wanted it to be a sort of mystery thriller, hence the use of firearms. There is gun in it. There is a man in it and a woman and while there's nothing very specific in the text, it's implied that the guy is a gangster and the woman is an escort working in the sex industry. What I did that was odd, and I don't know whether that came across in the tape was have them occupy the same space at the same time without ever meeting. I used a spare room in the house I was living in at the time as a sort of a studio. I repapered the walls and changed the décor around between the two sets of shootings. The camera angles were set up in order to try and make it clear that this was the same room but either at a different time or in parallel universes, so they never actually met but they interrelated through the video. The video interrelates them. That's the only connection that they have. That's something video can do. I heard someone say about shooting film once that you open a door one day and you walk through it three weeks later. In filmmaking things are shot in different places at different times and out of sequence. So, it was really saying something about *Maison Scène*. It was talking about the ability of film to create a world that doesn't really exist, and make it quite solid and three-dimensional.

MW: Where was your work shown throughout the 70's and 80's?

MH: Although the first time I'd used a video camera was in 1973 when I was attached to that Tate Gallery education department, and I used it to record people's responses to work in the gallery for the education department; after that it wasn't until 1975 that I got regular

access to video equipment, but it wasn't until 1976 or 1977 that I first made something that I felt I could show. I spent a long time trying things out, experimenting and so on. Finally I made something that I thought I could show publicly without completely embarrassing myself. So the first piece of video I showed was a piece called *Withdrawn From Exhibition*. It went back to that 'Is it art? Is it politics?' question. It was shown in an exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery. I think it was a response to an article or series of articles by Richard Cork saying, "Does art have anything to do with society? Is political art dead? Cork was looking back to the Russian constructivist movement and other movements through the 20th century, and bemoaning the loss of a political edge to art in Britain. The result was this exhibition called *Art for Society*, at the Whitechapel, which was an open submission. I submitted this tape, which was show with a caption above the monitor. It was simply a series of shots in which big advertising poster boards were electronically removed to reveal the scenes behind them, whether it was a car park, a derelict site, a heap of rubble or a field. What I was doing was symbolically removing the imagery that inundated our lives, which was the imagery of advertising, in order to reveal reality. It was quite a nice little piece. It had good music. I used test-card music on that. I was amazed when it was shown thanks to a young budding curator called Nicolas Serota who was at that time running the Whitechapel. What happened to him I wonder?

MW: Was your work distributed through LVA?

MH: Not at that time. I do remember going to the opening event of LVA, which was a screening at the AIR Gallery, which was then in Covent Garden. Covent Garden had only just been vacated by the fruit and vegetable market. When I was working for Greater London Arts, which was middle of 1973 through to the end of 1974, I was working with a lot of community video groups. Covent Garden Market was still very active and the offices were in the middle, so you had to struggle through the market each morning to get to work. Then there were quite a few art galleries when it was vacated before the money moved in to fill the vacuum.

MW: ACME Gallery was down there as well.

MH: Oh, the inaugural event may have been ACME Gallery. I remember that was quite significant and quite memorable because both David Hall and Hoppy were there in the audience. I don't know who selected the tapes, presumably a committee, but a number of rather slow, rather serious tapes were shown. I remember Peter Weibel had something in it and there was probably something by David Hall. There may have also been something by Hoppy. Suddenly though, a tape was shown called *Order* by Kit Fitzgerald and John Sanborn. It was part of what they called, a two-sided hit single. The other side of that was *Entropy*. *Entropy* was a sort of breakfast. It was the cooking and eating and washing up of a breakfast that had been cut up into lots of little pieces and redistributed so it was all over the place. The timing was all over the place. *Order* was a lot of disparate movements of objects that made noises scrapings, bangs, clashes, breaking of glass, scraping of a shovel, dragging of a chair, all of which made quite distinct noises and that had been edited to make a very concise audio composition with corresponding imagery. It was edited very, very fast and tight. You hadn't seen artists video edited like that before. When it was over Hoppy's voice from the back of the audience said, "Can we see it again

please?" It was the shape of things to come I thought at the time. I thought, "My God, there are people at the other side of the Atlantic doing stuff like this." I think I was probably over-impressed by it because there were a group of artists and I must be fair to John Sanborn because I liked him very much and he was very good to me, but he was technologically obsessed. He wanted to do things faster and with more effects and more gimmicks all the time. I think for a while, the actual content of what he was doing got left behind. I hear he moved to the West Coast and is now doing idyllic pastoral documentaries about his family and children. Good for him. At least he got away from Wall Street before 9/11. As far as where my work was shown, LVA came later. I didn't start by showing work through London Video Arts. Apart from that Whitechapel show, there was a local show at the Gardiner Centre, which is the University of Sussex campus. Somebody who was arranging an exhibition, a mixed show, knew that I was working with video and asked me if I would put something in and I did. That was an early piece. Then I showed the same piece at Maidstone, which had a sort of open screening one day. It was put on the programme and attracted some rather snotty remarks from some of the more rigorous video makers there because it had colour in it. It was the one with the Brian Eno soundtrack. In the audience was Brian Hoey, who was then running an annual video festival in Washington Newtown outside Newcastle. It wasn't in the sort of place where you would imagine cutting edge video art to be shown but he had this great principle, which was that if you are running a local art centre, you don't serve up what you think local people will like, you show the best stuff you can. I think that was a great principle to keep to. So, he had Bill Viola and he didn't just have Bill Viola's work, he had Bill Viola come over for it. So, I met some great people through that. I met other people working in the field that I probably wouldn't otherwise have met. I was able to show work there I think two or three years running so quite a lot of screenings came about through people who visited that and saw work and wanted to show it somewhere else. One thing lead to another. But by then, my work was with London Video Arts and of course they did an awful lot to help get it around.

MW: You exhibited in New York and that was quite an important exhibition.

MH: Yes. A lot of the times that my tapes were screened I don't really know much about because it would have been between the venue and London Video Arts. I wouldn't have had much to do with it. It's not like you go along to oversee the work if it's just a single screen tape. But, then I'd get royalties from London Video Arts six months later with a list of venues, which I'd file away somewhere. I don't have a mental record of all that. The exhibitions I remember of course are the ones that I actually went to, especially if they were abroad. I suppose the first big for me occurred occasion was in 1981 when the Tate did an event which took in film, video, audio and performance. It had lots of different people from different areas of the arts. Charlie Hooker who was a student here and is now fellow tutor, had a piece in it. They invited me and that was a big deal for me to show at the Tate because I hadn't been involved in the earlier video events that David Hall had had something to do with, given the earliest was 1976.

MW: Can you remember the name of the show?

MH: It was called *Film Video Audio Performance*. It was as neutral as that. It didn't have a theme in terms of content. It was just a jamboree of different kinds of things. Rather incestuously, I was at that time writing for Art Monthly and reviewing video and performance, so I reviewed a show that I was in. But what I do remember is how shockingly the presentation of video was, especially in such august an institution as the Tate Gallery. They weren't used to showing video and didn't really know what to do with it. So I arrived at the Tate to see what was going on and found this monitor on a table with a few chairs in front of it, having been left to run on into blank tape. There was nobody looking after it. It was just appalling. If you think now of the plush dark, light isolated cubicles with huge projections that they have now at Tate Modern, it was worlds away. I first got my taste of how it should be done at the Whitney in New York two years later. That was the next big thing that I was invited to, through Steve Partridge and Stuart Marshall. Stuart Marshall was with me there and I hung out with him a lot of the time. The Whitney Biennale had a video section and that was in a dark space with comfortable sofas and monitors suspended above. It was just beautifully done, but I think Bill Viola had a lot to do with it. He'd written an article on the best way of presenting video so I think he had a lot to do with advising the Whitney Museum how to do it. There didn't seem to be an equivalent figure in this country for the Tate. They got better very quickly of course. But, that Tate show was quite a big break. Then there was the New York show and after that a big tour of Canadian cities which was the SAW video festival. SAW Gallery was a gallery in Ottawa where it started. It's a bit complicated. There would be lots of people on this tour from different countries. They would be staggered, so one person from France would arrive at the SAW Gallery, Ottawa on a given day. They would show a screening of their own work, run a workshop perhaps for two days with local people coming in to learn how to make video art and then show a selection of work from their own country. So, I went out there with this big suitcase full of tapes. Tapes were big in those days, so I had a suitcase full of stuff from London Video Arts that had been put together for me. I hadn't selected them, it was a package. And I had my own stuff. So, I had another suitcase with my own tapes in. I did that in Ottawa and then I was bounced off to Newfoundland where I went to St Johns and did the same thing there. Then I went to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Montreal, Toronto and then Winnipeg and all points west. It was about eight cities. It was just a whirl. Then as soon as I'd left a given city the next person would come along. So after the person from France had left Ottawa and gone to Nova Scotia, I'd be shipped in to do my thing in Ottawa and so on. So, we travelled around and the only time we really all met up together was in Montreal where we had a sort of R & R break of about a week. We all collided with each other in Montreal, which was fun. There was Klaus von Bruch from Germany. There was a chap called Kumejima from Japan, a marvellous guy who'd invented all kinds of video synthesisers and things. I met him again three or four years ago. He was doing something at a gallery in London. I saw it and thought "hang on I know this name. I'm going to go and meet him." We had a wonderful evening drinking Irish whisky and just talking. His English was limited but we communicated and we had a very good evening. That was in Canada way back then and so I wanted to meet him again. He did not remember anything about it at all, but he was a wonderful guy. The following year, I think it was 1985, I found that I had been asked to be in the British Art Show. That was very good. I showed *Dickler's Whammy* in that. It one of the few outings that tape has had. I did show it in Canada and it got favourable comments on the soundtrack but that was about all. The British Art Show was quite a thrill. We were all trained up to Birmingham

where it opened at the ICON Gallery. I met lots of artists and I gave a couple of talks there. A lot of going to a town for the evening and giving a talk and showing your work happened because the Arts Council had a scheme called Video Artists on Tour. They had Filmmakers on Tour as well. If you were signed up for that the venue was subsidised by the Arts Council to have a video artist come along and talk about their work. A lot of that happened during the early 80's. After that was Video Positive and other events and a lot of video festivals. That video ghetto event has died away now. The last big thing like that was the Tate Modern's big show of film and video installations, *Time Zones*. The same thing happened of course with digital art. Video was then replaced by digital arts and digital arts had their own festivals and very fenced off events. I think it's better if art forms mingle and mix. Let 100 flowers bloom. I enjoy teaching in Critical Fine Art Practice at Brighton because it's not a video course. Video plays a part in it, film less so nowadays, but video, along with audio, has to stand up for itself alongside painting, drawing, text, performance or installation. I think that mingling and sparking of different ways of making art is quite lively, energetic and energising for the students as well as myself. Is there anything else to say about exhibitions? I have fewer now because I'm not making work. I haven't made work that I wanted to be seen for some time. I think the last event would have been Tate Liverpool in one of the Video Positive events. I'm certainly not pushing work out. I'm working in different ways. I'm working in different forms and occasionally exhibiting but most of my energy nowadays goes into teaching.

MW: You mentioned Video Positive. You wrote a piece for a Video Positive Catalogue.

MH: Yes, I've done that as well. I've written articles when asked. Actually, I went to Art Monthly, cap in hand, begging to write for them and they said, "Yeah All right".

MW: When was that?

MH: It was during the time of the Tate event that had the long not very informative formative name, *Film Video Audio Performance*. It was 1981. Around that time between, perhaps 1980 and 1983, I was writing. I was writing when I went New York for the first time. I wrote an article about the New York video scene, about people like John Sanborn, Dara Birnbaum and Dan Graham, all of whom I met out there and got on well with. Although they had all been visitors here before I ever went to America. So I wrote quite a long article about that for Studio. I did a couple of things for Studio International. Studio International was then in its dying fall. It wasn't very healthy. It had been the important art journal, certainly in Europe to rival Art Fourm. But after Peter Townsend left the editorship, Richard Cork took over. I think he was very good. He did a number of themed issues but I think the finances got very, very shaky during that period, partly because a lot of the readership were seeing all this stuff about performance and installation and political art and video art and film. They wanted reviews of painting shows, so a lot of traditional readership just dropped. It wasn't a very popular magazine and it didn't survive. The time that I wrote for it, it was having a brief revival. It was in different hands. It had a different editor and different owner and there was a... idea that it would be re-launched. But by that time newcomers like Artscribe had appeared and I think Frieze appeared. Frieze appeared not that long after the famous seminal Freeze Exhibition, different spelling but there was probably an echo in the title. So, I wrote for them and then some time later I got a call from Julia

Knight, who was then at Luton University. She was editing a book on British video art and wanted me to write one of the early chapters. I think somebody who was going to write about some of that early stuff dropped out so I got to write more than I originally expected. It was quite a substantial article. I enjoy writing but I'm pretty slow. Actually that was the one of the few times my work has ever been edited. I wrote a few reviews for the original Studio International a couple of times under Peter Townsend. Later, Art Monthly was under the editorship of Peter Townsend who was a terrific editor. I thought, "Oh Wow I'm going to be edited by one of the best in the business". To my disappointment they put in print exactly what I'd written without changing a punctuation mark, so it was a big disappointment. Then of course you had to go up there and sit in the office for three hours, refuse to go and throw a tantrum before you got paid your £30. Half of which had gone on the fare to get up there. So it was not a very rewarding activity financially, but I enjoyed doing it and I still enjoy doing it when asked.

MW: What was the subject of the piece that you wrote for Julia Knight?

MH: It was in a book called *Diverse Practices, a reader on British video art*. It was about the early days of British video art, focusing on the 2 key figures of those early days David Hall and Hopsy (John Hopkins). There is a bifurcation of the medium into a) rigorous high art or fine art and b) into sort of political social activity of which David Hall represented one fork and Hopsy the other. Really, it simply traced the emergence of venues, the emergence of a distribution system in London Video Arts and a production centre, funding with the Arts Council Artist Film and Video Panel, which I think was probably up in order to give a grant to David Hall. He certainly did get some funding from that and it helped a lot of people produce a lot of work. Goodness knows I saw a lot of work as a member of the committee because you looked at maybe 30 applications or more each meeting.

MW: How long were you on the panel for?

MH: About 2 years. I remember a lot of cold buffets and scotch eggs. Thank you Arts Council they were very nice, but that's all you got essentially. You got your buffet, so that not very financially rewarding work either. But, it was good to see all that work and good to think that you maybe had a little part in monitoring the excellence of the work and making sure that good works got made. Maybe that's an ego speaking. I don't know whether I did have any effect on that but I did meet some great people: Malcolm Le Grice who was a chair of the panel, David Hall was a member for a while and there were various other people. I think Tamara Kirkorian was on it.

MW: To go back to the writing, you mentioned some quite big American names that you met through that. Did you write an article on Nan Hoover?

MH: Yes. She's been resident in Europe for ages but she's American in origin. She is wonderful. She's been here a couple of times and she came for a week once and did workshops and did a performance in the dance studio. One of her beautiful performances was using rays of coloured, intersecting light. It's called *Intersected Rays*. It is a series of performances in which she moves around inside a constructed three-dimensional matrix of coloured beams of light. They are produced by using gels and slide projectors and so on. Wearing a white suit, she demonstrates the shape of this three-dimensional volume of

light, as it were through her movements. They are quiet understated but very beautiful performances. She was also at the time doing the paper landscapes. She makes landscapes from paper and lights them. They are just crumpled pieces of paper, but lit with great care. Then she videos them with the light moving. She was important. I've met her primarily in England rather than anywhere else.

MW: You studied at Sussex. Did you study Fine Art?

MH: No, Sussex has never had a fine art department. It didn't at that time have a History of Art department, had I known what History of Art was and that you could study it, I might well have done that because I was already very interested in art. But, my advisors at school and my parents pushed me towards more academic subjects. So, although I had done a Foundation at Camberwell, I was pushed towards the academic subjects, and I did American Studies at Sussex, which was literature, history and politics. I studied between 1965 and 1968. All the time I was there I was looking at video art magazines and writing rather incompetent reviews for the student publications. Whenever a visiting artist came along I went to see them. I remember Richard Hamilton coming along giving a talk. That was quite memorable. I just naturally gravitated towards contemporary art after I left University. It was doing a one-year post-graduate certificate of education and being placed in the Tate Education Department and here at Brighton, in what is now Critical Fine Art Practice, though it was called Alternative Practice then. It was through all that, that I found my way to where I am today, which is surprisingly where I want to be.

MW: You've just recently shown a sound piece at a gallery in Brighton. You have also mentioned that you want to shoot something on video in the Summer.

MH: Yes, I've got various projects. It could be a huge embarrassment if none of them ever materialise, but perhaps putting it on the record will give me the motivation to push them through. With the sound piece, I was invited to exhibit something in an exhibition at a gallery called the 35-A Gallery, in Brighton, which is a small gallery but very ambitious. It is run by two of my ex-students, so it is sort of incestuous, but they asked me, a number of other people who taught on the course and other artists whom they knew, to show in a group exhibition. Knowing that they would curate heavily, you gave them the work and they demanded the right to do whatever they wanted with it. What they did with it was to make a sort of assault course. The gallery was absolutely packed with stuff. It was absolutely packed with material. Some of it was art. Some of it was probably not. Some of it was definitely not. There was a kind of adventure playground feel to it. You had to negotiate your way around ramps and things. I guessed, knowing the two people involved, that that's the sort of thing they would probably do. They took certain liberties with works like a video monitor turned to the wall that was showing the work of a video artist. I didn't mind that but I wanted to sort of be equally tricky and evade their grasp as it were. I wanted to give them something that they couldn't curate, so I thought, "What can't they reposition or alter or hang upside down?" The answer is sound. But, I thought a sound piece would interfere with other people's work if it was constant, so I thought about a sound piece that only happens every now and again. As a result, it's unannounced and you don't even know when it's going to happen. You might even miss it if you are not in the gallery for long enough. It was a kind of a fanfare. It was an optimistic audible

rainbow. I thought would be upbeat and would interrupt briefly the show, the sort of thing that people would go, "Oh what's that" every now and again. It was played from a CD, but if I'd got a bit more sophisticated, it would probably be on a laptop now. It originated on a laptop, but it was on CD, placed at varying intervals, so the occurrence might be 10 minutes apart, it might be 15 minutes apart, it might be even 20 minutes apart over the space of something like 2 hours and then it would loop. I'd like to do some more like that, sound bites would you call them, that would be dropped into group shows and simply punctuate them. I'd like them to have a sort of a nostalgic edge, so that they'd be familiar but not readily identifiable. Something that comes immediately to mind is the Pearl and Dean signature tune. The Pearl and Dean advert was a sort of enclosure for adverts that was introduced by Pearly Gates opening with very instantly recognisable music. As far as video goes, I am planning a piece based on a railway station in Sussex called Three Bridges. The working title of the piece is *Three Bridges*. I've done some test shoots and photographs and stuff. It's about people and travelling or not travelling. It's about watching other people travel and relativity and stuff like that. I think Einstein got the first inklings of relativity in a train leaving the station and he thought "Is the train leaving the station or is the station leaving the train?". So those are two things I've got planned, but there are some other quite big projects that I'm going to get involved with coming up, including the South African animator William Kentridge.

MW: Are you doing an animation piece?

MH: No, I could never do animation. Not seriously I mean. I have done computer animation. I did a sort of computer animation master class at what was by then London Electronic Arts when it was still in Camden before it became LUX. It was a wonderful, very intensive, two-week class with just 4 of us learning about three dimensional computer animation and things like after image and how to move from one application to another. I was very new to digital editing and that was a deep immersion so I made a short 3D animation piece, which I later showed in Ohio. I was on a three-month secondment at Ohio State University. But no, I don't have the temperament to be an animator. You just have to be prepared to spend long hours of hard work to see the result flash past in an instant. I couldn't do that.

MW: You mentioned another project that you are involved in?

MH: I am involved in a project with the artist William Kentridge, who is a white South African animator. He is a wonderful artist who works with charcoal typically on a single surface. He shoots a frame of film every few minutes as the charcoal drawing is being developed and erased and renewed. So, he ends up with a single very dirty bit of canvas or paper and a film. The films are wonderful. What we plan to do is to have an exhibition of his work at Brighton and a DVD as the catalogue. I am involved in that.

MW: Is there anything else you think we might have missed that you'd like to mention?

MH: Yes, we haven't really talked about the difference between how video production was and how it is now. Digital video is more like painting or digital editing, if you are not an animator. If you are working with live action then I suppose you do still have to go out somewhere with the camera at certain times and shoot what you want. But, once you've

got all that stuff, the editing stage is more like being a painter in that you can have this project on your easel or laptop whatever for quite an extended period of time at home, in your studio or in your study. You can just go back to it whenever you have the time, or at regular times each day, and adjust a little bit of it. That's why it's called non-linear, because you don't have to do it starting at the beginning and working through till the end, which was very much the procedure at one time. If you got it wrong or if you decided you wanted to make it longer you were stymied. You either had to transfer the whole thing on to another tape or insert something. If you wanted to insert something new, you had to loose something that was already there. With digital, you just make the gap and drop it in and that's wonderful. It means you don't have to think in such an A to B to C manner before making it. You can respond to serendipity, although I do encourage my students to do storyboards. They don't like to. I think it's because it exposes their lack of drawing ability. It doesn't matter how much you say, "It doesn't matter what the drawing it like, it is not about that. It can be stick figures, just as long as somebody can get an idea of what your film is about. It is so you can get an idea. You've got to get it out on the page rather than leave it going around the washing machine of your head.



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



VRC Visual Research Centre
UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE



DUNCAN OF JORDANSTONE COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN