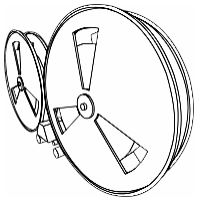

REWIND | Artists' Video in the 70s & 80s
Interview with Steve Hawley

Interview by Dr Jackie Hatfield, 12th July 2006

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

SH: Key to me, is a piece I did as a second year student called *We Have Fun Drawing Conclusions* made in 1981/'82. It is key to me partly because it was the first one that got me attention. It was the first one that was shown more or less into any extent. It is also key because I think the rest of my artistic video work is based on that. It's a piece about language. It's got humour in it and it's got a strange quazi-narrative. It's also about families, which a lot of my work seems to revolve around. Then I did another piece called *Proposition is a Picture*, which in a sense was a development of that only it has a deconstructed narrative that is filmed all over the place. In the fiction, it's a man whose father is really into artificial languages. It was the first thing I did that really tried to deal with different ways of approaching narrative, which was what I'm quite obsessed with at the moment. So those few things are combined. I made a work in 2002 called *Amen ICA Cinema,* which is a palindromic video. It's got a lot of palindromes in it, so there is a similar theme about language: playing with language, playing with humour, emotion, family relationships. All three of them are about families and they all deal with technical language as a sort of poetry. They have an unconscious poetry.

JH: When you say 'language' are you talking about the word or are you talking about everything? Are you talking about the language of the word and also playing with the language of the technology and the video and representation as well?

SH: I am talking about the written and the spoken word, mostly. In terms of playing with filmic language, I think they did a bit. They are playing with notions of narrative and how narrative is put together or taken apart. In terms of technology, they hardly used any high technology. In the palindromic work, things went forwards and backwards but that was pretty much it really. The rest were made in a very, very simple way. I have used technology in my work but it has been an off-shoot really. I wouldn't say it's been central for the most parts of the work.

JH: So are you thinking of conventional filmic language when you refer to the narrative?

SH: Yes, the standard model of narrative fiction is something that I consider and I suppose deconstruct in a rather old-fashioned, early 80's way. That's not really quite what I want to do. I want to have my cake and eat it, because I really like fictional films. I love fictional films but I like narrative fiction where there is a sense of distance and irony about it. I don't know quite why that is but I do. I've tried to use that in what I consider are, for me, my key works. They are not always recognised as a key works by everybody else, I have to say. But, for my own part, those are the ones that I adhere to.

JH: When you were a student and you were going through the process of looking at other artists work, presuming that this is in the context of the art world, were you looking also at Godard and works that demonstrated that?

SH: I was a student twice. I went to university when I was 18 but it didn't work out. I was only there for 6 months. That was Oxford. At that point though, in 1970, it was the first time I was exposed to experimental film, because I joined the experimental film club. I was also watching a lot of films. I was watching films sometimes twice a day plus the experimental film club every week, which I saw a lot of. I didn't understand any of it at that point but I realise now that I saw Carolee Schneemann's *Fusers*, a lot of Warhol things and I think, quite a bit of sort of Structuralist Film, although I wouldn't have recognised it. I was studying philosophy at the time, but it didn't work out. So, 8 years later I went to art school.

JH: So what was the context when you were a student in the 80's, and what was the transition from that early 70s period?

SH: I hadn't seen any artists' video at that point, but certainly in 1970 I saw experimental film and I was very intrigued by that. I didn't have any conception that I could ever make a film, it was just completely out of my world. When I went to my foundation course in Bradford College, they had a little TV studio that I mucked about with. I certainly picked up a Portapak and shot off a roll of half inch black-and-white film. When I went to art school in Brighton Polytechnic from 1979 to 1982, the guy who was actually the head technician at that point, to my memory, was Mick Hartney. Obviously, he is a video artist and a crucial person in the whole sector of early video art. He was a crucial influence. He taught the students how to use video and he also got a lot of video artists in, particularly from the States. He got very interesting people like Dora Burnboum, John Sanborn and Kit Fitzgerald. There were quite a lot of people, so that was the starting point. I think I was drawn to the idea of making films because I was interested in film, but then there was this video thing. Going back to childhood, I've always had rather boyish delights in twiddling knobs. I used to make transistor radios at school and things like that so there was a slightly tech-y element of dealing with the technology that I thought was very enjoyable. While Mick was showing us this output, actually I was making photographs at the time. I remember that I felt quite limited by the idea of the photograph. It seemed quite cold. It just didn't move, so I started making videos. Mick was certainly a formative influence. He was very formative on me and quite a lot of people around at that point, particularly at Brighton. I made my first video in the first year. I made two in the second year, which were actually shown. Basically, what happened was I saw somewhere that LVA, London Video Arts as it then was, had open screenings. I can't remember where they were. It might have been ACME. It might have been upstairs at ACME. It's a vague memory. So, I went up with my tape, my first ever, proper tape and there was nobody there except for Pete Anderson. I showed it to him and he said, "Oh this is good. You should come to our meetings." So, I did and that's how I got involved with that. It was good because there wasn't much of a community apart from Mick in Brighton really who were making those things.

JH: But having people coming from overseas, or certainly from the States, must have been quite exciting and unusual at that point? Not many people have talked about that as an influence actually in other interviews.

SH: I think it was unusual. They seemed to be friends of Mick's. We also had Video Artists in Residence in Brighton. While I was there Stuart Marshall was the video artist in residence and then Richard Layzell was there. There was quite a lot happening. I remember Stuart Marshall had gone to the Stares. He'd gone to San Francisco and come back with all sorts of influences. The thing was, the work that the Americans were doing was very, very different. We had British artists coming in and showing us work, but we also had a video library, which I don't know if other places had. We had a video library with artists' video in it. Most of the work was British. There was some Canadian work but it was quite dour. They had *Lenny's Documentary* by Ian Bourn. That was a piece that I was particularly drawn to. I thought that was great. I still do actually. But, a lot of that work was black-and-white. It seemed quite dour to me as a young art student. When the Americans came over, like John Sanborn and Kit Fitzgerald, their work was zappy. It was colour. It was full of spectacle and razzmatazz, or so it seemed like at the time. I and a couple of other people were quite drawn to that as a form really, so that coincided with the point at which, I think it was 1980, we moved from half-inch black-and-white reel-to-reel recorders and the Sony Portapaks to colour cameras and U-matic type five edit suites. It all coincided. So, all of a sudden we were able to use colour and had the technology to do the editing process, all while we were being exposed to these people via Mick. So it all came together. It seemed quite an exciting, almost secret, little art form because I didn't know many other people who were doing it.

JH: The period of 70s black and white British Video that you are describing as being dour, it does seem to be dour in terms of it's blacker colour but in terms of its idea, most of the work seemed to be quite conceptual. Would you say that you felt that in the 80's, at that period, there was a new beginning with all this technology evolving?

SH: Yes. I don't know about a new beginning. The 70s work that we saw, had this rigorous conceptual framework around it. The problem for me was that I hadn't really come from an art background. I never studied art at school or anything like that, except for the foundation course. So, I was drawn much more to television as an influence and what was then becoming the burgeoning music video thing. At that point, perhaps naively, I was drawn to the razzmatazz of that work while the rigorous structural work only became more interesting to me later. I think I was just so naïve I didn't know quite what it was doing to be honest. But yes, there was a sense that one could take an art school approach, but use techniques from music video, although I ditched that quite soon. I was much more interested in content to do with language and humour and emotion and things like that. My work had very little to do with the conceptual, structuralist notion.

JH: You were using lots of influences including popular culture influences rather than just purely what was coming from the sculptural, fine art approach.

SH: Yes, absolutely. At the same time there was a lot of performance art going on. I was seeing a lot of performance and actually participated in some performances. I remember going to the Almeida and seeing a whole series of work by people like Meredith Monk. There was a whole series of things I went to see. Meredith Monk was one and Robert Ashley was another. Those were as much an influence as the art because Meredith Monk was dancing and composing music and she made this rather

beautiful film called *Ellis Island*. Robert Ashley who worked with John Sanborn was doing performances with music, including Blue Jean Tyranny, who Steve Littman and I had actually worked with. John Sanborn had also done a video for it. So, I was interested in this multi-faceted thing that involved music and text. I was doing a lot of writing then and now, and so my work didn't really come out of that sculptural or rigorous conceptual tradition. It had more to do with the music by people like Philip Glass and Steve Reich that was around at the time. I remember buying the record, *Einstein on the Beach* when I got to art school.

JH: It was fortunate that Mick Hartney was there to creating a context for everybody. So you didn't feel it was policed by rigorous conceptual debates?

SH: Absolutely not. Mick had a very pluralistic attitude to it. He showed us everything. He'd done all sorts of things. He'd done a load of films of punk bands for example, when they had appeared at Sussex University. We had all sorts of stuff that we were exposed to. There were other artists teaching there as well I have to say, but in pure video terms, Mick was the man.

JH: Are there any of your works that are important that haven't been taken up or considered by the wider public or the critics or writers?

SH: None of them have been taken up that much but I did do a piece quite early on. I was a second year student. It was called *The Undistributed Middle*. It was a work with a man, me. It was a slightly performance-y piece where I walk around a flat uttering syllogisms. A syllogism is a form of argument with two premises and a conclusion. Only this man, me, keeps getting them wrong. It was quite a nice piece. It was shown a little bit. But, in terms of the way I view my work, something like that is more interesting to me than, for example, a piece I made later called *Trout Descending a Staircase,* which was a very technological, rather one-dimensional piece, but which nonetheless was shown. I'm not objecting to that, but in terms of the way I look back on my work, something like *The Undistributed Middle* and *Other Fallacies in the Home* are more interesting pieces to me I think. I read this book by Charles Dodgson, a.k.a. Lewis Carroll, who as well as obviously being Lewis Carroll was a mathematician. He wrote a maths book about logic, which was full of the most outrageous racial examples. For example, he was using in these syllogisms things like, "All Jews have big noses". I was very interested in the way this completely anti-Semitic material could be mixed with a very, very cool logical mathematical language. That's what I was trying to do in a rather more subdued way in the piece and that's what I've tried to do with a lot of the pieces. *We Have Fun Drawing Conclusions* is about children's books and the specialised language you get in 'learn to read' books. *Amen ICA Cinema* is about palindromes. It's about technical languages. I did another piece where I just filmed lots of signs on walls where letters had dropped off. But apart from that, it's the very, very early one that hasn't been shown very much.

JH: Have you still got that work?

SH: Yes, I've got them all.

JH: Is it on half inch?

SH: It is. It was edited. It was the first piece I edited on low band U-matic.

JH: You said that in the 70s, you were looking at film and you had filmic ideas because you were influenced by cinema, or mainstream Hollywood, as well as television. Why do you think you didn't use film and why did you choose to use the electronic medium specifically?

SH: I suppose there were economic considerations, but those were not really that strong because at Brighton Polytechnic certainly, we could use film and there were other people making films. I did make films actually. I made Super 8 films at that point. I didn't make a 16 mm film. I think partly it was also the technology. As I say there was delight in twiddling knobs and buttons while just the joy of handling videotape, I found very exciting. There was something I responded to in a very tangible way, which is odd because usually filmmakers say they like film. They say they like film because you can hold it whereas I like videotape because you could hold it. You could make loops out of it and do all sorts of stuff. I think the other reason, which is slightly more ideological, although there's very little ideology in my work, was this notion at that time that video was a democratic medium. It was something you couldn't sell, bizarrely. I remember this notion being promoted and at college. If you work with video because you can copy it, it has almost no monetary value. It's a bit like a performance. No horrible capitalist can get their money on it, make a product out of it and sell it, which was of course absolutely ludicrous given later developments with video. That's another reason why I use it, because I don't see video product as a precious thing that has value in the way that you can buy and sell. I might be wrong in that.

JH: I always think it's a difficult question. Lots of artists talked about it in that way but at the same time artists want their work to be seen. So, it's a contradiction really, which is quite a difficult one.

SH: They want their work to be seen which is fine, but they want to be paid for that. That's not something that has ever been uppermost in my mind. I think the world has agreed. Very few people are paid. I've never made very much money out of video as such apart from when you get an Arts Council grant or something and part of it pays you. I have sold works. I've sold works to museums and galleries, but not for huge amounts of money. Whenever anybody's asked me to show a piece of my work I've always said, yes. I've never objected to the work being copied because that was part of the whole ideology. I slightly follow that ideology, my own ideology, through to the end. I suppose the only difference might be if somebody took the money and by some strange chance they made lots of money out of it. I might think that was not quite the right thing, but for me I still think video is a democratic medium. I'm happy for my work to be copied. I'm happy for it to be shown almost anywhere to be honest.

JH: Yes, it was almost a bit before its time in a way. With the technology that we have for streaming one could say that it is relatively democratic in the West, not necessarily if you don't have a telephone and you are not living in the West.

SH: A colleague showed me a website called *Ubu.com*, where you can download a lot of seminal works for free, things like Terry Fox's *The Children's Tapes* for example, which I saw at college and always wanted a copy of. It was very difficult to get hold of. Now you can just download it as MPEG4. It's absolutely fine to show to students on that level. That interests me. I'm not a terribly technological person I might be interested in

putting my work up on the Web. I'd rather people downloaded it and saw it than get my tiny little royalty cheque from the LUX. LUX might have different views on that. There's lots of fantastic work on it, including some Vienna Action Work. It tends to be 60's, 70's and early 80's work. I found that lack of preciousness in all senses of the word about that initiative, very, very exciting. It took me back to those days with the attitude that we could not sell this stuff. It is a slightly, old hippy socialist attitude but nonetheless something that I think deep down I would still stick to.

JH: I think things moved. I think that it was really difficult for artists in the mid to late 80's during the Thatcher period and things really, really changed at that point. So, it's interesting to look back on it because there were ideological reasons why people used technologies at that time. I think it's a very difficult thing to say to students now, "What is the ideological meaning behind this technology?" whether it's the Internet or whatever technology there is at the moment. I think things have changed so rapidly in the last 15 to 20 years. There are just different questions.

SH: I think the ideology that surrounded video in those days has been transferred to the Internet. It's not a particularly original thought but I think there's an almost complete parallel there. That maybe being superseded by some other technology now, mobile phones or something, but yes, there is the notion of the internet as democratic, as exciting, as something that's relatively new and that, for the most part, in artistic terms doesn't have monetary value attached to it.

JH: It is a shift for the audience as well though isn't it?

SH: Yes

JH: Can you talk about how your artistic processes have changed over the years?

SH: I don't think they have changed. I think part of what I'm doing is influenced by technology but it's all quite low-tech. It's what I've got lying around basically, which is usually from a work context. I am an academic, so I'm based in a university. Or, it's what I've got laying around my studio, which might be Super 8 cameras. Now I've got a a cheap High Definition camera, so that will become part of something. The last piece but one I shot was on a mobile phone, so it has partly been about available technologies. I'm also working on a DVD piece because I had found out that DVDs can play things in random which has quite interesting implications for narrative if you've got random narrative generators. So that's part of it. It's part of "Well what can this technology do?" but it's all quite low-tech. I hardly ever went up to Wardour Street, looking at the highest possible range of things, partly because that makes me nervous. It just doesn't suit my slightly post-punk aesthetic. In terms of content, there has been a long preoccupation right from the beginning with language, poetry and storytelling. It's narrative fiction but with a knowing self-reflexive edge. Those things all go together, I think.

JH: Does the subject matter of your work naturally evolve and then you make a piece of work when you really need to or are you constantly on production?

SH: I'm not constantly on production. Partly I can't because of my job. I think I chose my job because I did have periods of being a full-time artist, which you could call

unemployment otherwise. I wasn't very good at that. It just freaked me out. I wasn't really that productive. I work regularly and I work in a studio perhaps one day a week or something but that's not necessarily that productive. I tend to generate things that then get made in a holiday period or a particular time that I'd planned, which actually suits video. There's a lot of mucking about and then you go all out for the shoots and then there's a longer period of reflection and editing. So, I try and make one major piece a year. That's not a written down objective but if I don't make a piece in a year then I get a bit nervous, so I then make little things alongside that.

JH: Do you still do photographs as well or have you stopped doing that?

SH: I do. I am doing a photographic piece for a show at the moment, but it's not a big part of my work. Essentially I've realised that my work relates not very much to the notion of gallery exhibition. I have shown in galleries quite a bit but I've never quite got it to be honest. I've never quite got excited enough to pay that huge amounts of attention to detail for galleries, whereas if anything is shown in the cinema context I always will do. I just feel at home in the cinema.

JH: Do you mean the black space?

SH: No, I mean a cinema as opposed to a blacked out gallery space. I mean the place and the whole environment, in fact where you buy an ice-cream and you sit down and there's music. It's that kind of thing. That's the space I like to show my work.

JH: The cinema theatre?

SH: Yes, it is the theatrical cinema environment, which is the place I much prefer to show my work because it's nearly all linear work that depends on large screen. The images are shot for large screen. They are quite often landscapes. For the last 20 years they have been anyway.

JH: That can't have been the case in the 80's?

SH: No, because I didn't know that such things existed as video projectors, or at least they weren't available to the likes of me. The early work was made for the small screen and related more to television. So, I thought, "What's TV good for?" Well TV is good at imparting. It's good at talking heads. It's very good at humour. So there was this humorous link. The information is again related to language, so I was happy within the confines of the box for quite a long time. But yes, these days, the theatrical environment is something that I prefer and occasionally an installation or gallery type space, but not so much.

JH: Can you talk about your sound a about process of the sound?

SH: I hardly bothered with sound for a long time actually. I can't believe I spent so little time thinking about it. I used to do a lot of voice-overs. It was a big step for me to actually to actually get other people to do the voices. Up until relatively recently I did everything on the sound myself. There is quite often music in my work. I wrote the music. I played it. I did the voice-overs. I recorded the sound dubbing. It's only in the last 8 or 9 years that I've been working with very talented people. It started with an ex-

student of mine called Joachim Sundstrom, who is now working successfully in the industry. He does the sound to all Michael Winterbottom's films. He also does the sound design for Patrick Heiler and Tracey Emin's films. He does the sound design for those. Working with him was a great inspiration in terms of what one could do with sound. I've stopped writing music as well for my films partly because I can't get an aesthetic distance on it and partly because I think my musical inspiration is running out. With the piece I'm doing at the moment, I'm going to be working with a composer on. For the last two pieces I worked with other composers.

JH: But you've always had layered sound in the works?

SH: It goes back to Meredith Monk and Robert Ashley. The sound part of it, also the musical part of it has been very important. I was always interested in the idea of the video having some slight operatic element. I didn't see why it should be just visual and the writing as well. I do write, I'm influenced by theatrical people that write for theatre like Tim Etchells, who is based in Sheffield. He writes for Forced Entertainment. It's very far from the idea of video being a sculptural thing. It's got music. It's got text. It's got characters as well. It comes perilously close to conventional television drama at some points or even documentary but actually I think in my own view, it wonders away form that quite happily.

JH: Do you start with a script in the development of the work?

SH: For many years I didn't. For many years I would improvise with the camera. I would shoot holiday footage or whatever and come back and edit it and work with writing scripts to picture. These days I do work half and half. So half I'm writing beforehand, half I'm writing to picture. I'm also collaborating with people so their input into sound design or music composition is important.

JH: Do many collaborations come out of the communities that you've moved in?

SH: They did. I moved out of London in 1986 to Sheffield. Before that point I was working a lot. I got a lot of collaboration through LVA, or LUX as it is now, and was collaborating a lot with performance artists and composers. I worked with Rose Finn-Kelsey, which was particularly fruitful, in make a piece called *Glory*, which is her piece with Harry Walton. I worked with other performance artists and dancers. I did some work with Sue McLennan and a classical composer called Jane Wells. That all happened while I was in London. When I moved to Sheffield I found almost nobody working with video so my work took a kind of much more isolated turn. It was not necessarily a bad thing. I was less influenced by what was going on around me. At that point there was only Andrew Stones who was and still is based in Sheffield. He was working consistently with video. Andy and I did, and do, get together and have great rapport in that area but the work started to go in a different direction after that. I have worked also with TV people, including a guy called Tony Steiger who is a friend of mine. He is basically TV producer. He is much more from the industry side. We've done documentaries and art works and we are still working together. The last piece I did was with a collaborator from my studio with a guy called Steve Dutton. The collaborations do continue but they changed when I moved out of that milieu of London, London Video Arts and the London Artistic Community. Sheffield is very, very different and the North was isolated.

It still is isolated, much less so but not necessarily in a bad way. I think it enabled me to actually focus much more in what I found out to be my path.

JH: Did funding stifle or enabled you to achieve your artistic ambitions?

SH: It's always been welcome. In the early days I think it was a real boost to my confidence and enabled me to really try things out. When I say 'early days' I mean up to about 1986. After that, I must say, for me personally, I find that it can stifle things in that I've never been able to write a piece, get the money for it and then just do it. The pieces have all evolved over a long period of time and it's very difficult to ask for money for something that you actually don't know where it's going to end up. What I've been doing is to actually get to a point where something is almost finished or at least halfway through and then as soon as I find out something is a viable piece, I apply for money for it. But, a lot of the pieces don't cost anything. The mobile phone piece cost precisely nothing and was, I think, quite an interesting piece.

JH: Did you show it on the phone?

SH: No it was shot on the phone. It is a lot of images that are collaged, but it's shown on a conventional DVD.

JH: Going up to cinema size then?

SH: Yes

JH: It must be interesting to see the texture.

SH: It is. I would say so

JH: What's it called that piece?

SH: It's called *Speech Marks*. It has a very slow aesthetic. It has got all the consideration that all the other pieces have, and I made a piece before that which was a film, it's called *Love on the Mercury* and that's a 16mm film. That cost probably about £23 000 or £24 000.

JH: That sounds like a lot, but actually that's not much for a film is it?

SH: It's not much, but it was a 35 minute film, shot on 16mm with prints and a proper stereo sound dub. It's not a huge amount, but it's probably the most I've ever got for a single piece.

JH: Do you get funding mostly from the Arts Council?

SH: Yes, the Arts Council have been my main supporters but because I work in a university and because I am so called "research active" within the university, I do get funding from that. I worked for 18 years at Sheffield Hallam University. Increasingly, as research became more important, there was more and more money and they did very well in the Research Assessment Exercise. So, they were funding me to the tune of about £5000 a year and with that, very little requirement for concrete outputs, although

I did have concrete outputs. That was an amazing luxury. So, for the last 10 or 12 years they were funding me mostly. I didn't really need much funding from the Arts Council. Now I work at Manchester Metropolitan University and I haven't asked them for any money at all, but I think the cost of technology has gone down so much that I can make things pretty much for no money if I have the tools: a laptop and a cheap HD camera.

JH: Or a mobile phone?

SH: Or a mobile phone, absolutely. Things don't cost much. I find having too much money is a pressure and I don't like it, actually.

JH: Who funded the film, *Love on the Mercury*?

SH: That was mostly the Arts Council, but Sheffield Hallam University funded quite a bit of it as well.

JH: Your first lot of funding was from the Arts Council in the 1980's was that after you were a student?

SH: I got some money from South-East Arts when I just finished college. I got £300 to buy U-matic videotapes, which was great. I was a young penniless artist and then I got various bits and pieces form the Arts Council. Apart from the film the most I got was when Tony Steiger and I made a documentary for Channel 4 about artificial languages called *Language Lessons*, which is another rather neglected piece. I thought it was really very good. It got very good reviews and I liked it as a piece of work. It was probably our biggest funded piece. We got over £20 000 to make that, but again it was not much for a documentary.

JH: What scheme was that?

SH: It was when Rod Stoneman was at Channel 4. It was 1991/92 that it was made. It was an Arts Council/Channel 4 project. I think Rod really liked it but I don't think David Curtis ever did. I think he was expecting something else.

JH: But it was broadcast?

SH: Yes, it was broadcast and it was sold last year to Fundació La Caixa in Barcelona, which is interesting because over there it was considered an art piece not a documentary.

JH: I've seen it in the context of a festival.

SH: Yes it has been shown in festivals.

JH: I didn't see it broadcast.

SH: No you wouldn't have. You would have to be insomniac to see it broadcast. It was on at half past two in the morning.

JH: That's so bad, but I suppose people could record video at that point.

SH: People did, luckily.

JH: But the life of it has gone on though, given that it has been screened quite a lot in festivals. What would you say is the context for your work? Is it festivals or are there different levels of dissemination?

SH: In my mind it's nearly all festivals. I like the festival environment as a way of showing my work. I just like the whole thing of going to them and looking at other people's work. Some of the work is broadcast more overseas than in this country. I can't remember the last piece that I had that was broadcast, but it must be quite a long time ago. Obviously I still do pieces in galleries, but for the reasons that I explained before, I am much more at home in the theatrical Cinema environment. So, that's where I show the work mostly.

JH: Would you say that funding played a big part in the continuation of your work?

SH: To be honest no, not in terms of the money, it's nice to have the confidence that somebody wants to put money into your work. I like that a lot. But, to be honest, the actual cash didn't actually pay a huge amount because I would have probably made all those works anyway even if I'd had no money at all. They might have looked slightly different and only about a third of the works I've made have actually been funded. The rest of them have been self-funded. Then, I've been lucky enough to have a job in academia so my career funds my art.

JH: Yes, obviously that's a major part of most artists' practice in this project. They made the continuation of their practice through their academic work. Can you talk about why you went into art school to teach and do academic work?

SH: I honestly can't remember the reasons I went in the first place. I never had any plan in my career at all. It was just somebody asking me to do something. I was broke and I applied for a job. When I stopped being a student at Brighton Polytechnic, I was on the dole, but I got a video artist residency at North East London Polytechnic. That had a day a week teaching attached to it, so it was a pure stroke of luck. But, I enjoy teaching. These days I am a manager. I don't only teach I actually manage other groups of artists within the University, which is very different. The conventional way that artists who are also academics talk, is that they winge about and basically say "Oh if only I could be a full-time artist and get rid of this horrible day job, these horrible students and these horrible managers" referring to people like me, "then life would be absolutely fantastic". I don't feel like that, I was never very good as a full-time artist. The pattern of my work supports the notion of working for intense amounts of time and then having a lot of long periods of genesis. That works quite well with academia. Plus I do enjoy being a manager, particularly now. It suits part of my personality to be honest. I like the strategy. I like the whole thing. For me they are complimentary. I've had a lot of advantages from being in a University, just in terms of equipment. In terms of funding, I am very grateful. I might be in a minority there I have to say. It really suits me and also I get a lot of stimulation from students. That's a cliché, but I think I've stolen ideas from students in the past. When you have a look at them and you think, "You've got a fantastic idea you are just not doing anything with it. I'll let you do it and

if you can't or if you are really not gonna do anything with it, I shall take that idea." I am being slightly factitious but it works for me. I understand it doesn't work for everybody. I am not far off retirement. It's about 6 years. It's not something I look forward to I enjoy the structure of a job and I enjoy the feedback I get from my job. I am not necessarily thinking about the stretches of time in the studio, which can get quite dull to be honest if you get day after day.

JH: So after doing the day a week at North East London Polytechnic, what happened?

SH: I did a day a week at NEL. That was for the first year and that went really quite well. They didn't have anybody teaching video there but they had a really strong Avant-Garde Film Culture with David Parsons and John Smith. The next year the video artist resident was Jane Parker. They had all these people coming in. I thought it was fantastic. I hadn't seen a lot of film at Brighton. Mick Hartney had got a lot of video people in, although he did have Deke Dusinberre teaching us. He was very influential. The next year I got another day and had two days a week teaching. I thought, "This is great. I don't want move out of London" but for various personal reasons I met somebody and she didn't want live in London and we moved to Brighton. The teaching started to dry up and I thought, "I've got to get a proper job". The first job I got was in Sheffield and until recently, I had been there ever since. That had been a very supportive environment to me. There were a lot of very supportive colleagues, working with video, working with performance. To start with I was teaching video and sound but after a few years the course leader left. We tried running it as a collective and it didn't work. I thought "Oh God! All right I'll do it". I found I really enjoyed it. I really, really enjoyed it so I became a course leader. Then I became Head of Fine Art. Then I became Head of Art, Design and Media. Now I'm Head of School. I never thought I would do that but on the other hand, I feel I do it better than quite a few artists.

JH: It's great if you can do that and you can make your work, which you obviously do.

SH: Yes I do. But, my problem is always artistic inspiration rather than being somebody who says "Oh I haven't got the time!" If you want to do it, you make the time. So I've never made any excuses. My production has been relatively slow, as I say, a piece a year, if that.

JH: That's fairly consistent isn't it?

SH: Pretty much yes. Over the last 24 years it has been, yes.

JH: In context and exhibition, you said that you preferred the Cinema Theatre space. Has that been more recent? Was it just projection really?

SH: No it's always been there. I just liked cinema. I think I never really related to art galleries very much and still don't. I find them forbidding, alienating places whereas I always find the cinema warm. I think it was John Smith who talked about cinema being the site of lots of pleasure: food, because you used to be able to smoke in cinemas, my first cigarettes were smoked in a cinema. My first sexual experiences were in a cinema. Then of course there's what goes on the screen. I just find them immediately the kind of places that I feel at home. When I first started making art, people asked me to show work in galleries. I was in the art school and video projectors didn't exist as far

as I knew, so I was showing work in a gallery context. I was never very good at it. I don't know why. I just never quite got the knack of dealing with things in space or dealing with things sculpturally either. I wasn't very good at. I'm much happier to deal with things in time. I think I've got a knack for editing and structural images along a timeline, but actually arranging objects in space is not me. Plus my things always fell off the wall or whatever. I was just not very good on that side.

JH: *Surfing on the Short Waves* was not for a cinematic space but more for a performance theatre though wasn't it?

SH: It was a performance spectacle. That was an interesting piece. I think it was a bit of a failure but it had some really interesting bits to it.

JH: In what way do you feel it was a failure?

SH: The actual performance was only an hour long but it was quite a long hour. It was an improvised dance comedy video spectacle. It had its moments but the cut down bit of it is the best bit to be honest.

JH: It looked exciting on the two-screen piece and the stills look exciting. Maybe that's the best way to see it then?

SH: The best bit is when Tim was mucking around with these little pigs. He does a parody of running a dance group only with little pigs instead of dancers. We did that at the ICA and the notion of performing on stage and presenting something as a spectacle interests me.

JH: Can we come back to the question of, 'why you didn't use film?" was it that the process in the early 80's was more important than the actual screening of it, and then later the screening became more important to you. Naturally, you could have gone towards film.

SH: I did make a film. I made Super 8 films at college and then I got a grant to make a film in 1983, which I shot and made. But, because it was improvised, I never knew what to do with it, so it was something like 10 years later that it was actually properly made into a film, by which time I had transferred it onto video. So I did work with film. I was shooting Super 8 work all through the 80's and a lot of the pieces like *The Proposition is a Picture* are actually Super 8 film that is edited and has the sound dub and sound design done on video. So there's a kind of mixture of all that stuff going on. I think the other reason is that although I was very attracted to film and certainly when I was at North East London Polytechnic, there were some wonderful filmmakers working there. John Smith and David Parsons were there, and were extremely helpful kind, people who also taught me a lot about art. But, there was the whole Filmmakers Co-op thing that felt quite forbidding. Whenever I went there, I always felt a bit of an outsider. LVA seemed much more warm and welcoming than the film crowd. There was such a split between the two groups, which was ludicrously at that point.

JH: It is important to get back to the historical context of that period, because obviously technologies change so much that it doesn't matter what you use although there's still a hard core group of people who are very keen on pure film and that craft if you like.

That's why I ask the question really. I'm trying to get my mind around how you dealt with that particular historical split.

SH: We are talking about 1979 / 1980. With film at that point, the dominant ideology seemed to be structutralist/materialist film, which was definitely not what I wanted to do. Video seemed to be going in a different direction via these Americans and so on. I was much more excited by Dara Birnbaum and Robert Ashley and Meredith Monk and co than a rather hard Co-op film.

JH: What was happening there? When you say 'dominant', what were they doing?

SH: Well it was a Peter Gidal thing. I speak of Peter Gidal but I've never even met him. There was this notion of the structuralist, materialist film which was certainly as we were taught, a kind of dominant ideology. Now I know there were other films that were happening at the same time that were equally as important like Derek Jarman's films or Peter Greenaway's films, which I loved. *The Falls* was a fantastic influence. Then there were people who were post-structuralist like Guy Sherwin and John Smith. I was drawn much more to them. It was seeing films by Guy and John that made me think, "Oh I could make films" but I think it came down to feeling that the Filmmakers Co-op had a lot of history and a lot of ideology and they were very, very serious about it. I just didn't feel I had any history or very much ideology and I wasn't particularly serious, not in that way. I wasn't very solemn about what I did, obviously I was serious but the video crowd embraced me with open arms.

JH: Wasn't David Hall rather dour and solemn, amongst that group of people? It was highly conceptual.

SH: I hardly ever met him. It was the second wave of people like Dave Critchley, Peter Anderson, Steve Littman, Stuart Marshall, Marion Urch and Jeremy Welsh. Obviously all those people were serious artists, but it seemed to me in a more all embracing thing. Despite that I was still making films and I still do make films occasionally and show them, but there hasn't really been an equivalent of the Co-op since late 80's. There haven't really been any film movements. That ideology just sort of ebbed away.

JH: There haven't been any recent movements in this country anyway

SH: Not here, no.

JH: I think those clusters shift around the world actually. There are things happening elsewhere.

SH: There are absolutely and of course there was Exploding Cinema and Pip Chodorov and all the things that he's been doing, but in terms of the film context in this country and in terms of there being a core, it seemed to evaporate.

JH: There was a specific philosophical moment during that period, that has evaporated, or gone somewhere else, or be absorbed into other things. Plus the technology has shifted with those ideologies. Did you achieve your ambitions regarding dissemination and did you get your works seen where you wanted to?

SH: Broadly speaking, yes, partly by limiting my ambitions. I think it was a strange time because there weren't that many video artists around in 1981, '82, '83. I was included in a show called, which meant my work was shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Stedelijk and The ICA and all over the place. People have talked about *The Second Link* but not in terms of the title. It was a huge touring show, Bill Viola was in it, I think Garry Hill was in it, and there was some British artists. It was an international, touring, screening show. It was called *The Second Link: Viewpoints on Video in the 1980's.* It was more or less the first big show I was in and it went everywhere. So, after that I thought that because I basically want my work shown in festivals, that's an eminently achievable aim. If I wanted my work to be shown as installations in the Tate, which I don't, then I might be feeling frustrated. Some things stand out. I was showing at Rotterdam Film Festival, showing my film, *Love Under Mercury*. There are some festivals, which are absolutely fantastic like the one in Geneva, the Moving Image Biennale. I tend to go to that every time, so yes, by and large that's true. I don't feel the need to show my work more widely.

JH: And so it wasn't necessary to compromise it in anyway because of lack of exhibition opportunity at any point?

SH: No because I've always had support from the University to make the work. My work has not been shown at a hugely important level but has certainly been shown internationally. Because there's never been a commercial edge to what I've done, I've always made exactly what I wanted to do, which was good. There have never been any compromises really in terms of the content. I've just made what I wanted and then if people want to show it, good, if not, I'm not worried. That's one of the great things about being completely outside of that structure of curators and galleries. There was no money and very little kudos but on the other hand you have complete artistic freedom.

JH: But have there been any specific curators or anybody that facilitated or helped to facilitate your work?

SH: Obviously David Curtis has been sympathetic and certainly in terms of funding was very good, although I think I also slightly disappointed him. I think I always wanted to take my work in a direction that he never really particularly followed.

JH: Do you think his approval is important?

SH: It depends. I know some people felt when *Shoot Shoot Shoot* and David Curtis's *A Century of Artists' Film* happened, they both concentrated on a certain kind of work. I know some people were upset that they weren't more inclusive. That didn't really bother me I felt, if you are choosing a show you choose the work that you are interested in you don't try and be necessarily representative.

JH: Yes but David Curtis didn't say that it was work that he was interested in. He didn't say "I'm the curator". The problem was that he'd said that it was a 100 years of British film. The problem was in the way that it was described. As a curatorial issue I think that's what the query was, not necessarily the work he had in it.

SH: I still wouldn't take issue. I think that's what curators do. They do their own thing. The whole position of the curator has changed in the last few years. The curators have tremendous power. They have become the DJs of the art world. The artists are like the lead guitarists in the groups, and now the curators are like the DJs, orchestrating and collecting and disseminating. Just to go back to the question, David Curtis was important. Rod Stoneman, I always felt, supported my work and wrote a nice little essay about it. I think he just really got it. I am more interested in the people who actually get the point of it because it is within video, it's quite a bit out on a limb, on its own little limb. Apart from colleagues and fellow artists I'd say there are one or two international curators. There's a guy in Spain, who is consistently showing my work. For example, it was through him that The Fundació la Caixa in Barcelona bought *Language Lessons*. I would say he is possibly the only international video curator who has consistently taken up the work.

JH: What about the United States? Does your work get screened there as well?

SH: A bit, not much. It's more European work to be honest. I tend to show more in Europe, but it has been shown in the States and in Canada as well. It has been shown in Canada, partly through people who've got contacts there like Cate Elwes and so on. The Canadian scene is also something I've been particularly drawn to. The American scene seems always a bit out of my reach really.

JH: No, I don't know if they are that interested in non-American works, unless it's taken over there specially. In terms of distribution it's quite a hard nut to crack, I think. I suppose there are various centres.

SH: That's true. There are places like V-Tape, which I find more interesting than Electronic Arts Intermix.

JH: But they don't take British work. I think they look at American work and that's it pretty much.

SH: It's a very insular world but some tremendous work has come out of it. It is disappointing when they write about work in America and almost completely ignore everything apart from one or two European artists. I mean not necessary for myself but for the people like David Hall who get missed out of those sorts of histories, which I think is absolutely ridiculous really.

JH: Yes, it is. It's crazy. Can you talk about any critical feedback or public attentions that your works attracted?

SH: Very few people have written about it. Catherine Elwes, I have to say, has been consistently a very, very interesting writer and has written about it in her book, *Video: A Guided Tour*. I thought it was a very, very good thematic book about the area, not just because I am in it, although that helps, but really because it acknowledged the international artists who were there in video, but actually redressed the balance in favour of British and European artists in quite an interesting way. It kind of re-framed the whole thing from the perspective of this country. I thought really needed doing, in a way that somebody like Al Rees has done for film in a very interesting way. I don't think anybody had done it for video, apart from Catherine Elwes. Tamara Kirkorian

wrote a tiny bit about my work in the early days, as did the late, missed, Nick Houghton. There have been occasional people abroad. I don't think for the most part my work has really been part of any kind of video movement. For very tiny glimmers of time it might have appeared as if it did, but it hasn't really. The work exists in a wider context to do with Britain and humour and radio and all sorts of cultural things that are outside art. So, it's not work that fits in very easily with the notion of writing about art. But then I'm not sure that in this country apart from Catherine Elwes and yourself, there are a lot of people writing about video, nor have there ever been for the last 20/25 years.

JH: But you are a person that has a craft for writing so why didn't you write about it?

SH: I did a bit. I wrote a few things for Undercut, and much short, lived magazine called Coil. That was the last thing I did. I didn't write about things because I think I would have found myself compromised. Almost anything you write about is somebody you know for a start and it's very, very difficult to get critical distance on that unless you've got a very thick skin. I just felt and feel for general reasons that with the limited time I've got, I want to spend my time actually making creative work rather than reflecting critically on other people's work, although I do a lot of that in my teaching. I run modules on experimental film and video and things like that. There has not been a huge amount of critical writing about video in this country or indeed any country for a long, long time.

JH: Sean Cubitt wrote.

SH: Yes, Sean wrote and Michael O'Pray I thought was a really, really interesting.

JH: He writes mostly about film though.

SH: Of course, Cate has always written. Nick Houghton wrote a tiny bit in the 80's.

JH: Stuart Marshall obviously wrote some key texts.

SH: Yes, Stuart Marshall wrote those key texts, but we were talking about quite a long time ago.

JH: That's right. There was no book like the filmmakers had with Malcolm Le Grice and Peter Gidal to add major philosophical texts. There's nothing for the video image. That is true.

SH: That's right. They also had David Curtis' book, *Experimental Cinema and Beyond* and in the United States they had Gene Youngblood and all those people writing about avant-garde film, which has been going for donkey years and there are lots of books about it. Particularly though, Americans do construct histories. They constructed the whole thing about Nam June Paik as the father of video and the story of him and the Pope. They have stories and they like making up stories. It's quite right that they should, but we can't mistake that for the whole truth.

JH: No that's true. It's good to have a choice of stories, rather than just one. But was there any particular contextual critical writing that you would agree or disagree with?

SH: No. To my shame I've never read much critical writing. I've read as much as I need to do in terms of performing my job but of course in the early days I read the famous Stuart Marshall article. I've read and studied Peter Gidal's *Structuralist and Materialist Film* article and I've read bits of Barthes. As the theories have moved on I'm afraid I've been left behind. But, as I say, to my conscious knowledge there's very little ideology in my work. It comes for me. It's framed by a completely different context.

JH: Don't you think your works contained philosophical texts though? You've described them in that way. You talk about them as though they are not ideological and yet the way you describe them is. The levels of language you are dealing with, is a kind of philosophical question. Is it that you don't want them to be?

SH: I generally don't think they are. They take their reference points from philosophical positions for example, *Proposition is a Picture* is a changed quote from a Wittgenstein theory. There is a lot of Wittgenstein knocking around in my work but I'm not really interested in Wittgenstein as a philosopher. I'm interested in him as a poet. So, I take all this stuff and mix it together. I suppose you could say there is something about the notion of the English language that runs through what I do. *Language Lessons* was really about the hegemony of the English language is a world language. But these are relatively minor things.

JH: But it's a commentary isn't it? You are making a comment on those codes that exist?

SH: Yes I am but these are not fitting in with art movements.

JH: I wonder whether maybe they are also a commentary of art because they contextualise within the art world. You didn't place yourself within the community or workshop groups for example. You placed yourself with a bunch of artists.

SH: I did, but there weren't many options. I certainly didn't come out of the community workshop group. I briefly flirted with the idea of broadcast. At one point when I was living in London, I was asked by somebody to be to be part of a collective who were making pop-videos. John Scarlett-Davis was part of that same group. There was a point at which I could have thought, "I can go to this", but I decided not to. So, where else are you going to place your work? I find it quite interesting where my work was placed because it relates to art in some ways. There is a lot of film and video work, which art seems to be the best context in which to place it, but actually a lot of it doesn't relate towards art. Some of it relates towards music. Some of it relates towards the cinema in a kind of cinematic theatrical tradition, and I think a lot of British work including my own ultimately goes back to a tradition of documentary from the 30's. You can trace a line between Grierson and the documentary work of the 30's, to people like Guy Sherwin, John Smith, Patrick Keiller and in a much more minor way, my own work. It's more about that, which relates more to cinema than it does to art. At least in terms of the plastic arts, it has a very little to do with sculpture or painting.

JH: Have you made installation works in moving image?

SH: I have made installation work, but for the most part I've not been that happy with them because I made them in the early days when I literally didn't know what I was doing. I

have done more recently where I think the work has been more successful but it wouldn't be my primary focus in terms of dissemination.

JH: What ideas and other artists work influenced you and your work and who inspired you or what inspired you?

SH: I think meeting Dara Birnbaum was quite influential. Mick Hartney got her to come to Brighton. I'd already left actually at that point. I'd just started the artist in residence at North East London Poly. Meeting and seeing the works of John Smith and all the artists that David Parson's got in like Guy Sherwin, William Raban, Patrick Keiller and those people, was very influential. They are filmmakers obviously, although John Smith is now making videos. People like Meredith Monk, Robert Ashley and obviously Bill Viola were influential. I think I was more interested in that strain of contained British irony, that people like John Smith exemplify, more than the Americans. Although, there is a big strain of poetic video in what I do, in terms of landscape, which is influenced by Viola and a lot of other American artists. Recently, Martin Arnold's work is something that I've really responded to. He had a show at FACT where he turned the gallery into a cinema I thought that was a really exciting, interesting way of investigating the gallery space in a cinematic way. Richard Billingham's *Fishtank* is a piece that I've really responded to. *Fishtank* was shown in a context of TV. It was an Art Angel production but it was shown on television and introduced as a documentary about a West Midlands family, which of course it isn't. That's a tremendously powerful piece but I wouldn't say it was an influence. It's not something I've consciously gone out to try and emulate.

JH: Is it mostly art works that inspire you or is it other things?

SH: No, the most inspiring piece for the last few years has been Robert Lapage's *The Anderson Project,* which I saw this year. It's an interesting mixture of video and performance. It's a one-man show that he did at the Barbican, where there are projected images on a strange curved screen that he appears to climb into. It's one of those total art works. It's very moving. It's got theatre patched to it. The writing is brilliant and funny and yet there are profound musical and filmic elements to it. It's a really interesting blend of film and performance so that's had me thinking a lot, since I saw that just three months ago. It's one of the most powerful pieces I've ever seen. I don't know whether it's going to have an effect on my own work, except to say that within the conceptual framework and the visual frameworks that he's setting up, he is actually dealing with relatively traditional notions of story telling. So that is interesting.

JH: You were part of LVA, but were you part of any other collective?

SH: Not really. I'm not a very collective sort of person to be honest. I've collaborated a lot.

JH: You have collaborated more than most artists, so you are obviously pretty collective in spirit.

SH: I collaborate a lot, and every time I do collaborate, I think, "I'm never ever going to do that again". Then the pain wears off. So I did collaborate a lot in the 80's partly because performance artists and people like that were looking for people to document their works. These days I'm working with somebody who is a TV producer, so the idea

is I'll do this piece using archive footage. In London, I was part of an art community, which revolved around LVA. In Sheffield I am part of a different art community, which revolves around my studio and ex-colleagues who teach at Sheffield Institute of Art and Design. There are very few of them who are doing work anything like mine. There are people I know vaguely, who are very interested. In the Sheffield context, it would be Forced Entertainment. I've seen all of their productions. I think there are absolutely great, wonderfully written pieces by Tim Etchells. There is a cross-over with theatre but in terms of a community, there is not much really.

JH: Do you think that LVA had collective goals as an artistic community and do you think they worked?

SH: It felt like it for about 5 minutes in 1982, but really we didn't. Video at that point was incredibly eclectic. There were people who were doing process structural based work. There were people doing things, which were more or less pop-videos. There were people like myself interested in language and all sorts of things like that, and there were others who were more interested in the sculptural plastic part of video. We felt we had a lot in common. We were bound together by the technology of the medium but really people went off in different directions. There were also people interested in sociological ideological parts of video. I remember lots and lots of debates about whether we were anti-sexist which we were. We were anti-racist and anti-classist. In those debates about whether LVA was anti-classist, I think that debate doesn't happen anymore, possibly for a good thing.

JH: I think it does still happen, but I don't know whether it does it at institutional level well in the same way.

SH: LUX works in a completely different way.

JH: It's hard to compare LUX with the separate Co-op and LVA. It's hard to say it is a merger of those institutions because it has completely changed its identity.

SH: You get a sense of community when you go to Europe and you go to certain video festivals. I showed some stuff in Geneva and in Lausanne and in Gerona. That's interesting because you are there with a group of people, there are still, particularly in Europe, people who define themselves in a particular kind of way. I do meet English artists there like Steven Ball I met recently and that's interesting. I feel more of a community there than I do here

JH: Yes, it's like a sort of international pride that kind of meets now and again. I feel it is like clusters moving around because you kind of meet people in these European spaces, or Australia, or even the United States in New York. It does happen, yet is dispersed rather than here in the UK perhaps. There is a sense a nostalgic sense that there used to be at some point during that period a real collective energy towards the collective goal.

SH: That's true and I think one of the things that I forget is you can see video art almost anywhere now. In Sheffield there are at least two galleries with extensive video screenings on at the moment. In 1979 in Brighton, you couldn't see it anywhere. My memory of it is that for conceptually interesting work, the only gallery in London I went

to was ACME. I didn't go to anything else. ACME always had really exciting interesting things. I know other people would talk about B2 in Butler's Wharf and stuff but I must say, I don't know why, I never really went there. I think it might have burnt down before I got there but I'm not sure. But, the idea now that you can see exciting multi-media artwork everywhere was completely belied at that point. All you ever saw was what they told us about at college. The New Expressionists, the German and Italian painters, that was the stuff that was shown, so, the exciting work was at ACME. It was performance and video. That's what it seemed to be about. I should also mention the media shows, which were incredibly important to me as a student. They took place in Sheffield and Coventry. Those were the ones I went to. There was a Manchester Polytechnic Events Week and there was the Sheffield Expanded Media Show, which were the first two places that I ever showed my work publicly. There was the Basement Group in Newcastle as well. Those things had a huge importance, particularly I think the Coventry one.

JH: Did Steve Partridge organise that?

SH: I think Steve Partridge was involved in it.

JH: Steve Littman was involved as well at one point. He was at Coventry.

SH: He was indeed. He'd left at that point but then there were quite a few people still around. With Sheffield, I had no idea when I came up to show my work that I eventually be working and living here. But, I remember it having a huge, powerful effect meeting a lot of other students. At Brighton, I was one of three or four students who were doing video. Suddenly you saw all this performance video work that was incredibly stimulating but it was a special thing. The idea of having an expanded media show is absolutely meaningless because everything is expanded media.

JH: It isn't at the same time though. Music events are expanded media, because they are performative and they are moving image or they have sound and so on. As art music, there is a lot of that happening. There is stuff in Dundee and then there is stuff in Glasgow and then there is stuff in London. Every week there is something, but I wouldn't say that that's normal for an art gallery. I would go there and try and see expanded things generally, but I wouldn't say that they were in our galleries. I mix with what I do. I like the cinema context too, and that's where I prefer to see things. I don't mind art galleries when they are blacked out. But there is really not that much expanded work.

SH: I'd still find the art galleries intimidating spaces even though I'm in the business as it were. I find there's something about them. It depends where it is. There were some things in the early 80's about place, which were not so much art galleries but more art centres like The Kitchen in New York. I went to New York when I was a second year student in 1981. That was a very powerful thing because there was video work being shown at the Mud Club for a start. It was really interesting video work. I remember Sharon Gorovitz and lots of people's works that I saw at that point. I found them truly inspiring. Then I went to The Kitchen and of course at The Kitchen they were showing dance and music, including Steve Reich. I went to this benefit for the Kitchen at some place and it was a mixture of film and dance and visual arts. That seems to be much

more exciting than the art gallery which in some senses has narrowed its focus to a certain kind of art with a certain kind of control on it by a certain kind of curator.

JH: Well I think that's a fair point. Having things in a gallery is about selling objects. Maybe you find it intimidating because it is about who's going to buy that object in the end.

SH: It is about selling objects but it's also about power I think. There was a notion, when I was at art school that the power was going to be taken away from these curators and dealers. It might just have been our own envy but the notion was that the power would be taken away, it would be distributed among some other people in a kind of collective. That has completely gone the other way. The curators obviously have power. Some artists have got power. I don't know that sense that I felt at The Kitchen. I don't know that sense of immensely exciting work happening over a whole lot of fields blending together. It is not something I feel. Maybe it is because I am living in Sheffield and I see it more in terms of experimental theatre, than I do in the area of art galleries.

JH: Artists also do things outside of the art galleries. There's a lot of counter-culture to the art galleries going on, certainly in London and New York. I think it probably happens in Sheffield as well. There are different levels.

SH: No absolutely. We had an event here, which was an evening of audio-visual music work. A courtyard on a summer night was given over to video and certain performances and stuff like that. That was very, very interesting and a social thing as well with things to drink. I found that more exciting than most of the gallery type spaces that I've stepped into recently.

JH: With the music things I've been going to, I would say that there is an ad-hoc community that gets together because they are interested in the works, not because they have to sell them. It's about seeing what creative things people are doing. There's a spirit that I suppose must have been like that pre-Thatcherism. I wonder whether that shift from the 80's period when everyone had to be accountable for everything that they did made a massive difference to that period.

SH: The Thatcher period came just after the birth of Channel 4 and that was a very interesting period for video artists working with video because you had things going off in two directions. From all this sense of: "oh well lets have an exciting blurring collective" some people going off towards TV and doing things very much towards TV and actually wanting to be the all mini-production companies and some of them achieved it. Others were moving towards the art world in terms of that 80's thing about marketing and selling their work, both of which I found interesting. I thought the TV thing was interesting although that's almost completely evaporated and everyone was very envious of a guy called Dubi Ilah. His name was Dove Ilah, but he was called Dubi for some reason. He was Israeli but he was based in London. When Channel 4 started he was one of the first artists who had a lot of work on Channel 4. I remember people seething the frustration around at LVA, but he seems to have completely disappeared now. As have many of those names. Thatcherism didn't really affect me that much because I had to earn a living but I was absolutely hopeless at making money. I got involved with academia so I was teaching in art schools all that time.

SH: You say it like you were forced to joined academia.

JH: Yes, for the reason I've said before. I like what I do but it was never part of the plan. The option of actually making some sort of commercial living as an artist or something else never entered the frame because I would be and I am, absolutely hopeless at anything that involves making money. I've been in the privileged position of doing what I like, but not actually making anything out of it.

JH: Did you facilitate any other artists' works? Did you help make them or help finance them?

SH: Not directly. I collaborated a lot. So, Rose Finn-Kelsey's *Glory* for example was something that I had quite a bit of involvement in. The original performance was hers but in terms of how it was interpreted for the screen I certainly had a lot to do with. It arose from a performance she did at the Serpentine. We shot it at the Serpentine and then subsequently Rose showed it around quite a lot. I'm not sure that I did facilitate. I worked with Anne Seagrave on a piece. When I worked with a performer then you could say I had a facilitating level, but other than students who of course I've worked with generations of I'm afraid I haven't really. Some of the students have become quite significant artists and filmmakers though.

JH: And when producing and exhibiting your works did you feel you were responding to a part of a larger movement and if so how would you define it?

SH: A tiny bit in the beginning in the terms if scratch video for example. Although, I wasn't aware of anything called scratch video when I made a piece called *The Science Mix* with Tony Steiger, which was taken up as a scratch thing. For the most part of my career I have not felt part of a larger movement, maybe to a tiny extent but mostly I felt I've been ploughing my own furrow really and that it hasn't had much to do with much of what anybody else was doing. Obviously I was influenced by the general Zeitgeist and there are certain artists that have an influence on your work but to a large extend I would have to say, no. I don't feel myself to be part of that wider context that you are talking about.

JH: You described briefly before about groups of artists meeting in festivals. Would that be the international context for your work?

SH: Yes. I feel the work fits into that context now much more closely than it would fit into a context of curated gallery spaces. There'd been a woman called Michelle Cotton running these things called S1 Salon in Sheffield that I've curated parts of. She does half of it, which is the contemporary artists and I've curated the historical material and they are shown within a gallery space. It's called S1 Salon. It's shown in a gallery but actually as a gallery arranged as a cinema. That's an interesting context to show work in. Not my own work though, I've shown one or two of my own works but mostly other people's works.

JH: So you are showing past work and current work?

SH: This is mostly Michelle's initiative, but I'm just thinking of contexts. She has had various people curating the historical section as it were, which I was one of them. But yes, it is different, which is an interesting context in which to show things.

JH: Do you think that you can perceive movements retrospectively more easily? Obviously you lived through the period making your work and obviously as an artist you do what you do, but do you think that it's easy to see that there was a British video movement retrospectively?

SH: It is possible to see a little bit and various people have made claims that various YBAs have been influenced by the first or second generation of video artists. I've never been completely convinced about that, apart from some people who very directly acknowledge influence like Dryden Goodwin. He's somebody who I know he's looked at experimental film and video from a different generation. I don't know but I suspect few of the others have. I've heard claims for example that Mark Wilcox, some of his early work like *Calling the Shots* are seminal pieces that have gone on to influence YBAs. I doubt it very much to be honest, even though I think it's a wonderful piece of work.

JH: Why do you doubt it? Do you mean that it's not very easy to find them?

SH: I don't think it's easy to see to see those works. I think they are difficult to get hold of and I suspect the context that Gillian Wearing and co are working within even though they describe it as video artist sometimes are very, very different contexts and their influences are such. But, I wouldn't know for sure. You would have to ask them.

JH: Why would you say that they are different? You say they are video artists?

SH: Some people have called people like Steve McQueen, Gillian Wearing, the Wilson twins for example, video artists. I don't know, but I don't think they would see themselves as that. Their influences and context seem to come from a very different place to the sort of people that we might have called video artists. The word video artist is weird one actually. It's almost become a dirty word.

JH: What does it mean to you then?

SH: Well it used to mean that I was a member of an exclusive club. An exclusive yet egalitarian communal club that was ignored by the wider art world and yet was immensely exiting. Later on it became to mean some sort of boring hobbyists who define themselves by a load of technology instead of art. I think these days I've kind of reclaimed it for myself so I do describe myself as a video artist without irony and I think it's something that I feel quite happy about actually. But nowadays I think it means something historical. It partly means these hobbyists who define themselves via a medium but it also defines the sort of historical culture, which I'm quite happy with.

JH: Don't you think the meaning has been shifted by the YBAs?

SH: Yes, I don't think any of the YBAs would describe themselves as video artists. I think they would recoil from the very term.

JH: Because it has a definition?

SH: Absolutely. But now I think we should say it out loud. We are video artists.

JH: With the REWIND database, there's a whole bunch of video artists there. They still call themselves that. There is also artists' video, which is not quite the same, but I think most people do say video artist. I don't think people have contested the terminology too much. The issue came up with David Hall, the term video art, and partly that's because of the history. It has a very specific historical meaning for him and his polemic, which perhaps shifted in the 80's particularly.

SH: It was a moral problem for the filmmakers, they didn't know if they were 'experimental', 'avant-garde' or 'artists' film'. They still don't know really because they were in opposition to commercial cinema. I like the term video artist.

JH: What was the international response to your work?

SH: Earlier on, as now really, there is an international network of spaces and people. Within that context, my work was shown and still is. I think to start with that international context was much bigger, like the Second Link Show in The Museum of Modern Art in New York.

JH: But what was the response to that?

SH: I don't know. I didn't go. To some extent I went to see it. I went to the ICA when it was shown, but the audience for video art was always absolutely tiny. That has changed with the YBAs and the notion of it being art that is expressed as video has changed. But, the audience was tiny. There wasn't any reaction. In all those screenings in the AIR gallery, there were between 6 and 10 people there, all of whom were artists, most of whom had work showing. So, there was no general public. People talked about how there'd be a general public for artwork but there wasn't. Nor was there a public at the filmmakers Co-op. There were slightly more people at the Co-op but not all that many more.

JH: Peter Gidal believes that if there are more than two, it's really positive and it's worth screening.

SH: I went to one of the Co-op shows. I went to a showing of one of Peter Gidal's films. I was one of three people in the audience to start and I was the only person at the end. I know that for certain and that was from a very interesting work by him. I've been several times and I've been the only person in the audience watching various video works. So, in terms of what was the major public reaction, it was very little. Most of the work still gets shown to relatively small audiences, although more abroad.

JH: I am interested in what the resonance is for British video art from that period globally. When you go to the States and you talk to them in New York or on the West Coast, you would talk about certain artists and they would say, "Well we've never heard of them" or "We never seen those artists" and yet these are contemporaries of Bruce Nauman or Vito Aconcci. People have heard of those people and the same with Europe. Actually, if you go to Germany or Vienna or ZKM for example, where I

showed some of the stills of the work and no one had heard of these artists, even though some of them from that generation.

SH: You ask what the resonance is and the resonance is none, there is a deafening silence, there is a deafening emptiness. In the States they are very, very good at mythologizing and promoting artists like Garry Hill, Bill Viola, Dara Birnbaum and all sorts of people in Europe: Marcel Odenbach and Klaus Vom Bruch, people from that first wave of video art. Here it almost disappeared without trace. I mean not disappeared, but the residence, the ripples were not there and are still not there apart from a small group of people like myself who teach and historicize that kind of work. I celebrate it in an academic context.

JH: Yes I think that's an important place. We did have a Salon for REWIND and we discussed some of those points. It is obvious that the art school context was really important in the UK. I just think it's interesting how the work was never really distributed in a global market consistently for it to stick.

SH: People had a go, Stuart Marshall did a show in 1983, which was an exchange show with the Kitchen.

JH: Were you in that?

SH: Yes, I was in that. I think Stuart was one of the international people. He travelled a lot, but that was a rare occasion. Steve Littman always used to say, and I don't know if it is his theory, but that the British cultural tradition is allied to history. So, we like historical art forms like painting, literature and so on. Anything new we don't like it. So video being new, and tricky and push-button was never regarded as something very interesting, whereas in France and in America they love new things. So, the new cultural art form was automatically validated and taken seriously. They mythologize themselves as well. Quite, rightly so here it never became that. There were no stories. Not until the YBAs came along, and that became the dominant mythology, the dominant fiction. Not that I'm saying it didn't happen. It's just that that was the construct that people responded to. What people didn't respond to was a group of people in an office of Wardour Street, showing things in the AIR Gallery basement. That did seem to have a little romance to me though.

JH: David Hall talked about it in terms of it being 'Underground'. The British art movement was partly aligned to the way that the Americans worked with American expressionism. So with the notion of big scale, video at that point certainly didn't fulfil those needs because of its being on a monitor and so therefore not seen as monumental. It wasn't huge. It was more 'small-screen'. It was all small-screen basically.

SH: Work that went towards the gallery became mythologized and became validated as the gallery became increasingly validated through the 80's and 90's. Some video artists ended up making things for the cinema like Kim Flitcroft and Sandra Goldbacher. Both of who were doing Scratch video, but both of who ended up directing feature films. That gets validated. But I think the work that stays within a single-screen context falls between two stores, here and in the States. There are still a lot of artists working who are showing anthologies, film archives or whatever, whose work has not quite been recognised. But it is an interesting question. I think the answers are cultural really

rather than anything to do with the merits of the work. I am very pleased that people like Catherine Elwes and of course REWIND are re-writing histories in order to say, "Actually no hang on this stuff is happening as well"

JH: What are your most current works or works in progress?

SH: I am doing a number of things. I'm working on a video piece, which is based on a book. There's a book by Michel Butor, who is a French novelle romancier. He wrote this book called *Passing Time,* which is like an interactive narrative but written in a book in the 1950's. He wrote it about his time in Manchester. I am making a version of the book but written by myself using random DVD. Basically it's like *1001 Nights*. It's a narrative fiction. It will never start and never end. It goes on forever. But, it will never repeat itself because each picture has a lot of different soundtracks based around the voice-over. That's the most interesting thing, which is uniting a new technology. DVD is not a new technology but it's a particular aspect of that with a self-reflexive attitude towards fiction, towards narrative. It will also be a total art work because it will have music and narrative. It's meant to be exhibited in a cinema context where it will go on forever.

JH: Will it be random access for the viewer?

SH: You put the DVD in and it just plays on and on forever.

JH: So it's random delivery rather than random access?

SH: Yes, it varies each time it plays. It's a bit like Brian Eno's *Generative Music.* You'll never see the same thing twice.

JH: So how will people know when to go in and out of the cinema theatre?

SH: They won't. They can move in and out as they wish. they can spend 5 minutes in there or half an hour, as long as they want.

JH: Do you have a space where you can show it or will it rely on finding a theatre space?

SH: I have got a space but I expect it will be shown as my other work is, in video festivals. But, it would have to be in a separate because it's not time-limited thing. It would have to be in a separate cinema space or be shown for defined time.

JH: And is that shot on video?

SH: It is a DVD piece, but the material is film footage. Because it is based around a Frenchman's experience of Manchester in the 1950's, is all archive footage of Manchester in the 50's.

SH: I got the material from a North West Film Archive. It is of two things. It's of busses and fires. Each chapter repeats. At the moment it's without the sound but I am currently writing the voice-overs. Each picture will have 8 different soundtracks. There are about 100 different chapters so it almost never repeats. The book is a story of a man who comes to Manchester for a year. He's a Frenchman who absolutely hates it.

Manchester, or Blesston in the story, is a god-forsaken post-industrial hell. I am taking this notion and expanding it using technology. In the book Blesston, or Manchester, is consumed by these fires. It almost feels like the city is consumed.

JH: Did you ask specifically for this footage?

SH: Yes. I went to the film archive and looked at all their footage from the 50's. There's loads of stuff. The fire brigade had a film unit then and the transport people had all this bus stuff so it's quite a tightly confined series of images. But, they will all be altered and modified by this French voice. I'm hoping that will be finished by the end of the year. I'm doing other bits and pieces. Steve Littman asked me to a high definition work, three-screen work for The National Review of Live Art.

JH: Is there anything else you would like to mention?

SH: Student festivals were quite important. New Contemporaries in those days was quite important. New Contemporaries has become much a small thing, with 8 to 9 very highly curated artists involved. It used to be for everybody. I was in it in 1982. They had a separate section for video and new media, which involved performance. That's where I first saw Cate Elwes' work. Loads of people were in that sort of thing. The only other thing I would mention, although I was never really part of it, was the Environmental Media Course at the Royal College of Art. I didn't go to it, partly because I was 30 by the time I left art school. I didn't have time. I thought, "I've got to start to get going really". But, all those people who went there were very influential.

JH: It was short lived though wasn't it? Al Rees refers to it as a second generation of artists, which I think is really quite narrow, because there were lots of other people coming from all over the place. It was influential though. The artists who did come out of it seemed to be very influential of their time.

SH: They did. There were some interesting people knocking around London at that point.

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