

JOHN HOPKINS & SUE HALL - Video Retrospective 1970-91

Key SH= Sue Hall JH= John Hopkins TVX= Video dept, Institute for Research in Art & Technology
Ext=Extract (England's first video group)

RUNNING ORDER WITH SCRIPT

BBC 1970

What got missed out of the programme notes was that TVX was England's first video group.

The first 3 pieces were made at the BBC, *Videospace* was first. The beeb invited us to hold an experimental happening where we were free to operate the control room as well as the studio itself. There were 2 takes of 20 mins each, and about 15 people involved as well as BBC staff. It was the first time anyone had tried running 16mm, 8mm loops, black & white video, numerous audio tracks and a live studio all at once in a real-time mix.

As a result they asked us to make a couple of promo's (the other 2 pieces) which were broadcast. These were probably the first promos made in this country and they were called "visualistions", the word promo hadnt been invented. They were innovative at the time, now they look - well - pretty crappy.

Im glad to say that Cliff Evans one of the founders of TVX and the video feedback cameraman for *Tell me you love me* is here tonight and is a TV lighting cameraman. When it was broadcast we were banned from the BBC because of the White Panther imagery which offended a media redneck called Mary Whitehouse.

1	Area Code 615 "Scotland"	3:38	JH & TVX, 1970, colour	Promo	Broadcast BBC
2	Videospace (Ext)	4:18	JH & TVX, 1970, colour	Experimental	BBC pilot
3	Zappa "Tell me you love me"	2:35	JH & TVX, 1970, colour	Promo	Broadcast BBC

SQUATTING

The low technical quality of the next clips is because they were made on the sort of equipment we could afford as squatters - the other end of the spectrum from the stuff at the BBC.

As squatters we used video to record street life, police atrocities and evictions. The video was used later for people to brief themselves prior to appearing in court, resulting in numerous acquittals as the police evidence fell apart, and setting the precedent of video being used as defence evidence. *Ben's Arrest* is a single, spontaneous take. *Squat now* is the longest extract tonight - it was broadcast the same day and includes some BBC studio footage which was part of the process of using video to defend ourselves.

4	Ben's Arrest	2:30	SH, 1974, B&W	Reportage squatting	Used in court
5	Squat now while stocks last	8:00	JH & SH, 1974, B&W	Reportage squatting	Broadcast BBC

LOCAL HISTORY

This was the UK's first local history video, made while we were squatters and funded by the BFI. The BFI could never really understand what it was because it didn't refer to the politics of the working class and was therefore politically incorrect. It was played literally hundreds of times in local libraries and was extremely popular.

6	Song of Long Ago (Ext)	3:46	JH & SH, 1975, B&W	Local History	BFI, Task Force
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PASTORAL

Free festivals and the philosophy behind them were an important part of the alternative culture, as the visionary Wally Hope explains. Unfortunately he died shortly after this recording. *Bungay Horse Fair* is a slice of country life.

7	Wally Hope at Watchfield	4:43	JH & SH, 1975, B&W	Reportage alternative	
8	Bungay Horse Fair (Ext)	3:54	JH & SH, 1976, B&W	Rural community arts	

SHORTS

Having a low-light tube meant for the first time you could shoot in clubs and homes in available light with little preparation. *Xerox TV* was post produced on a primitive half inch open reel format, a very time consuming business. *Com-com commercial* shows what a distance we have come in the last 20 years in freeing up the airwaves. At the time, mentioning the Official Secrets Act was enough to get our phone tapped by the absurd and theatrical security services.

9 Xerox TV

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| 999 "Quite disappointing" (Ext) | 2:30 | JH & SH, 1977, B&W | Promo punk, low light portapak |
| 10 Com Com commercial | 2:00 | JH & SH, 1979, B&W | Alt. Commercial Broadcast LWT |

ART

The first digital TV was extremely slow, with one frame every few seconds. In collaboration with a handful of artists, we made a whole tape of different pieces, some with synthesised colour added later and various soundtracks. The 2 pieces here are "word art".

By contrast *Skye* is landscape art together with specially composed music. *Skye* and the tracks that follow were made on Fantasy Factory's 3-machine analogue edit suite, where hundreds of programmes were made during the 1980's.

11 Slow Scan is a Slow Scam (Ext)

"Phone line" Slow Scan TV

Which Art in Heaven? 3:13

Art, beamed via Peacesat, NZ to USA & back

Art for Arts Sake 0:30 JH, 1980, B&W

12 Skye (Ext) 3:37 JH & SH, 1986, colour Landscape art

DOCO

Days of Chaos, made before the days of non-linear editing, has itself a somewhat chaotic structure with unexplained and apparently unrelated inserts; it also explains in layman's terms some of the concepts of chaos theory. *Li & Ling* is based on interviews with John Steele, an anthropologist and general systems expert.

13 Days of Chaos (Ext) 3:52 JH & SH, 1989, colour Doco on artist Paul Friedlander

14 Li & Ling (Ext) 3:44 JH, 1991, colour Doco: new age

END OUT

Nineties is a brief slice from a round-the-world trip in 1990. *Echoes of Goa* is a promo to end with, shot on Hi8 in one of our favorite places on the planet with then-current dance trance music.

15 The Nineties 1:00 JH, 1991, colour (very short with a few subtitles)

16 Echoes of Goa 3:40 SH, 1991, colour Promo, dance, TIP Records

In the early 60's Hoppy was a photographer working mainly in black and white. Picking up a Sony portable video (**portapak**) in 1969, it seemed like a natural extension of **photography** and it had sound too, great for a music lover. Sue came into video later (1973) as a community organiser during squatting days and brought the skills she'd picked up in advertising, together with a lot of travel experience.

There were no rules or stereotyping, no training courses. You could be an artist one day, a documentary maker the next, a political activist, a pornographer, a dancer or musician learning some new move, an academic researcher, a cybernetician.

In New York a group of people around the magazine **Radical Software** were busy exploring what you could do with video, and in San Francisco the **National Centre for Experiments in TV** was taking a similar approach with studio-based TV. In Canada the **National Film Board** was using video for community development.

What we all had in common was the understanding that this was a new **communications** medium whose possibilities were opening up day by day as people thought of new things to do with it. So we applied what we knew of communications and general systems theory to this new medium. Von Bertalanffy, Ross Ashby, Norbert Wiener and Stafford Beer for cybernetics, Shannon and Weaver for communications, Yezekeel Dror for military-political analysis, John Turner for general systems, Marshall McLuhan for media, Buckminster Fuller for a scientific, holistic approach.

This was a far cry from the established definitions of film and also of art. The BFI simply could not understand a programme without an auteur and a narrative. The Arts Council could not see that video was a new art form. As for community arts, they took 10 years to understand that the real meaning of the word "community" was "community of interest" as well as "local community."

Technically, post production was a nightmare in the early 70's. There wasn't any. You edited with sticky tape and scissors and hoped the joins wouldn't break the video heads as they went through. The **timebase corrector** was invented about 1973. By 1975 the cable TV stations were able to help us with TBC'd editing to a one-inch format but backspace editing was still very demanding.

To get anything on TV you had to point a broadcast camera at a monitor, the time base was so unstable, and this wasn't often done. But the ACTT (the union) was more of a problem. They had a monopoly, and far from facilitating access to air they actively opposed it. Having fought for years to join the union and succeeded, we eventually resigned because of the antediluvian attitudes of Roy Lockett and Bob Hamilton towards non-broadcast workers.

By 1980 **U-matic editing** was established and everything was in colour. Then Channel 4 opened up and the modern era began. We spent most of our time running Fantasy Factory, a non profit facilities house. Our own programmes got made in the cracks. We did this till the early 90's when non linear editing took over, grant aid collapsed, and we both felt like a very long **holiday**.

The holiday is now over. We hope to resuscitate the 200-300 remaining tapes in the next year or two, and transfer to **digital format** for permanent archiving. And with any luck Final Cut Pro and/or Avid Express will be debugged so that all the editing can be done on a reasonably priced computer.

(4) Other materials

- Sue & Hoppy together wrote theoretical stuff about using video and circulated at least 12 papers in the period 1973-1990, both published and unpublished.
- Hoppy has collections of the main video alternative press - years are approximate - including Radical Software (NY1969-74), Challenge for Change (NFBC1968-72), Journal of the Centre for Advanced TV Studies (1972-80), Video Extra (1975-82), Independent Video (1980-1990). Some of these are now unique as is often the case with "fugitive" press outputs.
- Supporting contextual literature exists for some tapes on squatting and housing i.e. leaflets, questionnaires