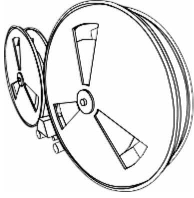

Interview with Brian Hoey and Wendy Brown

Interview by Dr Jackie Hatfield, 19th September 2005

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

BH: It's a difficult question to answer because sometimes I think that the only important piece I've ever made is the last one, or sometimes it's the one you are making or the next one. But I think the thing that evolved into *Videvent* was quite important because that was shown in a number of public venues, and I had this thing about how art should be a part of everyday life and shouldn't have to go to a great art gallery with the marble stairs and everything. But ultimately *Videvent* ended up being shown at the Tate in 1976, which caused some confusion in my mind because there I was in the marble stairs art gallery. It was a very interactive piece and that was what my work was concerned with at the time. So the artwork actually was the relationship between the artefact and the people who were there. Their behaviour influenced the look of the artefact and then the artefact would change and that would then again influence the behaviour of the people. So, there was a feedback loop and that feedback loop was really what I considered to be the artwork. The behaviour and the way that people learnt how that system worked and changed their behaviour. Then the system of course would do something different and they would change their behaviour again, and so on and so on. I began by working with kinetics. I was working lighting and air systems. I began by making sculptures of light. Then, to control the light I used electricity and it kind of dawned on me that I could use systems to control that electricity. So, I built a column of light to responded to the sounds that people made. It was called *The Column*. This was my undergraduate work, and my undergraduate show consisted of a darkened gallery with all these artefacts that were made of coloured lights. One was a room where the walls and ceiling were back air projected lights and it had a mirrored floor and so that the people participating were completely surrounded, and immersed in the colour. I had this six foot column of lights that responded to the sounds that people made. It was very simple. It was the very old, crude, sound-light units that mobile discotheques used to have. But, instead of pumping air music through one or two coloured spotlights, I had a microphone attached to it.

JH: To the amp? To an input or something?

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BH: Yes. High sounds I had connected to yellow lights, and low sounds to blue lights. People would make low sounds and high sounds because they'd realise that the thing responded differently.

JH: So there were different colours?

BH: Yes. I had this interactive set-up. I was doing this because, I am the type of person who has a very strong emotional response to colour. My thesis was looking at the scientific research that was being done amongst psychologists at the time as to how people had an emotional response to colour, so my whole undergraduate show was based was based around that. While I was making this my dissertation on this, scientific research came to the conclusion that yes, I did have a strong psychological response to colour or emotional response to colour and there were people like me around. Len Lye, actually talked about it drooling when he looked at the form and he held it up after he'd painted it. But not everybody was like that and I had this kind of I suppose naïve notion that I wanted to communicate to as many people as I could. I was a musician at the time, and I thought, "Well I'm not going to get through to everybody with this colour, so what could get through to everybody?" Then I thought, "An image of themselves". That was how I got involved in using video. How do I get an image of themselves out there? Out of a video, which was very hard to find the technology at the time. I was an undergraduate at Exeter, and then I went to the Slade to do my postgraduate work. I was in a bizarre situation of being a student, and having set myself this programme of work to investigate over the two years I was there, and they had no equipment. I used to spend hours down in the basement where there were only old telephone boxes, with a pan of 10p's ringing various television studios, and television producers trying to get access to somewhere. Eventually I got into the Education TV Studio at University College London, where I met this bunch of engineers who I would normally have expected to go "Oh we make proper programmes. We don't do that." but they got really enthusiastic about the whole idea and they started helping me take machines apart and play around with the machines. They were all ex-broadcast engineers who I thought would be really stuffy, but they were like little schoolboys. They all got really carried away with it and really helped me.

JH: You had the ideas that the audience could interface or interact somehow with the artwork. You were playing around with the demarcation between audience and artwork.

BH: Absolutely. What had bothered me about normal art was that the artist created something according to their own past, what had gone on in their lives, maybe even the wrong racial background, and then they made a statement. They put some paint on a canvas, showed it, and then the audience brought along their own completely separate background. This was then the point of interaction, where they had to understand what the artist was saying. So I thought, "Let's create a system, whereby the artist and the audience are involved in a much more in a much more direct way, that they actually are influencing each other" The artefact, the video installation was the system by which that occurred.

JH: What was the process of developing *Videvent?* Presumably, at that point you didn't know you had the show at the Tate. Was *Videvent* a combination of some of the other works that you'd made?

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BH: It was taking the idea of working with colour in an interactive format. It was taking that interactive system so it dealt with people's own image, which I thought would be psychologically, a much more powerful image for them to actually interact with. With being a musician, this whole rationale for my work was about playing people's emotions or allowing people to explore their own emotions.

JH: Or being part of the work itself, and the event?

BH: Yes

JH: So that was a perfect piece to culminate those ideas?

BH: Yes, I think it was for me at that time. So, during the two years I was at the Slade and then afterwards I gradually developed it whenever I could get my hands on the equipment. I didn't have access to equipment all of the time, and it was very special times when I was allowed to go and play really.

JH: So how did you try it out in the public space? Was the Tate Show the first time?

WB: You had that shop window in Kendal if I remember.

BH: Yes, I did it in a shop window for the festival in Kendal. I did it at the Slade on the grass outside the building. I did it in a corridor in Exeter College of Art. I went back and did it there.

WB: So people were walking by and would just interact with it.

BH: Then I did it at the Video Show at the Serpentine in 1975. But all those shows I just mentioned, were all single air monitor shows. At the Tate, I put it together onto five air monitors: two showing the present, two showing the past, up to about 8 seconds in the past.

JH: So, on a delay?

BH: Yes, on a delay. And then one showing a mixture of then and now.

JH: The video mix?

BH: Yes.

JH: Who made the technology for that? That was complex at that time. Were you involved with that process as well?

BH: Yes, I'd learnt from these engineers who'd helped me to develop the ideas and develop the ideas further, and it was really a question of cannibalising a reel-to-reel air video

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machines and making a visual echo unit like a guitarist used have tape echo units. I made a visual echo unit.

JH: So you recorded it to tape. Have you got the tapes with any of it on?

BH: I actually don't know. I think most of them were on a one-inch tape that developed a mould. At the time that it developed the mould, there wasn't a process for renovating the tape. It was very "Heath Robinson" really. It was mechanical. It wasn't anything like digital technology. It was actually mechanical. I would have a machine in one part of the room that was recording and the tape, instead of going on the take-up spool, would go across to another machine. It would go on that machine's take-up spool. One would be recording and one would be playing back. I've always been one of these people that think, it's not important for the audience to know how it's done. The point is the process itself. What they see and hear and do.

JH: Was there sound as well?

BH: Yes. There was audio as well.

JH: It must have been interesting to hear that mixed.

WB: Each might have it, or slur of the static.

BH: Yes, it would go round and round and decay, because the images would go round and round and decay.

WB: It became quite echo–ey.

BH: People can actually improvise and fabricate their own kind of experience by talking in different high pitches and low pitches, by moving around the various ways, or by showing the camera light coloured objects or dark coloured objects, because the camera would respond to them in different ways. They actually made their own experience. I used to mingle. I used to mingle incognito, and when I heard people say things like, "I wish it could do so-and-so" and disappear behind the curtain where the equipment was and try and make it happen. At the Tate Show there was an American couple who were on their honeymoon, who spent every afternoon there and they would orchestrate people. They would have people dancing with each other and everybody thought he was the artist. Everybody thought he was Brian all week because he was voluble and vocal and he would tell people what to do. Everybody thought he was the artist. I would just skulk around and tweek things.

JH: So the pieces that you collaborated on, which pieces were those?

WB: Those are *Drift*, and *Flow*. Basically we've worked together on lots of other projects, because we were both coming from multi-media backgrounds, kinetics, making those sort of pieces.

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BH: Inflatable sculptures.

WB: We had a critical input into each other's work. I was doing similar sorts of work and we were both working in the same department. But, I was more interested in not so much the colour, but the actual interaction between people and the works. So, I made things like robots that chased people around and tried shoot them and things. I was interested in people's behaviour. That was quite good fun. Robots now, are very sophisticated. One I made looked a bit like a Dalek. His head went round and he fired light rays at people.

JH: Did it actually follow people?
WB: It did because I actually had a little Remote control box. Of course I hid and watched through a two-way mirror and made this robot interact with the people. That was great fun.

BH: Wendy used to call it her behaviour alert.

WB: Yes, because I was interested in behaviour.

BH: One of the pieces you made, people would have something like a ray gun with flashcubes inside.

WB: They had a mask on so they couldn't see and just a little transmitter in their ear. They had to go around in the darkened room and pay attention to their senses as to where the other person was, and try and shoot each other. If they got a hit, they got a really high-pitched scream in their ears.

BH: And to mix it up, the robot was also in the room trying to do the same thing. In fact, it was probably the forerunner of the Quazar game. We realised we missed out. Wendy missed out.

WB: I couldn't hold up my hands to actually having invented that, but I certainly had an early version. That was in 1973. That was where my interests came from, so working in video was just another aspect of relating to the audience and trying a different way of relating to the audience.

JH: So, the pieces that you made with Brian together, were those participatory as well?

WB: No, they were tapes really, but we did things like *Drift* in particular, where we changed the shape…

BH: We put a mask over the screen.

WB: So it did look like a television.

BH: So you are looking at a circular screen. We put a black mask over the screen and designed it so the action would take place within that mask and it gave it a three-dimensional effect. That was based on snow drifts and the shapes that snow drifts make, the sculptural shapes. Also, the human body blends together, so you are going from one

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to the other and not quite sure which is the human body and which is a snowdrift with those soft colours that you get when light shines on snow when you get peachy colours.

JH: I was going to ask you, Brian, about *Videvent*, because it's an interesting shift from using colour to black-and-white.

BH: At that time black-and-while was the only technology that I had access to, so it had to be in black-and-white.

WB: Later on when colour became more available obviously we wanted to explore it

BH: At that time, I thought I'd sort of pushed the colour thing as far as I could, so I was more interested in working with people's identities of themselves. Then when colour technology began to become available with the invention of the U-matic format and video synthesisers that sort of thing, I'd had a couple of years respite from that, so new ideas were filtering in.

JH: So Drift came after *Videvent*?

WB: Yes. One of the other reasons we called it Drift is because on a TV monitor when it's not set up very well, you get a line drifting down and unfortunately we couldn't get rid of this technological hic-up.

BH: So we incorporated it.

WB: At the end, we just left it in and made it part of the piece.

BH: So the word "drift" operated on a number of levels: there was the voltage drift and there was the snow-drift that you saw. The images tended to dissolve from one to the next, or drift from one to the next.

JH: Did you use the *Videokalos*?

BH: Yes we did, we made a black-and-white tape and then processed it through the *Videokalos* to synthesise the colour, layer the colour over it. I think I was a bit mixed up because I had this notion about art being a part of everyday life and suddenly there I was, 25 – 26 year old exhibiting at the Tate. I think it confused me a little bit. Then I got interested in, because I'd spent so many hours and hours and hours producing tapes as part of the development of *Videvent*, trying to find out what would work in a real situation and what wouldn't. There was hours and hours of tape and I thought "Oh I could make some of these tapes into a single screen air pieces". So I took some of those techniques and began working on the single screen pieces. It wasn't until 1996 when I did an installation for *Visual Arts UK* which was a visual arts exhibition based in the north of England that I did another installation.

JH: So what piece is that?

BH: It's called *River Weave*. It was commissioned by the art gallery in Durham. They had a show on the river Weir and they were putting together an exhibition. They wanted two

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artists – a painter and a video artist who could make complimentary work based on the river Weir.

JH: Are there works that are important to you in the development of your work?

BH: I made a piece called *Spered Hollvedel,* which was kind of a video tape to dance to. The music was of jigs and things. Then I made a piece based on the Gaelic legend called *Tir Na Nog*, for which I recorded my own soundtrack. So, I didn't have any of the copyright problems that I had with the other one. Then in 1995 I was working in Massachusetts in the USA and I began a working relationship with an American composer called Daniel Warner. Over the last 10 years we've made three pieces together and our last piece was a remake of *Tir Na Nog.* But, when I say a remake, I mean just taking that theme. The structure of the piece wasn't anything like the original. *Spered Hollvedel*. It means Universal Spirit. The objective for me was to introduce some other kind of infectious spirit, like Celtic music, into a video environment. I think it was Cliff Evans, who once said "Nobody has ever made a video tape you can dance to" and I said, "I am in the middle of one now" so that's where that expression came from.

JH: Would you say technology has been quite key to how you've evolved your work?

BH: Yes, well I think that any artist, even the oldest, they used to mix their own paint. It's not just the intellectual process of conceptualising. It's actually rolling your sleeves up and interacting with the medium or whatever. We always worked with whatever medium we thought suited the idea. At the same time as when we were working with video in the seventies, we were producing inflatable sculptures and working with lasers.

WB: The lasers that were available were of such a weak nature, the ones we could afford to actually have and use. Your idea was always better than what you could actually achieve with the technology that was available.

BH: To put that in perspective from 1976 to 1979 we were artists in residence to Washington, Utah. A mining village was being transformed into a new dormitory town for Newcastle and Sunderland. There, they were building a new community and trying all sorts of different town planning ideas that hadn't really been tried before. They got the Arts Council to sponsor artists in residence, tame artists for the locals to poke through the bars. We were supposed to be part of the community development plan. That's why we were talking about this big environmental scale projects.

WB: For the three years we were actually sponsored by the Arts Council and again we did a lot of events based work. Rather than producing pieces of work that were to do with us, we were more interested in producing events that the people of the town could be involved in. So we worked with a lot of play-schemes and we hand-glued inflatables together. This was the basis of, the bouncy castles you get now, because we'd worked with some artists who first started this in London.

JH: How did you make those? What was the process?

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WB: With huge sheets of vinyl and you worked it out just like a dress pattern. Then glued all the seams together. It was a very, very clever technique, which these chaps taught us and which we carried on into Washington.

JH: So basically you blew them up with air?

BH: Yes,

WB: With a Hoover

BH: We always worked from the point of view. It was like you have an idea now what's the best medium to put that idea into the practice. We never ever sat down and said, "We are solely video artists" or "We are solely inflatable artists" or whatever. When we first started working with video people said "well what are you? What? An artist? Oh you paint!"
"No"
"You make sculptures?"
"No"
"What do you do?"
"We work with video"
"Video? I've never heard that word before! What does that mean?"
And of course it's absolutely common parlance now. Everybody is saying "Did you watch so and so last night on TV?" "No but I videoed it" It just wasn't part of the language in the seventies.

JH: With the technologies of *Videvent,* you talked about the technology at UCL or getting hold of the TV studio technology, and how, basically, that funded the process and the production of the works, because it must have been an expensive process?

BH: Oh yes, it was wholly sponsored by really good-hearted engineers and academics who supported me in developing that. Of course in every experimental session, the equipment always had to be put back together because somebody was going to record a kind of Open University style lecture on computer programming or something. So I actually learnt a lot about the technology. My tutor at the time was Malcolm Hughes, who was part of the Systems Group. So, he understood the interactive notion of it because it fitted into his philosophy. But it wasn't like being a student who did life drawings or something like that, because it was as if, even as a professional artist after that, it was as if somebody gave you pencil for one day of the year, if you were really lucky to get into a studio facility and muck around for one day of the year. I did have a small bursary from the Arts Council in about 1976/77 to work in colour and you could go to the Royal College of Art's colour studio, but I can't remember what the bursary was. It just about covered a day and a half in a studio over the period of the year. So, you were given your pencil for one day in the year really, and you had to remember how to draw with that pencil and create something with it and then think for another 364 days.

JH: That must have been quite frustrating.

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BH: It was. It was awful. To this day, every videotape that I make is going to be the last because it is infuriating, but it was frustrating to have ideas. I think I've always been the sort of person who was slightly ahead, well both of us were, slightly ahead of our time. We go back to notebooks where we had ideas for a video camera and a microphone being in the street and people in a British city communicating with people in a Russian city or an American city or something, which is quite feasible now. It's no problem at all, but in the seventies it was different. We had all these ideas we had to shelve, but quite rightly because you couldn't do them. But, then you had to find a way of doing something.

JH: Did you work in the United States?

BH: Yes, we did do a short lecture tour in North America in 1981. We were very envious of the American artists. People like Bill Viola and Ed Emshwiller, who seemed to have fantastic facilities. As you say and Bell Labs, WGBH in Boston and links with MIT, there seemed be all sorts of opportunities there, for artists. Having lived there in 1995 and talking to some artists then, you got the impression that those opportunities, perhaps, were only available to an elite. It perhaps wasn't as commonplace access as it seemed to us from the books we read here like Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema.* Things that everybody was always talking about, artists doing this and the other, and you think "How fantastic! They really got it easy there." But I suppose they had a lot of more small town TV Stations and things like that so there was always somebody who was prepared to experiment, but then that was probably hampered by the conservatism of the US.

WB: It's a different culture. I think Americans, when they get an idea, people will try and help them to make it happen, and here I always feel like everybody tries to get in your way and trip you up. It's just a different way of looking at things as long as you go ahead and you've got the belief in yourself and the where with all to put forward your ideas. In America you can make it happen.

JH: It's interesting observing the fact that you were making, and having looked though Gene Youngblood's book you see a lot of European work with interactivity and participation, inflatables. It was happening, people were doing those sorts of events and were taken seriously certainly in the States. So you were clearly doing work which was pushing those boundaries across all kinds of areas, particularly the electronic. It's a shame that the ideas weren't taken up and propelled into the gallery space. Why do you think that was?

BH: Galleries were very frightened of this type of work because they were always frightened it wouldn't work.

WB: Well that's why we, if you call it "curated" but that's why we set in trying the video show in Washington. That was a part of our three years. We actually saw that as an artwork in itself, because we saw that as the town, being a new town, interacting with a new technology.

JH: So you did a three-year residency from 1976 to 1979 and then during that period you also did the *Biddick Farm Show*?

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WB: Yes, as part of the residency

JH: You did five didn't you?

WB: We did five yes

JH: Over five years?

BH: Yes

JH: Was it also funded by the residency? It must have been costly.

WB: No, for the residency the Arts Council funded us and then we applied to the Arts Council for funds to do the exhibition. We also got money from Northern Arts and Washington Development Corporation who were essentially building the town at the time.

JH: But they saw artists as being integral to creating a culture?

WB: They saw it as part of the process to try and give it some sense of its own self, its own being. It was lots of little pit villages effectively being built in between by big huddled versions of new people and a new influx of people who didn't know anything about the people who were already there. So it was to try and give an overview. They built the Art Centre at the same time.

JH: So the Art Centre is where the Biddick Farm Shows happened?

BH: Yes

JH: And they happened from there in 1976? That was the venue?

WB: Well, the art centre wasn't built at the time.

JH: So where was the first one?

BH: It was actually in the shopping centre. In the shopping mall because Washington is built around American lines, so it was one of the fist places in this country, to have a shopping mall. The Development Corporation had an information centre in there because everybody always got lost and still do. It's somewhere where you could go and ask, "How do I get to so-and-so?" or 'What kind of employment opportunities are there in town?" that sort of thing. We actually held the first show in there…

WB: In the Information Centre. It went down bundle.

BH: Yes, people would come in and take a break from the shopping and watch video art.

WB: I can't remember how many monitors we had, four or five I think. There were four or five machines to play. We just had, effectively, a library and people could ask what to watch

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BH: We had a menu.

JH: How did that work? Were you there all the time?

BH: Yes, we were there all the time. People would come up to us and say:

WB: "Can I see that or that!"

BH: or "I want to see that one"

JH: How did they know what to see? Did you have a list or the catalogue?

BH: Yes, we had the catalogue.

WB: We had the catalogue and we had things continuously playing to attract people in and see if they wanted us to change it and put something else on.

BH: If nobody was watching it and it was playing to an empty room we would. Otherwise, they'd have to wait until that one finished and put on the next one

JH: So in the seventies, it was very early to have public events like that, certainly outside of London.

WB: Certainly it was groundbreaking, and that was one of the things that probably caused some controversy, because we wanted to have it in our new town for the reasons we've said. But, a lot of people thought: "Oh it should be in London so that it's more accessible to a greater audience". But the concept wasn't for it to be in London, it was to be here in this new town before these new people and its new influx, merging with this new technology. That was the idea.

BH: Part of it was that it had been a pit village, or a series of pit villages, and the community was developing. New people were being brought in and the whole identity of the town was changing. We very much thought that this show should be identified with that change and that town, helping that town to evolve into something new and not the little insular mining community. It wouldn't have made sense to take it elsewhere, but that was our brief to part of the development of the community.

JH: So this was an international show? You invited many artists from all over the world?

BH: The first year we had people from Israel, Doron Abrahami he was an Israeli Artist, Peter Donebauer from London. We showed Ed Emshwiller, but he didn't come from the States and the Vasulkas. People from Switzerland, Jacqueline Air, Elsa Stansfield and Madelaine Hookyaas from Holland, they used to come just about every year. Hoppy and Sue Hall from Fantasy Factory. One year somebody came up with an antipodean accent, and it turned out he came from New Zealand for the show. He was a guy called John Henry and he decided to come. We used to get coverage from this area, The North East, but also

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from Sheffield, Brighton and places like that. It was a great because people, who had only heard of each other, would meet each other. We'd all go and drink and, as Wendy says, go out to the Roman Wall for a day or something.

JH: How did you curate it all? Were these artists that were known to you already?

BH: They were known to us, some of them, but then again, we had spent all year going to exhibitions ourselves.

JH: So researching who you might show?

BH: Researching people.

WB: Then word of mouth. People would say' "Oh you really must see the work of…"

BH: Yes, or people would write to us and send copies of the work saying, "Is there any chance I could be in that" We used to pay the artists too. Now with festivals, you have to pay to get in the festivals. We used to pay the artists £25.

WB: Something like that, it was a pittance really.

BH: It was a week's wage. It was certainly worth it if you were sending heavy videotapes from the States.

WB: It covered the cost

BH: At least it covered your postage and a few beers probably.

JH Were those shows reviewed very much because I think there may be one? Maybe David Hall did a review?

BH: Yes, and I think Freeman did a review.

WB: Will Freeman did the introduction to one of them. I think it was the second one. And Richard Cork did as well.

BH: He did an introduction for the catalogue. I think Stuart Marshall reviewed it one year. There was a little northern visual arts magazine called Aspects and they were reviewed in there.

JH: Was that based in the North?

BH: Yes. It was edited by Colin Painter. It seems like years ago now. It's almost 30 years ago. I don't know if I got seriously reviewed because I was a long way up North.

JH: You worked at LCP?

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BH: Yes, I worked at LCP from 1983 to 1996.

JH: This show must have created a dialogue, 5 years is a long time to be running a show.

BH: It did

WB: It certainly did

BH: We had a conference one year that was interesting.

WB: That was the last year, I think. Again that was outside pressures saying that it should evolve. We should have other events attached to it and make it bigger.

JH: What do you mean outside pressures? Do you mean just generally?

BH: The funders

JH: Specifically? The Arts Council?

WB: Yes. It was always just that sense that something should be bigger and should perhaps move away from Washington into Newcastle to make it easier for to people to get to.

JH: Were you funded by the Arts Council of Great Britain at the time?

WB: Yes, Great Britain. Basically, they didn't want to come to the North if we are honest about it.

BH: Yes, they gave us that impression. They saw it as an important show but it was just a damned inconvenient place to hold it. So, there was pressure to bring it to London and in fact I remember one artist, one video artist at the time I won't name, who just casually just phoned me up and said, "Would you just give me the list of the names and addresses of artists that you've used" and I said "Why?"
"Because I want to put on your show in London"
I said "No". I said, "That's our show, that we've curated. I'm not going to hand it over to you." There was a lot of research there. There was quite a lot of pressure for us to do it and then, "Well at least take it to Newcastle rather than Washington" and I think my answer was "Well would you move Glyndebourne out if Glyndebourne?

WB: Or the Edinburgh Festival out of Edinburgh?

BH: In the end they more or less said, "Well you have to move it or we will withdraw your finding" and we said, "Well withdraw the funding then."

JH: So it became an ultimatum if you didn't move it?

BH: As I recall it yes

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WB: Yes, I think it did in the end.

JH: And that was the last show that you did there?

WB: Yes, that was 1980.

BH: Yes because they said, "We think it deserves a wider audience" and we can take the money and expose it to a wider audience elsewhere. It never happened. They withdrew the funding or made it obvious we wouldn't be successful in our funding and they never put on anything remotely like it again. There weren't that many of us when it happened and LVA began with half a dozen of us in David Hall's flat all putting a fiver into a pot. As our show developed, there were camps developing and people saying "No, what I do is really the true video art, what you do isn't really seriously video art"

JH: This was the artists?

BH: Yes, the artists. We exhibited a very broad spectrum of work. We never saw it as, "only show work we liked". We thought we would show a broad spectrum of what goes on and we showed what we didn't like. A lot of people thought "Well you should be showing this slice through the artist's spectrum or that slice of the artist's spectrum" and we didn't do that.

JH: How long was the actual show? Was it a week?

WB: It was two weeks.

JH: Two weeks is a very long time.

WB: Yes, and logistically to put it together it was.

BH: Towards the end we began to show installations and performance based artwork as well that originally started off as just tapes.

JH: Peter Donebauer has some images of him at Biddick Farm doing the *Videokalos*. There are some great images of that. You don't really see the space, but he is obviously looking very young. Did you have any work broadcast on the television?

BH: No

JH: But that was something that you were happy to do if someone was going ask you? You didn't take a stance against it or anything?

BH: When you talk about "ideology", that was part of the reason for using the video medium. Your TV could be an art gallery in your own living room and people could have access to that sort of work. But apart from being sponsored twice to provide a title sequence to some unusual show, which I didn't do because, "This is not a title sequence, we are doing

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this for other reasons", that was about the extent of the interest really. They thought it was too weird and avant-garde for Joe Public.

JH: You mean the broadcast companies?

BH: Yes, they thought that Joe Public just wouldn't comprehend it. Whereas we had people who were doing their shopping dropping in and watching video art so we had a very different view.

JH: So there was a market for avant-garde work?

BH: Yes

JH: The audience liked it?

BH: Yes

JH: Is that the feedback you got?

WB: Certainly, yes.

JH: They weren't coming in being angry because they didn't like it?

BH: No, no we never had anybody saying, "This is lot of rubbish! A child of three could do it". There was nothing like that.

WB: There were people who were puzzled or confused and ask questions.

BH: "We don't understand what this is about? What's happening?" and you'd explain it. "Oh I get it now, yes".

JH: Wendy, you moved away from using video or collaborating with video works. Why was t hat and how did that happen?

WB: I was alluding to lasers earlier on and that the quality wasn't good enough for the effects that you wanted to achieve. The technology wasn't there effectively and it was the same thing with video. There was always something glitchy or irritating about it. You would just get your shot and then you get a big lump of drop out or something that you just couldn't quite get to work properly.

BH: You couldn't edit to the frame.

WB: I just found this very irritating. I was watching the Great North Run the other day and it's all, digital now. All the runners kept dropping out into little squares. It's the same sort of thing. They haven't got the technology right yet even though they are using it. So with video, that was really it, because I suppose I am a bit of a perfectionist and I couldn't get it perfect. I actually worked at the art centre after the artist residency finished. I worked at

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the art centre running an exhibition programme, so I got a bit tired of art in many respects and put it aside for a little while.

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

BH: Well probably a bit of both actually.

WB: There wasn't an awful lot of it about it was there?

BH: No, it was very hard because video equipment was so thin on the ground. To hire it cost a fortune. If you weren't affiliated to a higher education institution you couldn't get your hands on the stuff. It was quite hard.

WB: You had the attachment with Aden Vision

BH: Yes, there was an educational TV studio that actually began in the art department of a school in Carlisle. Interesting, the teacher was teaching them all about the history of art and he found the kids were coming in every day talking about what they've seen on TV. At that time Border TV was converting from black-and-white into colour so he managed to talk them into giving them the old black-and-white studio. He got the kids making TV programmes and that eventually became a kind of educational TV studio and an artists' space. Quite a few artists got small residencies to actually work there and then it fell foul of funding. Aden Vision it was called.

JH: You'd had access in the last year at the UCL, at the Slade. What date was that?

BH: 1974 I left there. The Arts Council did run this thing called The Coloured Video Bursary that I won, in something like 1977. It might have been 1976. It was a chance to work in colour but really it only bought you a day and a bit at the RCA Studio. The whole idea was that you were supposed to spend the money at the RCA studio and I did spend it there. *Spered Hollvedel* was made there. Then I found out, that if I could produce something in black-an-white and put it through Peter Donebauer's Videokalos and synthesise it, I could actually make the money go a lot further. I also used a tool that was designed for artists to use because the RCA was a purpose built TV studio and it was set up to produce life-like pictures. That was the last thing I wanted. I wanted to make everything completely unlife-like, so there was a little bit of friction between the engineers and me.

JH: You wanted some visual disturbance?

BH: Yes, I wanted vivid colours. I wanted movement and brightness. With the old Tube cameras, if you alter the adjustments for the tube, you could get trails of light, which they were always trying to minimise. I loved those and I wanted to try and do that so there was a big jukebox-sized control panel inside the room and I would put everything out of whack and it would take them a day to get together again. So that was slightly problematic.

JH: For them?

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BH: For them yes, but it was problematic for me too because certainly access wasn't as easy. Whereas Peter had devised this tool for artists to use.

JH: Did you have your own work at the Biddick Farm show?

BH: Yes, we used to try and make a piece every year to put in there because we thought being artists in residence in the town we ought to have a platform to show people what we were doing.

WB: We ought to have some sort of relationship with them and also to show that the people who were funding us as artists, that we were actually doing something.

JH: Where did the shift happen between making work, which was participatory and physically interactive by an audience, to this thing of sending off a tape and not seeing it or having that as a part of a presence?

BH: I think it was after the *Videvent* at the Tate. I thought I'd said all that I could say at that point in time in terms of participation and I got interested in producing tape-based work. It seemed much more convenient to put a tape in the post than to take machines apart.

WB: You were trying out an awful lot of machinery and it all cost an awful lot of money. To do that one in Durham that we did…

BH: In '96?

WB: Yes, where did you get the funding for that?

BH: From the Commission from the gallery.

WB: That's right so the gallery paid for the equipment, but if you have to pay for it yourself it's quite a difficult thing to do.

BH: It really just became unviable for me to work in that way. As I say, I think by the time I'd done the Tate show I thought I'd really said all that I had to say. I could have taken *Videvent* on tour I suppose and gone all over the place with it, but I would have been doing the same thing time and time again and I've always been the sort of person who wants to move on. I had a point when I was young when I was like, "Do I become an artist or do I become a musician? If I become a musician I'm going to stand on the stage doing the same thing every night so I'll become and artist"

JH: You were part of LVA. Can you talk about how that evolved? Were one of the people that set it up. How did that work?

BH: Well we were in London for some reason, I forget why.

JH: Was it the Video Show?

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BH: No it was after the Video Show. We were living in the North. A number of us had been talking about how we needed a medium to distribute our work. I mean the Americans had Electronic Arts Intermix that came from the *Howard Wise Gallery* and they were sussed on how to distribute their work. A number of us were talking about "Well we should set up a British distribution." We were in London one week, in David Hall's flat. Wendy and I were there. Stuart Marshall was there I think, Roger Barnard was there, Marceline Mori I think was there, and we all just threw a fiver in the pot. David said "Well we have to start. We have to register a company and become an entity that can then apply for funding". So we all put a fiver in the pot and that was the start of LVA. So it became London Video Arts, then London Electronic Arts. It enabled colleges to hire tapes. It enabled galleries abroad or anywhere to hire tapes.

WB: It was like a catalogue really

BH: But it was quite expensive. I think it was about £30 to hire a tape then so it didn't really hit the mass market in the way that a television programme might. Beyond the initial meeting, we weren't really involved in the day-to-day management because we were based in the north. There were various individuals that were London who set all that up and hired premises. David Hall was very much a truck-driving force behind it. I think they got some money from Arts Council and maybe even Greater London Arts as well. Being in the North we couldn't really be hands-on on a day-to-day basis. Then we suddenly noticed that a shift seemed to have taken place whereby, there seemed to be people involved in the day-to-day running of it who had been filtering certain work out, promoting work of some artists and excluding other artists. You would look in the catalogue and you wouldn't see the tapes that you'd lodged with them and wondered what went on.

JH: But the initial philosophy was to include everybody wasn't it?

BH: The initial philosophy certainly was to provide a distribution base for British artists working in video and not to be discriminatory. It was to basically allow anybody to put their work in and produce a catalogue.

WB: And anybody could choose from it just like a book catalogue.

JH: Well the Co-op worked like that. There was no censorship about the work.

BH: Yes, I think the Co-op was seen as a model but then the internal politics of LVA seemed to change.

BH: Yes, it just took on a life of its own. We weren't really seen as having anything to do with it. I never got my fiver back.

WB: At the least it got it started. That was the main thing.

BH: David Hall put together a number of exhibitions including the Tate one that he included me in. He was a good help for my career. In some ways I think I can blame him. If it wasn't for

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him I wouldn't be where I am today. Yes, David Hall was very important for me, individually.

JH: Did he programme your work, Wendy?

WB: No, I didn't really get involved with video until later. Although I helped you out putting together the technical side, like we were stringing bits of tape around and folding it up.

BH: It was difficult because we would produce work and one of our names might go on it but we probably both had a hand in it.

WB: I would come to the editing of your work in York and have an input into the editing, but I wouldn't put my name on it. Also I would say things like, "Well that doesn't work!"

BH: "Don't do that"

WB: "That's an awful!" It was just a helpful view so in that sense you've got an input, but we've always been like that. We've always worked together on everything.

BH: On any of the media we were working, one of us would have an idea and the other one might have the expertise to put that idea into practice more than the other one.

JH: Certainly the shows that you did were a massive collaborative event.

BH: It was very supportive of the arts centre staff. The art centre staff were very supportive as well.

WB: Very hard working

JH: Did the work have any critical feedback? You said Stuart Marshall and David Hall wrote about the Biddick Farm Show, but did David write about your work as well?

BH: Yes, he did. I can't give you chapter and verse, but he did. There was the *Studio International* issue and there was *Aspects*.

WB: There were a few articles in *Aspects*. There was quite a debate going on back and forth.

JH: What was the debate?

WB: I was the same debate as always it is: does this work have any validity?

BH: But it became like, "That's not real video art"

JH: Who was saying that?

BH: Stuart Marshall was one of the protagonists. It was very funny because Stuart worked here where we actually are right now, when it was Newcastle Polytechnic. He was quite a chum

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really and he'd sometimes loan a camcorder over a weekend or something. He got all very "You know this is what video art does. It should be this, and what you do isn't"

JH: I'm surprised about that because my reading of Stuart Marshall is that relative to other people he was very pluralistic and very open minded.

BH: He was at first

JH: So that changed?

WB: Yes, it seemed to.

JH: What was he saying?

BH: There was an exchange of letters in *Aspects*. It is a long time ago and I can't remember details.

JH: When one reads his writing, it seems very open and respectful of differences of opinion of works, so it's quite interesting. Are you saying this debate happened in *Aspects*?

BH: Yes. I would have to see where the articles are. I have to see if we can find them.

BH: Yes, there was gap between the people who used video as a more graphic medium. Both myself, and Peter Donebauer tried to create images that you could only create electronically. You couldn't make that type of imagery any other way whereas there was also a school, and this is a big, broad generalisation, that leaned towards performance related work or conceptual related work, work where they more or less documented the performance in front of the camera. More than once it was said that Peter's work, and I'm sure they said that about my work, was just special effects. It was just playing around with equipment.

WB: Or "moving wallpaper."

BH: Yes, whereas they thought there was a greater conceptual validity of the work that they were doing.

JH: So you are saying there were two camps, broadly speaking?

BH: Broadly speaking that's how it began to pan out. I wouldn't call them purists because the medium was emerging. How could you be purist to an evolving medium? But, yes, they had an idea that of the validity of their work and the lesser validity of other people's work.

BH: I think it manifested itself through certain people being invited to be in exhibitions and other people not being. Peter Donebauer was excluded from an awful lot of exhibition opportunities. He wasn't invited shall we say? Maybe excluded is a positive term for a lack of invitation. I remember at the time Peter was quite upset about it that his work's existence was being denied and so I think that's probably partly why certain people's work

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was never distributed very well by LVA. There were preferences to push a certain work. There were occasional spats in *Studio International*. Some people would write about work. The Arena Show that went out, which David Hall put together and fronted it speaking to camera, introducing pieces of work. The producer of the show, whose name escapes me, wanted a piece of Peter Donebauer's to be in there. David didn't want it to be in there. He couldn't prevent it from being in there but he refused to introduce it. If you watch that, you've got David speaking to the camera introducing a British piece of work then he suddenly disappears and a voice over introduces Peter's work. We've actually got a copy of that.

JH: Is there anything that you would like to bring up that we haven't covered?

BH: After my nine-year hiatus of making video, I went to LVA to have a meeting. I can't remember what the reason was. I had just begun the meeting with Steve Littman when the phone rang and Steve said, "Oh he is here" and passed the phone over. It was a production company that were doing pop-promos. They'd seen some footage of Jimi Hendrix that had been optically printed from 16 mm, or 35 mm maybe even, and they wanted to emulate that in video. I just happened to be in the office at the time. Steve said "Oh he is here". It was for a band called *The Cult*. They were reinventing psychedelia and produced this dreadful music promo, but I did all that type of special effects for that on a diverse on the *Videokalos*. It was after that that I started making the landscape based work.

JH: So you actually did a piece for this band?

BH: Well I wasn't the director of it. I don't know what they were. I don't think they were a punk band. They didn't appeal to me at all. This was a song called *Revolution*. It was the days of video jukeboxes and it was No. 1 of the video jukebox chart for several weeks. I was a kind of special effects director. I never did get quite the same effect as they wanted because you couldn't but everybody there seemed to enjoy it

WB: And it got you back into working

BH: And it dragged me out of my cocoon.

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