



REWIND | Artists' Video in the 70s & 80s

Interview with Peter Boyd-Maclean

Interview by Maggie Warwick, June 2007

MW: Are there any of your works that are more important to you than others, or are a favourite piece of work, and if so why?

PBM: I think my favourite piece of work was probably the *Blue in Heaven* video that we made in 1985. It was a culmination of all the visual ideas and effects that we'd been playing around with at the time, and the energy of the time, which was all combined into this video. For me, I responded to the song and the song was quite angry, there was a lot of anger going on. That video condensed a lot of feelings for me, and it condensed a lot of the ideas that we'd been working on together in the college.

MW: Were you commissioned by the band to make it?

PBM: Yes, it was Island Records who asked us to make it and basically, they gave us no money. At the time there was Godley & Cream making those really big films for Duran Duran. There were really massive budget films going on and people were actually making films, which had narratives. I was very much against the narrative form in video. I thought that it should be much more of a visual idea, a visual impressionism. Anyway, they gave us £8000 to make this video, which was about a tenth of the budget they normally give. We went over and met the band when they were doing a gig in Ireland. We filmed the gig on Super 8, then afterwards spent all night in a hotel, running around in the basement and shooting stuff with them. There were some weird scenes shot basically in the bowels of the hotel. Then over the next few days we filmed them in Dublin on the Super 8 and just made it up as we went along. It was in the editing process obviously that it all came together. There was a lot of energy and I think for me, it summed up everything that we'd been working towards. It was a slick, finely produced piece of work. Island Records, when they saw it, couldn't believe it went on to mainstream MTV in America and was shown in rotation, which means they show it every hour or 4 times an hour. It was a video that had an impact. At the time I was in America. We'd started working on a film with our multi-screen work and were showing it to people. They were going crazy over it because nobody had really seen that kind of Super 8 style with fast-cutting and all the mixing. There is just a ton of ideas in there. It's just overflowing with ideas and experiments. There are bits where I filmed my hand, up against the light and then we keyed it over the drummer before we froze the drummer in the background. There was just such an amazing synergy between the music and the images. I thought it worked perfectly. I think that had quite a big influence on work, although I say it myself, made in the future.

MW: Why did you choose to shoot on Super 8 and not on video?

PBM: At the time, I don't think video was as advanced as it is now. They weren't like tiny video cameras. They were low-band and you couldn't really shoot on them. You wouldn't really

shoot on them. Also the texture of Super 8, like video, was not really nice at the time. A lot of people were shooting on film, big film, and you didn't really see that, but we could manipulate the texture in the video process afterwards. The grain gave a very warm feel to it.

MW: Did you transfer it onto video to edit?

PBM: Yes, we transferred it all on to video and then we edited it. We put it through various processes in the edit, changed all the colours and changed the speed of things.

MW: And where did you do that? Where did you get access to that kind of editing equipment?

PBM: At the time Rik (Landers) was working at Diverse Productions, which was a political, documentary filmmaking TV Company, run by Peter Donebauer, who was another video artist. He was working as an engineer there and he got access to the place basically. So when we started working together, we used the facilities in the middle of the night. Rik would lock up and say bye-bye to everybody and then I'd meet him in the pub across the road about 7 o'clock. We'd wait and we'd watch, making sure the last people had left the building, then we'd go back in, get the keys, go in, do the alarms and work all night till about 7 in the morning.

MW: And did they know? Did Peter Donebauer know you were doing that?

PBM: I don't think he knew at the beginning. No one knew at the beginning. Then people started to take notice of some of the work. Then they found out and they were fine about it, really. I think they turned a blind eye. Peter Donebauer was really good about it. Because he was an artist as well, he understood what we were doing. But I don't know what would happen nowadays. There'd be all sorts of Health and Safety issues I should imagine.

MW: And you got quite a lot of found footage as well from Diverse didn't you, for some of your other work?

PBM: Yes, that was an incredible source. The other thing about filming in that time was getting access to the equipment and shooting all the raw footage. It was quite a big operation, so having the library at Diverse, where there are thousands of tapes and old films and old this and that. We'd just go through the library and plunder it and use whatever we needed for what we wanted to do at the time.

MW: You were never worried about copyright or anything like that then?

PBM: No, not really, because we weren't bothered about selling it. We weren't really bothered about anything to do with that. We were concerned about making the video, and using the material in a funny way. We didn't really think that it was going to go anywhere or do anything. We released a tape called *Pillow Talk*, which had a lot of found footage on it and news archive, but we didn't clear it because we only sold about 20 copies. Funnily enough, the only people that gave us any problem with copyright was a band called The Sid Presley Experience, who took offence to us putting their video on our *Pillow Talk* tape.

They got lawyers in to remove it, so we had to do that, and of course they never got any publicity for their video. So, it seemed odd that they got so angry about it.

MW: And what about New Order and *Blue Monday* because *Blue Monday* was shown quite a lot at the time wasn't it?

PBM: Yes, but they had to pay. I know they used to show it on the Channel 4 Eleventh Hour.

MW: It was Channel 4 that paid?

PBM: Yes, and it cost a lot of money. To actually broadcast it like that, cost money. They had to clear all the footage and probably clear the music as well. I think it cost about £600, which was quite a lot of money then.

MW: Let's go right back to the beginning. When and where did you meet Rik and how did you start working together?

PBM: Well, it all goes back a very long time ago. We both come from Colchester. In my earlier years, round about my early 20s, I'd been living in a squat in London and had a fairly reckless life. I ended up getting asked to stay out of London for a while, and I had to go and stay at my aunt's house. I didn't really have anything to do, but a friend of hers had said that there were people setting up a film workshop in the Minories Art Gallery in Colchester. I went down to the first meeting of all these guys gathered to set up this film workshop, and there we talked about what we were going to do. The next week, we were going to think about measuring up the place, as we were allocated a tiny little room, it was about 15' long and 6' wide in the gallery, which we could then turn that into a film workshop. Nobody knew anything, about how to do it or anything like that, so people just chatted and said, "Yeah, it'd be a good idea to make a film workshop, and next week we will come back and have another meeting and talk about it a bit more." I was thinking "Well, I'm not doing anything during the week," so I thought I'd get on with it. I went to Ipswich where there was a film workshop, and found out how they make the pic-syncs, which is where the film goes into these bins. In that week I basically built the workshop on my own. They came back for the meeting at the end and they were like "Oh, what do we do now then?" It was all done. I felt a bit bad but something had happened within me. I'd been struggling for anything to do for quite a few years and I got really stuck into this idea. From there I started building the workshop and went and bought a Super 8 camera, and I bought a 16mm camera in an auction that was going in a big country house. I had to go and bid for this camera against international art dealers because there was loads of art being sold. I bought the 16mm camera with a load of stuff and gradually built up the workshop. Then I started teaching. I got a book called Lenny Lipton's Independent Filmmaking. I knew nothing. I didn't have a clue what I was doing.

MW: And how old were you then?

PBM: I was 21, and the idea was that, we'd had some funding from the Arts Council, Eastern Arts I think, so I'd learn how to do it and I'd teach other people to do it. So I read the book one week and then the next day, taught what I'd learnt. I had a little group of 10 people and

I taught them all about f-stops and things like that. Then we went off and made a film, which starred me. It was a massive ego trip for me I suppose, because for some reason I just found a way of expressing myself through film. I didn't really talk that much sense and I found that I could express emotions through the films that I was making. I made about 5 or 6 Super 8 films over the period of a year, while teaching other people how to do it. They were quite strong, emotional films. It was cathartic. When I went to college, people started analysing it, and I was just bitten by this thing.

MW: And then you met Rik?

PBM: And then I met Rik. We were doing this course and I think Rik came along wanting to buy a camera and we chatted. He'd made a film. He started doing a pop-video I think, with the Super 8 camera, and then he got into a college to do engineering in London while I had got into Saint Martin's. Then, in my first year at Saint Martin's, somebody came to ask if anybody wanted to do these multi-screen shows in the Fridge Club in Brixton, the old Fridge, which was a much smaller club than it is now. There was a place called The Ice Box, which was on top of it. They were going to put on this thing with a load of TV monitors and have people come along and show their films.

MW: Was that Bruno de Florence?

PBM: That's right, yes. He came into the college looking for people who wanted to show work. He put a notice up and I thought, "That looks good. If I go to see Rik, then maybe we could work together on it and use all the equipment that he has." So I went down there. We had a plan to do. We set a date for the multi-screen show in about 2 months time, and we just started working constantly. Then we started working overnight in Diverse, sneaking in, doing all the editing, sneaking out in the morning and coming back the next night. Of course Rik was having to work all day as well. He was pretty knackered by the end of it.

MW: What did you make to show in the Fridge?

PBM: Rik was working on *Blue Monday* and then we joined forces and made a piece called *Horses*, which was made up of a load of old Super 8 footage that I had. I then set it to one of the Willie Morbid tracks. That was specifically made as a multi-screen piece. It was made using a lot of slow motion, abstracting images and using the monitor, so each image would jump around. That was the thing that we wanted to do. A lot of people just showed videos on the monitors, but we deliberately designed a multi-screen show. So, we'd have 3 VHS machines playing at the same time but each image would be edited specifically in and out of synch so the images would happen how we wanted them to happen. They would dance across the screens. The idea was that all the monitors were like a canvas. It was like a moving canvas of images. So we edited all that specifically for the show. That's how we started getting into the multi-screen, and focusing on those ideas of what you can do on a much bigger canvas or a bigger monitor system.

MW: And then you went on to do quite a few other multi-screen things as The Duvet Brothers?

PBM: Yes, we started doing big shows. We did a show in Glasgow at the Third Eye Centre. That was one of the first shows. We started showing work from there we really liked it and it went off really well. There was a journalist there called Andy Littman, who wrote about our work and scratch video. He wrote about Kim Flitcroft and Sandra Goldbacher and George Barber. He summed it all up in this idea of scratch video, in an article in City Limits.

MW: So do you think he was the first person to use the word 'scratch'?

PBM: Yes, I think so. He put it out there. Also, it was a combination of the hip-hop that started happening at the time and people playing around with scratching records. There was a lot of energy going around, and people are always looking for something to hang it on. He managed to bring us all together under this 'scratch video' term.

MW: Did you know each other existed beforehand?

PBM: Not really, no. We all met around the time of doing the multi-screens at the Fridge. We met George Barber and Kim Flitcroft and Sandra Goldbacher at that time. After Andy had written about it, it was picked up by various newspapers and the Sunday Times did quite a big double spread on this new thing called 'scratch video'. We had to go and do this big photo-session. I think that was when we all met for the first time. Everyone was going, "I don't want to do that". We all had to stand up and do this ridiculous picture; everyone was being very art-y. As soon as that magazine article came out in the Sunday Times, we were bombarded with phone calls. Also, at the same time, our tape was being released, the Duvet Brothers compilation tape.

MW: And were you still at Saint Martin's at this point?

PBM: Yes, I was in my second year at college. We'd made the pop-videos and we'd done the multi-screen stuff, and it was all happening really fast. There was so much energy and drive going into the whole thing. It was weird. It was like getting on a rocket. As soon as things started, the press started getting involved because we also had a double page spread in the NME, by a woman called Dessa Fox, who wrote about 'scratch video' as a big thing. She looked at all our videos, and it all started taking off. We got bombarded with phone calls from commercials companies, advertising agencies, they were just phoning up, literally phone after phone. We were like, "Yes, we'll sell you the tape for £12." We were like, "I'm sure we're not doing something right here." We sent everybody out all the tapes, and then watched all the commercials happen without us.

MW: So you were copied a lot, the style was copied?

PBM: Yes, it definitely started to happen. You could see it on TV three months later. With the archive and agit-prop stuff that we were doing, *War Machine* and *Blue Monday* were two big things that people had known about because it was political. But the other stuff people didn't really know about, they didn't really recognise it as anything because it took the form of pop-videos. But it was a very strong visual style that hadn't really been seen that much. So people grabbed that, and the fact that we mix it all up with archive in a certain way. At

the same time we were doing bigger multi-screen shows. We'd signed up about that time. Mike O'Pray had seen the work as well, and he asked us if we wanted to present scratch video at the Edinburgh Television Festival as a new TV and Video form that was happening. So we went up there and we had this big room with about 500 people in it. We all had to sit there on this stage with microphones everywhere. They showed all our work and then we had to talk about it. People were blown away by it. We didn't really know what was going on, because we were just making the stuff and having a laugh basically. Janet Street-Porter got up and said, "These people should be working in television. This is what's happening. Why aren't they working in television?" Then she took us out for lunch afterwards with Peter York. They were very excited about it and we were in a daze about the whole thing because we also got signed up by a company at the same time. A woman who came and saw the work, said, "We'd like to represent you to do other work," and so we joined the Calendar Company and they paid us a monthly retainer.

MW: That's a commercial company, is it?

PBM: Yes, it was a film company actually. They didn't really have commercials. A guy called Colin Calendar ran it. He is now the head of HBO films in America. But he'd just done Nicholas Nickleby and I think he was trying to get hip stuff going for his company. We did the *Blue in Heaven* video through Calendar Company. He put us up for doing commercials and things like the Bananarama video, which we didn't do because we were being too arty to do that. We were trying to be really cool. We were quite arrogant at the time, so we were quite picky about what we were doing. When people want you to do all this stuff it goes to your head a bit, so we were choosy. We were asked to do a commercial for a big commercials company, and we worked on that for a while, but it didn't work out.

MW: And how did you see yourself in relation to art? Because you were at Saint Martins studying art. How did you see yourself in relation to what else was going on at that time?

PBM: When I started making the films in the film workshop, I was never really aware of other films. I didn't go and see a lot of films and I wasn't really aware of the underground art scene or the fine art scene for film. I started showing films as part of the film workshop and became more aware of it then. I'd get all sorts of experimental filmmakers coming. Malcolm Le Grice came down and showed his films, and I spoke to him about Saint Martins and whether I could get in. I showed him my films and he said I should apply. That's what I did. I was basically becoming educated to more experimental film, but I was also making films that I didn't realise were experiments. They were experiments, but I wasn't really aware of what was going on at all in the film world, and I was just doing my own thing.

MW: So, where do you think your influences came from? Do you think you were influenced by certain things, or do you think you just did your own thing?

PBM: I think the original influence was the desire to find an expression. I found doing it in film, by images, I could express myself and express certain feelings. It was really based around that. Then it grew from there. You move on from there. Most of the stuff was experiment. One of the first Super 8 films I made was called *Real People* and it had a guy

in it called Matt Fraser. He was a thalidomide victim and really wanted to be in a film. But it became quite an expressive film, black-and-white, and it was shot in a certain way, which was slightly narrative. The idea was, because I had several takes, I didn't want to waste the film stock, so I used the takes over and over again. So, there are shots of him running up the stairs, which I just thought I'd use over and over. So it was all repeat editing, which occurred naturally without being influenced by anything else. It was just because of the sort of stock and the price of the stock. I wanted to make a longer film. I wanted to make a 4-minute film and try to expand everything out, but as you do that you think, "Oh, that looks quite good," the repetition of the image, it becomes another meaning, the more you repeat something, the more it takes on a meaning of some description. So, I was getting quite into that kind of experiment. When I'd just bought the Super 8 camera, I ran some film through it and tested all the different things on it, the dissolves and all the different buttons that you could use. There were tons of dissolves and I went out and just filmed all these people in a bus stop, people sweeping up the road, people bringing cement mixers in, cars and traffic coming through and sent it off. When it came back it was all amazing mixes and everything was mixing around, it just looked perfect for some reason. Somebody came around to the film workshop and I happened to have the film in the Super 8 synch. It had a magnetic strip on it so you could record sound on to it. The radio was playing, Radio 4. I had it plugged in, and the guy came around and asked, "Oh, how do you make films?" I said, "Oh, you can just do it like this. It's easy." I plugged the thing in and pressed, "Record" and played the record from the radio straight on to the film. It was a woman talking about art and how significant fine art is. It was really weird. I was watching it create a sort of poetry. It was amazing. I couldn't believe it. I was getting quite into that experimental work. Then when I went to college, the whole thing opened up and I realised there were loads of people doing things with repeat edits. I saw Ferdand Leger's film *Ballet Mécanique* was all repeat edits. That's when I started becoming more influenced. During that first year at art school, I couldn't believe that I'd actually finally made a decision that was the right one. I was thinking, "My God, in my whole life, I might have actually made the right decision." I was in this college and we were getting bits of film and scratching on them with wire brushes, and punching holes in them, putting sugar all over it and selotaping it all, then projecting it and going, "Oh, look at that! That looks great."

MW: Who were your tutors at that time?

PBM: There was Tina Keane, William Raban, Anna Thew and Malcolm Le Grice, that was the main people I think. David Curtis came in the second year. We were doing all these experiments. It was just like playing. It was brilliant. In the second year we had a project, which involved the step gate printer, which we did with William Raban. I'd taken an old film that I'd made at the film workshop. It involved a continuous white pan. I'd put a camera on a child's roundabout and it filmed all the trees and everything like that. For the project, we had to use the step gate printer, which was printing every four-five frames, and so I put all the different coloured filters all over the step gate printer, and slowed all the images down. The trees became all these really weird, abstract shapes. It was like an idea of painting, but with all the different colours on it. It took on quite an effect. I remember William at the time, saying "God, you've taught me something there," I started applying all those ideas to the videos. So, the first video that we made was the *Torch Song* video. We'd shot this on video camera, zooming in and out really fast on flowerbeds in this park in Notting Hill Gate.

We were just throwing it around and zooming in and out and then slowed it right down. By this time, we'd moved on to using video because it was cheaper, and you could abstract the pictures. So the flowers became like blobs of colour and it was like literally painting. At the time when I was at college, there were a lot of painters talking about how they wanted to do video. So, I thought it'd be quite interesting to see if you could do it the other way round, and use video to paint. But the actual idea of being an artist, I balked at a bit. My brother was an artist and he was at college as well. He was at North East London Polytechnic, but for some reason I always had a funny thing about the idea of saying "I am an artist." I am not quite sure why, but I've only just started to realise that. Maybe having spent a lot of time in television, now I'd rather do the art. But at the time I was rebelling a bit against the whole artist idea.

MW: You thought it was pretentious?

PBM: Yes, I thought it was elitist and pretentious at the time. There is great art and then there are people messing around with berets on. It was all very good fun though, and it was a great time. I know that the college were not too happy with me doing the commercial side, but my feeling was that I wasn't going to be making close-ups of duvet covers and zooming in on a brick wall for 25 minutes, which is what the films we were seeing at the time were. That was the Structuralist stuff. Although I was influenced by the Structuralist ideas, I needed to make a living. I don't think I could have lived off hand-outs, although I'd like to now.

MW: Can you talk a bit more about the multi-screen work, because that was very interesting at the time? How did *Strickley Trigalig* come about and where did the title come from?

PBM: We were commissioned to do a video for LVA. It was a 9-screen work, which was going to go in the window of an art gallery. At the time, I was about to make a graduation film and we were just starting to get a name, but I was a hit with a sudden tragedy. My brother died. He was 29. I was 26. He died of a very sudden heart attack. It was quite a shock, because no one knew it was going to happen. One day he was walking around, the next day he wasn't, so it was quite a shock. I think it was at that time I threw myself into the Duvet Brothers, working, trying to get more work and avoiding dealing with that. There was a kind of sadness in the film. It was in 1986. I was trying to make my graduation film, I'd been on a recce down to Clacton in Essex. I was looking out of the car windows, driving past all these fields. When you look at the fields, all the sticks and stuff like that from the hedges, as you drive quite fast past them, they take on this weird effect. So, you are looking through the fields and it's like watching a film in a way, like loads of stills. I saw that and I thought that'd be good for part of the video that we were making, so I filmed that and I filmed loads of trees. There was something about using nature, because all our stuff was very hard and hard-cut. With focus pulling on a tight lens, I filmed the twigs in the winter, so they started to move with the focus pulling. It was like they were moving and glistening. We put that on to the multi-screen. It was doing that all over the place, which looked nice. We had quite a sad song to go with it and it went through different aspects because it was about 10 minutes long. There was a lot of sadness involved in that, because that was virtually around about the time that he died. And then the connections, the *Blue in Heaven* video, there was anger in that one which came later, the energy of anger. But he'd died

just at the very time that we'd started to get successful, so everything was tinged with pain. I was very sad.

MW: But the multi-screen work did very well. You showed that in quite a lot of places.

PBM: Yes, we began to do big shows and we were really interested in showing live performance. A lot of it was because we wanted to be in bands. We started organising and just showing them anywhere basically, anywhere that that'd have them. The guy that used to run the Minorities Gallery, Jeremy Theophilus, had taken over Oriel Mostyn Art Gallery in Wales. So he commissioned us to do a piece, *Harry*, and we did a big show there as well. We'd started to show our work anywhere we could as a performance show.

MW: When you say performance show, were you mixing the multi-screens live? They weren't computerised? They weren't digital?

PBM: No, we were mixing everything live. It was very old. We'd get a load of DER type, rented TVs and put them upside-down or sideways. It was very similar to the original set up in the Fridge, but instead of being in a mound we put them up on a big wall built out of scaffolding, with just wooden planks over it. Then the TVs were higgledy-piggledy. Then we connected all the TVs up in a series and put them through 3 VHS machines, which we'd previously edited. So, we had a specific piece. We'd change tapes after the end of each piece. We'd whip a tape out and stick another one in, so we were doing that all the way through the shows, 25 maybe 40 minutes long. We'd planned everything out, so we'd do it like that as a show, it would either go well or it wouldn't. Sometimes we'd mess up because we wouldn't press the right buttons. You always had to press, "pause" on one, and when you press "stop" on two of them all screens come up as one image. Because that was coming from one source, and then you press another one, it'd break it all up in different images. So, that was what we were really enjoying doing. We did a show in Berlin, one of our first shows. We were doing it in a tent we'd set up, right by the Wall in Kreuzberg. We'd done a few radio interviews trying to strum up a bit of publicity for people to come and see it. We put the monitors up during the day and then suddenly we'd see an armoured vehicle gradually surrounding our car park that we were filming in. We were thinking, "Bloody hell! We are not that popular! My God, that's a bit heavy!" There was a tank and a couple of armoured vehicles. Then we came to do the video about 8 o'clock or 9 o'clock at night, and there were about 20 people in this tent, there were kids cycling in and out, and it was all surrounded by the army. We did the show and then at the end, everything went crazy, people throwing bottles, not in the tent but in the street outside, literally outside our tent. They were just throwing bottles and then there was tear gas. There was a massive riot going on, so we sort of joined in and started filming it and running around. But, then we got tear-gassed. It was a bizarre, but quite funny experience really. We did Holland and we did Melkweg, which was a big show. We did a couple of galleries round there as well, and then we did some shows in America. We did a show in Brighton at the Zap Club. There was a band there that we were supporting called Sigue Sigue Sputnik, who were getting quite a lot of publicity at the time for their mad hair. People were laughing at the music and their visual style. They'd been derided basically, but some other people quite liked them. We went and supported their gig at the Zap Club, so we were showing the films, then Tony James from Sigue Sigue Sputnik started going

on about our video show and how great it was. It was exactly the kind of thing that they were trying to do. They were about to do this big show and they wanted us on board to help. We were like, "Yeah-yeah, whatever, this is not going to happen," but then it did. He phoned up, came round and commissioned us to do this video installation for his gig at the Royal Albert Hall. There was a large number of people there. We were going to get a live satellite link up to the Reykjavik Summit with Gorbachov and Regan. So we had a satellite dish installed on the roof of the Albert Hall, with all these wires coming down into our multi-screen. They gave us a ton of films. Because they were all about ultra-violence and all this stuff, we had a ton of big Hollywood copyright films, like Death Wish, Clint Eastwood films with, "Make my day," and all that stuff. We just did this cut of all these really violent films, and mixed it in with the live TV footage of the Reykjavik Summit. We'd sit there on the stage. We were all wearing white coats while the band played. We were given control of the sound to put our sound effects in over the band, but we couldn't really hear very well, so we kept whacking it up and down and doing all this stuff. It was quite a funny show really. I think it was ambitious at the time and it worked.

MW: It sounds incredibly exciting and because it was completely improvised it must have been a really unique spectacle.

PBM: Exactly, and you didn't really know where it was going to go either. We did it at the Royal Albert Hall, and then we went to America and did it in Los Angeles and New York. We did a big show in New York at a massive club there on Halloween. I think it was Halloween, when the kids throw the eggs. In New York, they do trick-or-treating, and they throw eggs. So, they've got these massive screens on the stage, then the band came on and literally, there was just a hale of eggs and they all hit the screens, everything. We were thinking, "Oh Christ, they are going to electrocute everything." When the show was finished, there were loads of eggs fried on the screens. And that was quite a good show as well. We'd set up where we were going to play and perform which was high up above the stage, but it was right next to the VIP lounge. People kept coming backwards and forwards and Rik was getting really annoyed because we were trying to plug the wires in. He just turned around at one point and said, "No, you can't come in," and it was Debby Harry. So, he was having a laugh about that. It was great though. The multi-screen was taking off for us. People really liked the multi-screen. We'd also done a big show at the Limelight. By this time we were attached to the Calendar Company and they got involved. Lynn Frank was into PR for us and we did a big show at the Limelight Club. It was packed. I couldn't understand how on earth it got so packed, but obviously Lynn Frank's got something to do with it. TV crews came down and we did interviews for BBC News and things like that. Then we did this show and there were about 1000 people there. It was all suits. It was just full of the commercials industry and all the other industries. So they all came and watched all the stuff and then we never got a call. But one guy that was at the gig was Marek Kaniewska, a film director who was making a film in Hollywood. He phoned me up afterwards and said, "I really loved this show. I really want that in my film, we'll be in touch." Rik and I were editing away, doing something when we got this phone call from Hollywood, going "We want your stuff in the film, we want the multi-screen in the film." I was doing conference calls with all these producers and I didn't really believe that it was happening. So, I was quite casual with them. I said, "Well, why not come and see our show with Sigue Sigue Sputnik? We are playing in LA, so why don't you come and see that?"

So, it all tied in perfectly, the producers came to the show and then we ended up working on a film.

MW: What was the film?

PBM: The film was called *Less Than Zero*, and it was based on Bret Easton Ellis' first novel about Hollywood rich kids who lose themselves, basically. It was a brat-pack film, and it was Robert Downey Junior's first film. James Spader is in it as well. So, the next thing is, I'm in Hollywood staying at the Château Marmont and going clubbing in a limo with James Spader. I met Ice T, it was great! That was 1988, I think. It was around about 1987/'88. It was at the time that all this hip-hop stuff was going on, with all these amazing rap artists like Schoolly D and Ice T was there. I was working on the multi-screen, hanging out with all these people and going clubbing a lot, listening to this incredible hip-hop they were playing and scratching, they were really doing all the scratching. You'd be dancing on the dance floor and you'd hear words, it was like being schizophrenic basically, you'd think people were saying the same words to you, but it was all from scratching.

MW: Those artists hadn't really arrived in Britain by then. They hadn't really appeared here.

PBM: No, not at all. It was a totally new thing. The guy that I was working with on the film was doing the record scratching. He was called Afrika Islam. He was the son of Afrika Bambaataa. He taught me how to do the scratching, but he'd also take me out clubbing and we went out and met Ice T. Ice T was doing a lot of rapping. I saw some bloke up on stage talking and then I got on stage with Afrika Bambaataa's son, Afrika Islam. Then I saw a chair and I thought "Oh, I'll sit on that for a bit," because I thought I was going to wait for him to stop talking, and then we could have a chat. Then I realised I would have to actually get off the stage. So, it was good fun. The whole *Less Than Zero* thing was really mad actually. I was there for three months doing the film. I was going to work on another film after that, which was *Earth Girls are Easy*, so I had a lot of meetings with Julian Temple, but I made a mistake of getting the producer of the first film to represent my deal for the second, and of course it was far too expensive, so I was cut out of it.

MW: Were you still working with Rik all through this?

PBM: Yes, Rik came over. We couldn't really both go over at the same time, so I did the filming basically. I filmed a lot of stuff on the back of someone's motorbike and then when we came to edit it, Rik came over and we edited it together. We also did another multi-screen show, in a place called Athens, Ohio, which was a university town. We did a big show there and had to give a big talk the next day.

MW: Was the multi-screen stuff shown in the UK as well? Or was it mostly abroad?

PBM: No, it was mainly in the UK to begin with, and we did shows around London, but the biggest one was the Limelight, and the Albert Hall, but we also did The Third Eye Centre in Glasgow. It was mainly art galleries. There was quite a lot in support of Nicaragua and the Miners' Strike, which we'd do. We'd put on events and show them then.

MW: That was pretty radical at the time, because that kind of stuff wasn't normally shown at those kind of events. Was that because some of your stuff was quite political?

PBM: Yes, a lot of it was because of *War Machine* and *Blue Monday*. They were the two main political pieces that we did. The rest of it was entertainment really, but in a different form. It was using television. It was using the method of television and throwing it back at the audience, in a way that was deconstructing TV. Which was something I picked up from the college, when everybody was deconstructing film. It was like applying that to the TV. That began after we did the gig in the Zap Club. Janet Street Porter, who was Tony James's girlfriend and who'd seen us before at the Edinburgh Festival, approached us about doing some videos for her TV programme called Bliss. We did these fashion pieces for her. She just gave us a lot of footage and we cut it to Colourbox music, which was hip stuff happening at the time. 4AD Record Label and all that kind of stuff was going on at that time. She really liked what we'd done. She used to come and meet us with Tony James when we were cutting the stuff for the multi-screen. Then she said that she was doing a programme called Sunday Brunch, which was going to be great new youth current affairs programme. We talked to her a lot about the shooting style. The deconstruction was quite a good thing as the idea was just having TV and seeing all the people and opening the whole thing up, like Godard. I started to discover Godard at college, watching his films, he was breaking everything down, you could see the cameras and you could see this, and I thought it'd be good to apply all that to TV, because it hadn't really been done. If you've just seen newsreaders and people reading news, everybody was just walking about, basically. She had the insight to pick up on what was going on, because of all the scratch video at the time. She keyed straight into what was happening in video and applied it all to Network 7, which was her first programme for that. I remember showing her these things, because Rik had put all these facts coming up. I'd never seen that before. It was all across the screen just in a roll, which became part of the Network 7 language.

MW: Right. So Rik was involved in the Network 7 thing as well?

PBM: He was involved in the meetings.

MW: And you were still working together as the Duvet Brothers at that time?

PBM: We were in America when Network 7 first went out, but we were involved in the developing of it, we talked and we had meetings with Janet about the whole visual style, but she didn't ask us to work on it. I worked on the second series.

MW: Can you talk a bit more about the *Less Than Zero* work?

PBM: We were making the multi-screen installations for scenes in the film *Less Than Zero*. I was there for about three months, having a whale of a time. I was experiencing all these incredible new things that were happening. Being in America was like living in a film, so you actually feel like you are in the film already. But towards the end of the job, I was thinking I wasn't going to get paid. I started to feel that I wasn't going to get paid by the producers, because I was going to go back to England and that would be the end of it. So, I expressed this worry to a friend who said that he knew a lawyer, and maybe I should go

visit him. He pushed me to go and visit him, because all the American people I knew, were saying "You are not going to get paid. They are just going to see you later, because you will be back in England. There is nothing you can do about it, so you should be careful." So, I spoke to this lawyer. I went up to Mulholland Drive, which is this amazing drive along the Hollywood hills, through all these incredible houses. It turned out that this lawyer was the lawyer for John Landis. At the time, John Landis was having this massive court case about somebody who died in a helicopter crash while he was filming, and this was the guy who was representing him. So, he was a pretty top lawyer. The first thing he said to me was, "Watch my lips, you will not get paid," as he opened the door, and I was thinking, "All right, here we go!" So I went in for about an hour and showed him all the work, our work, the Duvet Brothers work and everything, and then explained to him what was happening. He said, "You should copyright this. You should copyright the style." I said, "Well, you can't copyright an idea. It's all ideas and you can't really copyright that. He replied, "Well, you can here." For some reason I thought I knew more about law than he did, and I didn't believe that you could actually copyright the idea. So I didn't do anything about it. But he made sure that I got paid. I ended up phoning up the producers and saying, "I've been advised by such-and-such a lawyer," dropping his name. That made them really angry. He just said, "Don't fuck with me! Don't fuck!" like classic Hollywood, "You'll never work in this town again." I got the money the next day, but I never worked in the town again. Well, I did actually, but not for him. It's quite interesting that people in America thought that you could copyright the style. I still don't think you can do it, but maybe you can, I don't know. But because we'd shown our work to quite a lot of people, versions started appearing on MTV. MTV at that time was just showing the Duran Duran-type videos. There was some bloke just standing there talking in a white background or whatever, and it was pretty boring basically. We'd done all these idents for a company called The Music Box in England. That was just before MTV. One of our first commercial jobs was to do these idents and we did 21 Music Box fillers, each one being about a minute long. Some of them were quite innovative, because they were showing how you could start to use the technique in a commercial way: using all the art, putting it in a commercial, groovy way which became the MTV standard. Then we were asked to do all the Channel 4 stuff. I think our style started to influence the Channel 4 style at the time. I had to cut all this forthcoming programming and press-release stuff. So, I re-cut all the Channel 4 films for them to show to the press, but it helped create this style that Channel 4 was looking for at the time when it just started. I got very much involved in Channel 4 after the Duvet Brothers, and that involved getting into TV, Network 7 and then loads of youth TV after that. So, I've spent 10 years using television as a playground to play around with ideas. For some reason, I was allowed to do whatever I wanted. So people were encouraging me and when you are in a position where people like you to do whatever you want, it's quite easy to do it. But after 10 years of doing that, you get spat out of the other end, and suddenly it's over. There is a growing up period I think, and after that, a lot of people changed at Channel 4 and in TV. People move on and do other things, and our style wasn't that 'in' anymore.

MW: Looking back, how do you see scratch now? Can you define scratch, or do you think it's pretty indefinable?

PBM: Well, I think scratch video is, basically, Eisenstein's 'one image plus another image gives a third meaning' idea. It's just a montage, but it's using archive and changing the meaning of

the original archive. I think that the one that actually defined it is *Blue Monday*, that Rik was doing. But it also made it contemporary, by taking the song and changing the meaning, giving it a political, agit-prop feel. We did *War Machine* at that time as well, which was using the guns as a repeat edit, creating a rhythm, having that as a base and making it into something else. We were making the footage into something completely different, not what it was intended to be used for. So, I think that's scratch. But, it's also the shot stuff. I was very interested in shooting stuff as well, because I felt that the scratch video with archive was going towards a cul-de-sac, and I couldn't really see where it was going to go especially with copyright problems and other things. Where could it go, really? I was interested in shooting stuff, and the style that we developed through the shooting and mixing, the scratch style, was the most important thing in developing TV. If you look at the whole visual medium, that style had quite a lot of influence. And you can see it now. I watch Andrew Marr's *History of Britain*, and you can see all the techniques in there. It's part of the film language or the TV language.

MW: Yes, it's been there for years now.

PBM: Yes, it's just become the language. I think the problem is that if you are involved in innovation like that, you become dated yourself. You do it from your soul, and work in a way that you want to do things. That's what we did. That was my art form in a way. That's what I do. I don't really do anything else. So, when everybody else is doing it, you can feel it happening. These are my techniques. So, what do I do? I become dated, or I move on and do something else. But I do remember at the time, I might have just come back from America and a friend of mine said, "You're like a speed boat down the river, everyone is surfing on your waves, but you've ran out of petrol." I like the first bit. I'm still trying to find the petrol station.

MW: You've just edited a music video recently?

PBM: I've been in television since 1990. I worked in documentaries, challenging documentaries that were pushing the boundaries. I think that with all of the stuff that we were doing, the energy was always to push the boundaries. We were always trying to change things. We were trying to make things different. The whole point of everything was to try and get people to look at it and go, "I haven't seen that before." I think we did that quite a lot. I was trying to do that in TV and was pushing that. I made the first documentary about sadomasochism that went on TV, for a show called *Sex Talk*. I ended up working with that. I was interested in the human condition. I was interested in why people do certain things and that was a thing that I became very interested in. I was interested in why people do all that sort of stuff. That was a landmark in a way. People were talking about it a lot, but then things changed. I am not sure if it helped television at all. TV has pretty much run its course for me. There is not really much I see now that I actually want to watch.

MW: Do you think of it in terms of it all being done?

PBM: It has all been done, but then again it hasn't. I think there is lot to be done, but it's the pits at the moment. Everything is so lowest common denominator. We probably helped to do

that. We contributed towards the 5-second attention span with our fast cutting and synch backs and all that stuff. So, you start to think in reflections, and it's not a terribly positive thing. You never really know what's going to happen.

MW: You are working with Jonathan Ross at the moment. Is that in television, or is that independent?

PBM: Funnily enough, Jonathan Ross joined the Calendar Company in the 80's, when we were at Calendar. His first show, *The Last Resort*, was produced through them, so that's when I first met him. Then years later he had a show called *Japanorama*, which was about his interest in Japanese culture and film and he asked me to do it. I did the first series, and then we did another two series after that. It's something that became a home for a while, because the whole of last year, I was doing two series of that. I did a punk show with him as well, which incorporated a lot of the multi-screen ideas. We had Jonathan recounting his memories of not being a punk rocker, or being a punk rocker, depending on how you look at it. We had three walls, and just put loads of punk images bouncing around, so I went back to the multi-screen in that TV thing, which was quite nice. But, it's always working for other people. I've always had this issue. Doing television is quite easy, because people ask you to do it. They want you to do it, and you're very happy to do it. You say it's quite good fun, but you are not actually originating the material yourself.

MW: Do you regret that? Is that something you want to go back to doing?

PBM: Yes, I've gone a bit full circle. I've just completed a video with a band called *The Magic Numbers*. I've just done their latest video called *Undecided*. That is really refreshing to come back to. I think that the last video we made was in 1988, for Howard Devoto. So, it's really weird to come full circle. I am developing more photographic work myself, and trying to get an exhibition together of that. I'd like to do an installation, and maybe start painting, which has always been a fear. I keep doing things, but I'd like to be able to generate something from myself.

MW: Rather than do it for other people?

PBM: Yes, I'd like to do that. I'd like to do everything. That was the attitude that we had before. We just wanted to do everything, basically. We went off, and I exploded in every direction. I was trying to cover everything. Most of the things that we did had quite an effect: *U2 Zoo TV* was exactly what we were doing with the multi-screen but on much bigger scale. We should have done that. We should never have turned *Pink Floyd* down! But the TV world has been incredible really, working on *Lonely Planet*, and doing *The Travel Show*. I did the first one of those and *Youth TV* basically. After the documentary about sadomasochism, I did another rather challenging film documentary about extreme compulsive sexual disorders, which caused a lot of talk. It was called *Beyond Love*, and was for the Channel 4 *Equinox* Programme. It challenged a lot of people's ideas about this subject.

MW: Is there anything else that we haven't spoken about, that you feel we should mention?

PBM: I think scratch video, in essence, would be *Blue Monday* and one that we did called *Man or Dog*. We cut two completely different films together, and made them unite in some completely mad, other meaning. It was a comedy, but it was surreal and crazy, with a soundtrack made by a friend of Rik's. I think that was one of the best things we did actually. It was a beautiful moment and it's one of those moments where everything came together and it created something completely different.

MW: And you made that for a shoe store or something? Isn't there some bizarre story attached to it?

PBM: Yes, it was for a shoe store. That was one of our ventures into the commercial world. We were asked to do some work for a big shoe company based in Leicester, which was going into accessories. No one had done accessories in shoe shops before. You could never buy little bits and pieces. They'd designed this super futuristic shoe shop and they asked us to do the video multi-screens and design all the interior stuff for the visuals, for the shop. So we made *Man or Dog* as a multi-screen show. It was made from two films. One was a public health and safety film I think, and another one was from an Ealing comedy, where a guy kept thinking that he was having premonitions of something or other; and we mixed it with this dog getting put into the washing machine.

MW: So nothing to do with shoes?

PBM: Nothing to do with shoes, and I don't think they wanted anything specifically to do with shoes. They just wanted crazy images. But I think the shop closed. We also had to make a soundtrack for it, so we went into a recording studio and wrote a song which they played on the radio, called BLFA - basic, leisure, flash and action. That was the kind of shoes they were selling. But it didn't really take off, although it was quite innovative at the time. If you look at it now, everyone is doing that.

MW: So, you are still very good friends with Rik?

PBM: Yes, we see each other quite a lot. He came out to Japan when we were doing the second series of *Japanorama*. I see him quite a bit. He often comes up and stays.

MW: Do you think you will ever work together again, in any capacity?

PBM: I don't know, maybe. It would be quite good to do the multi-screen show again. But I don't know really. If anyone can be bothered to get it together, I suppose we would. I think doing a multi-screen show would be a good thing.

MW: Yes, it would be because those things are incredibly difficult to get off the ground, and then when you see one twice and that's it really.

PBM: Yes, it would be nice to do a show at the ICA. I would be nice to do a big show there. Who knows? Rik was interested in getting involved with some of the other people who are doing multi-screen now. Ours was pretty basic stuff by today's standard.

- MW:** These days you wouldn't have to mix it live.
- PBM:** I wouldn't even have to turn up! We could do it from home and send it through. That's the good thing about the media now, is that you have the means of production. Back then you had to sneak into the edit suites and blag whatever time you could get. But now with the technology, you can just do it all at home. There was a time, we were meant to do this thing in Athens Ohio, when we first saw our stuff being used on MTV. It was the *Blue in Heaven* video, with all the feet running up and down. It was used by MTV as an insignia. It was used for their little stings. We were like, "Oh my God, they are using our stuff for the logos that are supposed to demonstrate what MTV is all about."
- MW:** And did you ever get paid for that?
- PBM:** No, they just used it.
- MW:** So, you didn't make a massive income apart from the Colin Calendar Company paying you as a retainer? Whether you made anything or not, you didn't get royalties or anything on pieces that were shown?
- PBM:** Not really, no. With the pop videos and stuff like that, you don't get royalties but we didn't get any kind of acknowledgement either. At the time, we were just having such a laugh. It was all about being able to really enjoy yourself and doing what you wanted to do. We were creating all this stuff, and having a massive, mad party when we went along doing it. We looked at it as a rock and roll thing. We actually had a rock and roll attitude to it and went a bit crazy. We were allowed to as well, so that was good. But, I think for me, it was coming back after *Less Than Zero*, when I had to face up to a lot of things. It was also because of my brother and things like that. I came back to reality a bit. I remember we were coming back to London after about 3 months, and I said, "My God, I've been drunk every night" and a friend said, "What were you doing in America?" And then I realised that I'd better calm down a bit. Another 10 years later I did.
- MW:** Did you ever work with any other artists? Did you work with George Barber?
- PBM:** Actually doing work together, no. But, I think Rik worked with Gorilla Tapes. When we stopped working together, Rik wanted to start directing. He wanted to be a director in his own right. We both did, really.
- MW:** Is that why you split up in the end?
- PBM:** I think so, yes. We'd done the thing. It had run its course.
- MW:** All in all, how long did you work together? Was it about 10 years?
- PBM:** No, it was only about 5 years. It was from around 1982 to 1988.
- MW:** It was a very short space of time, really.

PBM: Yes, we covered a lot of ground. It was like getting on a rocket, just going and not stopping. We didn't stop until 5 years later when we looked at the damage around us. But it was good. It was good fun.



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