



REWIND | Artists' Video in the 70s & 80s Interview with Rik Lander

Interview by Maggie Warwick, 11th June 2007

MW: Are there any works that you've made or produced that you feel are more important than others, and why?

RL: There are lots of references to the Duvet Brothers in lots of books, but they always refer pretty much to the same story and they always refer to the same video. They always refer to *Blue Monday* and they always tell the same story about that particular aspect to the Duvet Brothers work. Not to say that what they are saying is wrong or anything, because they tend to be very flattering about *Blue Monday*, but what's missing from what's reported about Duvet Brothers work, is there is no reference to the multi-screens. And also to other videos which don't get a mention because we've had such bad distribution. So, *Blue Monday* and one or two other videos, *War Machine* for example, are very well known because they are available from LUX, but most of the other videos, people don't even know they exist. They never get looked at and they never get analysed in that way. So, the piece I would choose to talk about is a piece called *Harry*, which is a multi-screen, commissioned by the Oriel Mostyn Gallery in Wales. We were paid to make a piece, which we put on, and it then became part of our touring show, and our multi-screen show toured America, Germany, Holland and the UK.

MW: Who did you tour with? Who funded the tour?

RL: We did a multi-screen show. It was quite an elaborate thing. It involved a multiple of three, so in terms of monitors it could be 7, 14, 21 screens, or it could be 18 but the bigger ones were 21. We did a huge one at the Limelight Club, that was probably the biggest show we did, but we also did the Melkweg in Amsterdam and we did a couple of big dates in America. We had a multi-screen show, so it was either a single image on all 21 screens, or only on 14 of the screens, or across 7. It ran from VHS players, so we mastered the art of making up tapes that we'd stop and start. We would work out the gap between pressing 'play' and the amount of time it would take for the thing to actually start, so we would pre-time it, and then if we got it wrong, we would just pause and start. It was a live show and it was incredibly popular. It was very unusual, there weren't really many people doing that kind of work. Later on U2 did huge shows using video and live video, so it was very much not on that scale, but it was very exciting. You could only take so much as an audience, so we'd do a 25 minute show, then we'd have a break and then we'd do what we called 'the mega-mix' which was lots of video work: maybe a bit of George Barber, a bit of Gorilla Tapes, a bit of our own. It was a mix of our favourite works.

MW: Was it different every time you showed it? People would not have seen the same things twice?

RL: Yes, we worked it as a show. It developed over the years. We formed, essentially because we were invited to play at the Fridge bar in Brixton by Bruno de Florence. He had what they called the Video Lounge in the Fridge. He had a stack of tellies, so that's exactly where we got the idea from. We entirely inherited that concept from Bruno's set up there. They were all in a big jumble like they'd been dumped there. I think there were chains on top of them. But he had 3 sources. That's what we formed the Duvet Brothers to do, to make a show there. So we spent the entire summer doing that.

MW: When was that?

RL: It was 1984. But in that same series, there were other video makers around at that time, who would later become scratch video makers, and were on in other months of that year. So, we developed the show over the years and we got various commissions, we did a piece called *Strickley Trigalig*, which was commissioned by LVA with *Harry* for Oriel Mostyn. We added them to the show, so we'd have *Blue Monday* as a single piece and then we'd do re-mixes of other things. So, *War Machine* was made into a multi-screen and so on. But this stuff is not known about really, because the number of people who would have seen it would be very small.

MW: Would it be quite expensive to recreate it?

RL: To recreate it nowadays would much easier, because you can get three projectors. Every gallery has three projectors, and it's so much easier for people to use video in a gallery setting and all sorts of other settings, because you can go out and buy a projector for £1000. Whereas, we had to go to DER and beg them to give us 21 tellies and then their technicians would come in. There was a shop that did second-hand, ex-rental tellies and I went and bought loads of them. Half of them didn't work, but we would cobble them together and try and make them work. I used to take them out. We used to do gigs, blues parties and squats and all that kind of stuff, so we did lots of little shows with 9 tellies.

MW: Was that just for friends or were you commissioned to do those?

RL: Well, it was a very political time. There was the minors' strike, Nicaragua solidarity, and the Apartheid. There were lots of protest movements. We would tend to be invited to perform at benefits, so we did quite a few of those. Also I used to do visuals for bands, so I did a stage show for a band, called Psycho Circus.

MW: Can you talk about how you met Peter?

RL: I was studying to be a television engineer. I was at college and I had bought a Super 8 camera in the first year. My parents live in Colchester, so I went to stay with them for the summer while I was at college, with my Super 8 camera. There was a film workshop there, where one could use the editing equipment, so I went there with my first rolls of film and said, "Hi, I want to learn how to edit on Super 8," and so on. It was run by a guy called Peter Boyd-MacLean, and he said, "Yeah, whatever". He would be rushing off, making his own Super 8 and 16 mm films. He was very, very difficult to approach because his energy was very, very strong and intense. He just assumed that everyone who came in there was

going to get in his way, because really he didn't want to be running the workshop for anyone else, he just wanted to be making his own films. But when I actually carried on and didn't require anything off him apart from the key, and I was producing work, I think we started to talk more. I would be there and I would be teaching myself to edit. It's a very physical activity to actually edit a pop-video on Super 8. It's an incredibly difficult process. What I would have to do is record the soundtrack on the magnetic strip and then I would be able to count the number of beats by playing that through. Then I would have to make the edit using scissors, cutting and then selotaping those together. So you could actually do beat editing by that process. Then you'd send off the thing with all the cuts to get a print done. But it's a brilliant way to learn editing, because then you really understand what a frame is worth: how many beats a frame is.

MW: So, when did you first start using video?

RL: They had one of those Sony PortaPaks there, so I did a few experimental things with that. Typically, I managed to make it as complicated as possible. I filmed a musician who had recorded his own music. He'd done 4 or 5 parts so I filmed him, then we played that back on the monitor. Then I sat it next to the monitor and filmed him playing the next instrument. Then I put that on the monitor and filmed him playing the next instrument, which I then put that on the monitor and filmed him playing the next instrument. You could see him playing all the instruments in one go. That was pretty much the first thing I did with that camera.

MW: Has it ever been shown, that piece?

RL: No, but I've got a tape of it somewhere.

MW: Did video change the way you worked? Did you like using video?

RL: When we started, I had got a job at Diverse as an engineer. Diverse was a company, which was set up at the beginning of Channel 4. I think Channel 4 started in 1982 and I went there in 1983. I moved to London. I left the workshop behind and I finished college. I knew Peter, but not really that well. I think he probably started college at the same time, so he was up in London. He phoned me up and said, "Oh, a friend of mine's got a camera, like a video camcorder" I'd never seen one. That was the very first one I'd ever seen or ever got my hands on. It was just a little thing. The PortaPak cameras had this great big box with a cable, which you had to move around, whereas this was a camcorder. It was the very first camcorder and it belonged to a friend of his. Peter said, "Let us go and play with it," so the three of us went to a park and I filmed him pretending to be a pop star. He filmed me, and we filmed the pigeons and the ducks and the peacocks and a nun walking through the park. Then we went back to Peter's friend's house. She had a VHS player and we found that we could do very primitive editing by playing from the camera into the VHS player. So, we put down a track which was a song by a band called Magazine, called Motorcade, and we just cut it just there and then that afternoon. It was, "Hey, this is great!" "Fantastic, this technology is now". It was homemade technology. We had a really good time doing that, and in fact at one point she typed in, because it had a caption generator on the camera, Duvet Brothers. I don't know why she did that but anyway she typed that

in. So when we eventually teamed up, that's the name we took. Peter, being a very sociable chap, met a guy who was a manager of a band. The guy said, "Oh, we need a promo," and Peter said, "I've just made a promo, do you want to see it?" He showed him the tape and the guy said, "Oh, that looks interesting." So Peter came to Diverse and we just took off the Magazine track and we put on the band's track on, and did a rough cut. Peter took that back to the band, they said, "Right, OK, you are commissioned." Then we filmed the band doing what we'd been doing, which was pretending to be pop stars. We got them to pretend to be pop stars in the same location. The band was William Orbit's band. They were called Torchsong. So we made a promo and that became a very significant piece for us. The look of it was very, very strong and that was mainly thanks to this bit of kit called The Videokalos which Peter Donebauer had invented this machine along with another guy. It was a way of processing imagery. Because I was an engineer, I loved playing with that kit. Peter Donebauer was a co-owner of the company, Diverse. So, in many ways, he was a mentor for me. He was very excited by the fact that I wanted to make videos and often said, "Go ahead! Do it. The only way you can do it is by doing it." So, I was given very, very good access to cameras and equipment and so on.

MW: And also found footage.

RL: Well, they had an archive, because they did a weekly news programme, a magazine programme. So, they had a huge video archive and they had a very good archivist. When I wanted to become an editor, basically I wanted to learn the skills of editing. Having mastered the principles on film, I wanted to master it on tape. So, I started playing with found footage and that's probably why I went to it, because it was available and it was just great material.

MW: Obviously the name Duvet Brothers is very synonymous with scratch video. How do you think scratch video came about? Can you talk about meeting other artists who were doing the same thing?

RL: There are a number of reasons that scratch came about. One was the availability of the found footage. That was important. The other is that the particular kind of editing that I was interested in, which was actually approaching it in a different way, in quite a mathematical approach, was an examination of different ways of looking at how you break up time. I taught myself editing. I had one lesson, when I went to see the main editor at Diverse and said, "Is there anything you can teach me?" He said, "You always take out a little bit extra on the cut, so if there is a door closing you don't cut half-way through the door closing. You can snip out a little bit and you join those together," and that was basically the only thing I was ever taught about editing. But I was interested in seeing the door close. And then seeing it close again. And then seeing it close again, and maybe shaving off frames and making it do different things as it goes. Or I was interested in approaching a door and then coming back and approaching it again; getting closer, and closer, and closer. That was what I was interested in, in terms of editing. In terms of filming, the very first roll of Super 8 I'd got, I just went into the field at the back of my parents' house and ran around with the camera. I was just looking at the ground and zooming because it's a thing you can't do with the human eye. You can't zoom. You can blink, that's one thing you can do. You can go around and blink and that's a great effect,

but if you get the camera and you zoom the ground will come forward. It will check completely and you will see the texture. You will see things much more clearly. You will be pulled into that particular stone or that thing, and then of course if you move around. You can just gather images of the world around you. Then you start putting that into the edit. There is a piece called *Airhole*, which is that roll of film. I got a friend of mine to act out a role. He was just going through a door, putting on a coat, standing still in a busy station. So again, I was taking time and cutting it up, jumbling its order and elongating it and so on. That is what I was interested in terms of editing. It was the way of filming, which I think is not really considered in scratch, but it's an important part of the Duvet Brothers work. It was the way both Peter and I were using the camera. There is another thing, which is a really, really important part of scratch for me, in terms of *Blue Monday* and *War Machine* and so on. I worked for Diverse and they were commissioned by Channel 4 to make a TV programme called Diverse Reports. The idea was that it was allowed to be partial. Before that, as far as I understand, all documentaries on television had to show both sides. So, you could say, "This is point A and this is point B. Make your mind up". What was allowed with the emergence of Channel 4, which was actually Thatcher's idea, was "Say what you want". It was allowed. Her purpose of setting up Channel 4, in a certain way, was to damage the dominance of the BBC, but it was also to allow the rightwing to put rightwing ideas over. So probably a third of the Diverse reports were rightwing libertarian ideas, which were also horrible things to work on. I really hated the whole politics of it. But on the other hand they would do programmes about Nuclear Winter, or Broadwater Farm or whatever, so there was some very strong leftwing stuff and there was some wishy-washy liberal democrat stuff made in the meantime as well. But it fed into my interest in imagery as propaganda basically. I was very much drawn to the propaganda films that were in the archive, going back to the 30's and before, which were very, very strong. There I was at work, having to work on these right-wing programmes and I thought, "Well, yes I am going to say this is propaganda. This is what I feel and I am not going to put the other side." But actually, the other side of it is that the news is propaganda as well, because it's supposedly impartial, but it's not because of the way it's edited. There were so many cases during the Miners Strike of the miners attacking the police but everybody knew it was the other way round. So, just by leaving out the shot of the first stone thrown or the first baton wielded you changed the meaning of the news and the emphasis was very much the state. It was the state point of view. So one of the important parts conceptually, about scratch is that you take the original meaning and you stand it on its head. You take the original meaning of the found footage and you subvert it. You do that by the conventions of juxtaposition of images, which is a fairly conventional thing but then there's a few new tricks in there as well. The repeat edit was one, but it became the cliché of scratch. Actually, there is not that much repeat edit. It was actually much more about messing up time rather than repeating it.

MW: When did you first become aware that other people were working in a similar way?

RL: It was amazing actually. I can't really remember when it was, but I think it was probably an event at the ICA when I first saw Gorilla Tapes and when I saw George Barber's work as well as Kim Flitcroft and Sandra Goldbacher's. I think I met them through George Barber, who actually brought us together because he wanted to do a scratch compilation. Possibly it was a journalist. It could have been Pat Sweeney. He phoned up and said, "Hey, did

you know there are all these other people doing the same sort of stuff as you?" But it was a complete revelation, to meet all these people that were doing very, very similar things and complimentary things, which was fascinating. I had no real explanation for why these things occur in that way.

MW: Did you then go on to work together with some of those people or did you become friends? Did you help each other out?

RL: Yes. I edited together the *Greatest Hits of Scratch Video* for George and I did the online edit for *Night of a Thousand Eyes*. I just did the online edit and I didn't do any of the creative side of that work, but because I had access to the edit suite, I said, "Oh, come in on Friday night and we'll probably get it done by Saturday morning." So, I got to know them all very well.

MW: You were using downtime on the edit suites, so you were working through the night basically?

RL: Yes. I would work all day. We'd all leave at normal time, 6, 7, 8 whatever it was in the evening, I'd go to the pub, Pete would turn up at the pub, we'd have a few pints, and then at 10 o'clock we'd go back in, work till 6 or 7, go to the café and then I would arrive to work at 8.30, like I've never been there. Then I'd work all that day and maybe get some sleep that night.

MW: You said that the work hasn't been distributed that much, but can you talk about where it was seen and when it was first made?

RL: Our work was seen outside of the gallery mainly because we did benefit events, which tended to be political events. Our political work was put onto a tape that was distributed to striking miners, so it was put on in the workingmen's clubs or the Union venues. So our work was seen, interestingly, by a different kind of audience all across the country. That was quite interesting. We didn't really have the idea that it would be shown in galleries. It was shown though. It was put on at the Tate I think, and obviously it was on at the ICA.

MW: You showed in clubs quite a lot?

RL: We showed in clubs a lot, yes.

MW: But that wasn't a conscious decision on your part?

RL: We definitely saw it as video art, but we saw it as trying to reach people in a different way. So, it wasn't video art that was interested in being in the gallery, it was video art that was interested in talking to people, the form it took was much more accessible than video art was conventionally at that point.

MW: And how was that then viewed by the art critics, gallerists or other video artists?

RL: I think the video art establishments didn't really like us. They didn't really appreciate us. In fact, they were quite negative in a lot of ways because I think they didn't really understand what we were doing to be honest. They thought it was just a load of editing jokes. They thought it was very superficial. They didn't like the fact that it was based on a populist form; basically it was based on MTV and pop-videos. It was using the 3 minute song and a lot of our pieces were literally a minute long or less, because we could get our message across in a very short space of time. All the video art I'd seen up to that point was endlessly long, languorous, difficult and highbrow. I found I had great difficulty with all of that. I think in return they had difficulty with the Duvet Brothers because they thought it was just knocked up in an edit suite. It doesn't really count. It's not really saying anything. But I don't think they were really looking at some of the deeper things that we were playing with. For example, *Laughing Girls* would be a really good example of what we were thinking about behind the editing techniques. *Laughing Girls* is a video, in which we found a bit of footage of some girls. I think they were in a laughing class from the 1930's or 40's. They are just very sweet schoolgirls and they are laughing "hi-hi-hi-hi" in a very bright way. But we play with it. We slow it down and we take it forwards and we take it backwards. We just manipulate it and manipulate it until it becomes quite menacing.

MW: Did you distort the sound?

RL: No, we don't even distort the sound; we just take the speed down. We used to play that tremendously loudly in clubs. If you run that for a minute and a half people's brains start to go, and I think in a way it encapsulates a lot of things that you can do with scratch. We took 15 seconds of footage and turned it into a minute and a half or two minutes and you can't watch it and fail to be altered. Your state of mind is altered. I think it's a very pure example of scratch. And people just thought, "Oh, they are just messing around."

MW: But were there some people who were supportive?

RL: Yes, we did really, really well. We had a fantastic time. We got so much press, mainly newspapers. We did the title sequence for a TV programme and they reviewed the Duvet Brothers titles sequence, they didn't review the programme. That was in the Evening Standard. It was ridiculous.

MW: Do you remember what the programme was?

RL: It was called Open the Box. It was produced by Michael Jackson, who went on to be Head of Channel 4. We got a hell of a lot of press, so in a sense we were very well known. The weird thing was that people were reading about us in the Sunday Times or in the Evening Standard or Harper's and Queen's or even Tattler. All sorts of odd magazines were writing about "The Duvet Brothers are doing a show in Wales," or "The Duvet Brothers have made a video." Nobody ever saw the work. The people who were reading the magazines just thought, "Oh, there's cool video stuff happening with these two guys called The Duvet Brothers, how interesting!" But they never saw the work because there was no way of seeing it. We would be selling tapes, but we hardly sold any.

MW: What about now?

RL: If there was YouTube then, we would have been seen by millions. So we were relatively famous for video artists, but not really seen.

MW: But you'd met Janet Street-Porter or she picked you up, didn't she, for Network 7?

RL: Yes, that's right. We did a talk at the Edinburgh TV Festival in August 1986, I think. Various people were on the panel; some of the Gorilla Tapes were there. Basically, we were presenting scratch to the TV industry. It was fascinating because by then, certainly after that event, the thing was completely assimilated. Everybody had a scratch title sequence. The Milk Marketing Board even had a scratch advert.

MW: Were you still working at Diverse at this point?

RL: It depends when it was. I can't really remember. I left Diverse reasonably quickly, after a couple of years.

MW: Was that because of the success?

RL: Yes, we did it commercially. We did lots of pop videos, title sequences, in-store videos and all sorts of stuff as the Duvet Brothers. Peter worked with Janet Street-Porter, much more than I worked for her. It's arguable that a lot of the ideas that went into Network 7 were nicked. She nicked the title from Bruno's pirate radio station in Brixton, called Network 21. Network 7 was the title of her TV series. And if you look at the use of graphics and the whole tone of the thing, I think it owes a lot to what we were doing. But she did give us work.

MW: You were also wooed by corporate commercial companies weren't you?

RL: Yes, we weren't very successful at that really because we had such a terrible attitude. I was certainly very political, but we were also very arrogant and very unreliable as people at that time. But, we did some really good stuff actually. If you look at *Blue in Heaven*, the first promo we did, that was hugely influential. It was on medium rotation in Europe and America on MTV, and a lot of these techniques we were using, the kind of thing I was talking about with the camera, which were throughout that video, spread very quickly.

MW: Did you go on to use commercial editing facilities and get hold of good cameras?

RL: Most of the time we went back to Diverse. We already had that kit available to us. I guess we went back and paid once we started doing it more commercially.

MW: Can you talk about the Colin Calendar relationship?

RL: That was great because, Peter is a wonderful person to have as a partner, because he is so great at schmoozing people and blanking stuff. He would always be in Soho and he would always meet someone. He'd got assigned to a production company, and then we ended up in a little bidding war. We had Colin Calendar's company and this other

company. Both of these companies wanted to sign us to do commercial work and so we got paid a retainer whether we did any work or not. That was probably the worst move that Colin Calendar ever made: paying us to do nothing. So we would go and hang out in Soho and try and not get work basically. But we did some very interesting stuff.

MW: Can you talk about the *Man and Dog* video? That's hilarious.

RL: One of the jobs we got was to do in-store videos for a shoe shop. Some bright spark had decided to create a new shoe shop for the British Shoe Federation. It was difficult times for the shoe industry in the 80's. It was a time of massive industrial change and the shoe industry was worried that it was going to be destroyed. It was worried that it was going to be decimated by foreign competition. So, how was it going to move with the times? They got in some Soho consultants and they invented this ridiculous shoe shop called BLFA. They had 4 lines of shoes: basic, leisure, flash and action. They took all the concepts of the shoe shop, and probably in some kind of cocaine induced psychosis churned them all up and threw them back, and then said "Look at this! This is what the future of shoe shops is." Allegedly it was cocaine induced. So they mixed up all the men's shoes with the women's shoes for example, because "Women chose men's shoes don't they?" But of course when it came to the actual shop opening, nobody could find anything. It was ridiculous because how would you have the sizes? "Were size 11 men's with size 11 women's? Surely not!" Anyway, we did these in-store videos and basically we were just given X thousand pounds to go out and do what the hell we wanted. So, we took Lenny Riefenstahl footage and re-edited that. We put Cocteau Twins music on, or Fela Kuti or Erik Satie and we just indulged ourselves massively in being paid to make art, which would be played in a shoe shop.

MW: It had nothing to do with shoes?

RL: Well, we did convert some of our existing work into shoe related stuff, but quite half-heartedly really. One of the things we made out of that was *Man or Dog*, which, I think, really stands the test of time. It just basically cuts together two bits of footage in a very amusing way and that was a genuine collaboration between the two of us. So it's a good example of us coming together and pushing it and pushing it, and we got a really good outcome. BLFA opened their shop in Chester. We got money to go into a recording studio, so we went into Gorilla Studios, which was a big posh studio. We did a whole session. I wrote the song about BLFA and it was used as a jingle on the radio, that was just money down the drain obviously, but it was good fun for us. Anyway, the shop opened and I went up to visit it and of course, by then, they were just playing their own music. So our videos were playing but they'd taken off all the Erik Satie and all the Cocteau Twins and Fela Kuti and they'd put on Rick Astley or whatever it was. The shop shut in a few months, it was an absolute disaster.

MW: And how did you get round copyright in situations?

RL: We basically ignored copyrights. It was fine for us because we were selling tapes, but we only sold a handful really. The problem came when it was shown on television and there were big rights problems. Certainly a piece called *Take It*, which has a famous black

American actor in it. He point blank refused to allow permission for that to be screened, I don't know why, and the bill for showing it every time on telly was huge.

MW: And did that bill the TV Company?

RL: Well, in that case it would have been Channel 4, who was doing these video arts compilation programmes at that time. In a sense I think we would have distributed the work much more were it not for the copyright issue, because the truth is we don't own the music and we don't own the images. But I suppose what we feel now is that the work is so well known, that the original footage is actually something separate and what we've created is a piece in its own right. I don't know how that would go in the court of law, but it might be interesting to try and find out. A lot of people know that footage because it's in those videos. I don't know if anyone's ever seen the *Laughing Girls* footage in anything else.

MW: But the *Laughing Girls* footage hasn't got a famous person in it. It's so inane you probably would get to clear the copyright on that quite easily.

RL: I don't know. They could name a price I suppose. We are actually not that bothered because everybody's seen the stuff. It's fine.

MW: Did you ever approach any of the bands to try and get rights to the music?

RL: Well, we paid them in the conventional way when they were screened on the telly. We got threatened by one of the bands, but that's just because bands are like that. Bands just go a bit wild. We tried to talk to New Order but we never quite got through to them. They said some funny things, quite amusing things actually, about our video; claiming that we'd nicked the idea off someone's home movie or something like that.

MW: Wasn't one of your pieces shown on Beavis and Butthead or something?

RL: Yes, *Pump Up the Volume*, which is a really interesting piece in a sense, because it was only screened on these video art programmes. One bit was shown on the Tube and there were a few other little bits shown on stuff. We wanted to show *Man or Dog* but they couldn't show it because of the dog going into the washing machine. They said they weren't allowed to show that. It was after the Duvet Brothers finished, I did the *Pump Up the Volume* video and I'd say that's probably the first big crossover scratch hit. It was the first scratch video that the nation saw really.

MW: When was that?

RL: It must have been 1988. It was after Duvets. It was 1987 to 1988, but if you look at the video it's not a scratch video. It's just archive material very pedantically edited. So, the imagery is not scratch, although the track is scratch. Therefore, *Pump Up the Volume* is actually a scratch. If you talk about that song, people say, "Oh yeah, I remember all this space stuff," because it was a big hit. It was number 1. It knocked Rick Astley off the top.

MW: Did you do that with Peter?

RL: No, I did that on my own.

MW: Were you commissioned to do that?

RL: Yes, it was just because we knew the band. The guys who did it were in a band called Colourbox that Peter had done a video for in the early days of the Duvets. They came to me, rather than going to Peter, probably because I was working at Diverse and had the edit suite. I think *Blue Monday* wasn't seen in that way, which is a real shame, it would have been great if we could have got that out there in the way that *Pump Up the Volume* was, because it's much more pure scratch. That's the one they always write about because it contains so many elements of scratch to it.

MW: And are you still involved with music now? Because it's such a large part of you production.

RL: I still make art, so I do installations and I do videos, but the main thing that connects with what we were doing in the Duvet Brothers is the performance stuff, which I do with a group called Republic Of and which contains Jon Dovey from Gorilla Tapes as well. I suppose my feeling was that I wanted to continue to make video art and continue the experiments that we began with scratch, because I feel they were cut off. It became impossible for us to do scratch. It'd become a self-parody in effect. It had just spread so quickly and been devalued into this repeat edit. So I wanted to continue making video stuff and I felt that anything I could do, any technique I could come up with in terms of editing or in shooting or whatever, there is nothing I could really do that couldn't be mistaken for a piece of commercial work, a piece of television or advertising. It could even be by a bank or weapons' manufacturer because everybody uses every technique now. So there are not really radical techniques outside of the mainstream effectively in video. So the element that we've brought in is a live performance element, which means that none of these videos can be mistaken for a commercial or a TV programme. The live element adds a sort of edge of uncontrollability and danger. It's just about keeping it on the edge effectively. A lot of the work entails a relationship between what's on the screen and what the performer is doing on stage. So we're exploring those possibilities, of which there are many.

MW: Have you had any training in theatre, or you've just taken it up and done it?

RL: No. The fact that I am now doing performance comes out of the fact that it's really hard to get people to do what you say, especially when you are doing it for nothing. *Giant Rabbits* for example, is a piece that I would say is directly descended from *Blue Monday* and *War Machine* and even *Man or Dog*. It's a performance that I do, but I was expecting to get somebody in to do it. I kept asking people and I tried people but I just did it myself eventually and suddenly enjoyed that a great deal.

MW: How often have you done it?

RL: We just did a performance at The Fringe of the Hay Literary Festival. It depends, because we are all busy people and it's quite an elaborate show. It involves not just performing, which you have to learn, but also having to make a video element as well. So, we do it 2 or 3 times a year. Basically, for me, it's a vehicle for experimentation. Obviously we want the audience to like it, but it allows me to write, create, and perform and I get a very instant feedback. So, I can write something, make it very straightforward and simple, so its simplicity is key, and then perform it, and I get an instant feedback. So it's a very much a continuation of what the Duvets were doing in terms of making video art for the non-gallery space.

MW: And is it similar in terms of content?

RL: Well, I would say *Giant Rabbits* is politically, definitely close to *Blue Monday*. This is the thing about the Duvet Brothers, in a sense there is a whole bit about the Duvet Brothers that's completely not known, it's not discussed, which is all the aesthetic stuff. A lot of what we did actually was purely aesthetic and it wasn't political. It was about experimenting with editing, experimenting with shooting and experimenting with multi-screen, and generating sensations that were pure, that weren't necessarily to do with politics and making you politically angry or confirming your political belief, but to give you other sensations of pleasure or disturbance, or to uplift you or to shock you in other ways.

MW: Let's talk about some of the multi-screen pieces. *Strickley Trigalig* was your first one, wasn't it?

RL: Well, no, because we'd already made stuff for the Fridge, and following on from that, so *Horses* probably would be the first thing we made. *Horses* was a multi-screen, which was just basically stuff moving around the screen. We were just beginning to understand the possibilities of how things go. With *Strickley Trigalig* it was just great working with Pete, because I learnt so much. He'd say, "Let's go filming. We've got to film this thing, let's go filming. Let's get the camera." We get the camera. "Right, where are we going to go?" He goes, "Oh, I know a field in Essex, let's go there." But we don't really know what we were going to do. So if we were doing a promo, often we would just turn up and start filming. Pete is very good at that spontaneous thing. So, we were in somebody's flat and there was a very bright window so he says, "Oh, just cross the window," so this guy just bobs up and down, going across, and then you see in the frame. You see this head come in and go out. Once you put that into a multi-screen, it goes in one screen, in another screen, in another screen and then you can get him coming back. There were so many possibilities. Pete is fantastic for that. He's fantastic for just being able to capture these tiny little fragments. It's a real pleasure. He is the same in life, not always when there is a camera on, but he'll find opportunities that you don't really notice. If they pass by he will just say, "Ah, there's that little frame. There's that little moment. There are a few frames there." So, I'd say *Trigalig* has got a lot of that in it. There was a field, which had rows of vines curved around the road, so as you drove past, the vines would align in different patterns. So, at one point you'd be looking along the vines and the next you'd be looking at the diagonal. As we drove past, pointing the camera out the window, we zoomed in and the vines would create these fantastic images as they went round. So, that formed the centrepiece of that piece. Then we found some woods and just started pulling focus through twigs. Of course

once you loop that, that pulled focus just goes on forever and then the guy starts bobbing across and the whole thing just becomes very magical.

MW: Where was it shown?

RL: That was commissioned to be shown in a shop window. I think it was called Window Box, and I think 9 artists were commissioned to make a 9-screen work.

MW: Was that through the LVA?

RL: It was through LVA, yes. It was 9 screens in a square and it was silent. So, we took that, put a soundtrack on it, and put it into the live show.

MW: Was it ever shown internationally?

RL: Yes, it was shown quite a lot. I can't remember the chronology but it was certainly our big show. By the end we had a really tight show and it had all these pieces, it had *Harry and Strickley Trigalig* in there. We used to get invited to parties, like Chris Blackwell's 60th birthday or Island Records, for example. We went on the road with Sique Sique Sputnik and they would give us loads of footage and we would cut it together and make multi-screens.

MW: You did something at the Albert Hall, didn't you?

RL: Yes. That was amazing. It was absolutely, truly amazing. We'd met them because we did a gig at the Zap Club in the early days. The Duvet Brothers were invited because there was a woman there who had seen our stuff. She was a fan. Later, she put our stuff on another tape. So we were the support act for Sique Sique Sputnik, and of course nobody knew who they were. Tony James came up and said, "Oh, I make videos." We went "Yeah, whatever." Anyway, he later called us back. In fact, I think his girlfriend was Janet Street-Porter, which was also the connection. We did this live show at the Albert Hall, which we then later took to the States with them. We had 3 channels of video. We had 3 live cameras. We had live TV with a couple of channels and we had satellite TV with a couple of channels. So, we were mixing all that live and we were dressed in white coats sitting on the side of the stage.

MW: Was that just you and Peter?

RL: Me, Peter and somebody else. There was a really amazing moment in it. There were a couple of songs, where we'd pre-arranged it. They had a trademark beat, which they would drop down. They'd be throbbing away doing that, and we would mix up the sound. We would be doing a live mix, so we could have bits of Blade Runner or imagery that they were fascinated with, but it was the same time as the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Reykjavik and it was also the same night as a really big Tyson fight when he was at his absolute pinnacle. So they were going "Do-do-do-do do-di-di," and we were going between Reagan speaking live and this boxing match. Plus there was a bit of Blade Runner. The band were going and we were going, and then it just picked up and went off.

It was absolutely brilliant. It was really brilliant. Then when we went to America, for some reason the sound guy, it would only work because we would send the signal to the sound guys and we would go "Yeah, we've got something really good." But in America, they just wouldn't put the sound up.

MW: Can you talk about your aesthetic and *Harry*, because *Harry* was quite a narrative work. It was a lot more narrative than all your other work.

RL: After *Strickley Trigalig*, which was wonderful and beautiful; I thought, "Well, maybe there is more that can be done with this technique." The thing that was interesting me was having just mastered some of the techniques of multi-screen, it was quite complicated mastering the editing techniques, so we had those techniques. So, I thought about what could be done in terms of storytelling. I am very, very interested in structure. So that's what I did. I came up with a very, very simple idea: a guy is sitting at his desk, he opens the drawer to get something out, but he is very afraid that he's being observed. So he tries to hide the thing that he's got out of the desk. Then he goes for a walk next to the Berlin wall and then he throws the thing that he got out of the desk over the wall. Then there is an explosion of history. So it was an incredibly simple story. We got to the studio, it was quite a good studio, which was given to us by Pete Townsend, and we had 3 cameras. So, it was filmed with 3 cameras as a 3-camera shoot. We already had the 3 angles, and then there was just breaking up of the time.

MW: What about the performer?

RL: I got Peter Boyd to do it. It was one way to stop him directing, to get him on camera. He's very, very happy to be on camera. It was good because it allowed him to hand it over to me to play and to do it. Then there is a musical sequence. I made some music by editing some classical music. It was some quite, atonal classical music. I turned that into a beat and then got a drummer and some other musicians in, to turn that into a piece of music. So the music itself was created through scratch editing, effectively. Then I tried a whole lot of experiments in editing techniques. So, the idea was that each shot became an instrument or a beat effectively. So, you've got a snare drum or a bass or whatever, you have those instruments, but then you also have echoes. So, as they go across the screen, they are echoing and so you've got a pattern to the editing. It's rhythmic but it's also like a score. It's playing out the imagery.

MW: Do you play a musical instrument yourself?

RL: Yes, I used to play bass in bands and stuff like that. Actually, bass is probably the ideal instrument for this, because it's about rhythm and structure and keeping the thing together. So, it's probably a good background.

MW: With *Harry*, being semi-narrative or dispersed-narrative, does it tie in with some of the stuff that you are involved in now, except with a different kind of technology?

RL: Yes, I suppose it does. I was approached in the late 1990's by Paul Bonaventura from The Laboratory at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in Oxford. He basically said

one day, "Whatever happened to the Duvet Brothers?" Somebody told him how to get in touch with me. So, he contacted me, asked me what I was doing, and asked if I was able to make a project for them, which was an online narrative. It was an interactive story told through a website called Magic Tree. It's on magictree.com. I am obviously very interested in narrative and storytelling and structure, but my work has always been about formal experimentation; hence scratch video and multi-screen. It's a bit like doing a TV programme, but you have to do it within defined confines. That's all fine and great, you just be a director and do that. But, if you really want to push boundaries, then you have to find something to squeeze your perspective. So, storytelling on the web is a fascinating area that's not really been fully exploited and explored. As a consequence of doing Magic Tree, I've been invited to several other interactive online and otherwise interactive narratives. It's a perfect area for me because it's about formal experimentation and it's about structure. In a sense, it's also about editing a story in a very large way. So, if you imagine the multi-screen is 3 screens or 21 screens, online storytelling can be told in as many voices as there are online effectively. So, it's a very interesting area and I am having really good time at the moment playing with that.

MW: What other things have you done that are out there and that people can see? Are they available online?

RL: There is quite a lot of stuff around. There is a lot on the installations and stuff, some of which are interactive. Yes, there is a lot around. I did an installation in a local hotel, called the Ashley Court Hotel, which has actually closed down and been demolished since. We were there in the last few days. 21 artists took over the hotel and I made a piece for that. In a sense it was a scratch narrative in the *Harry* vein. It was an installation, so it was these voices and images coming from different places and it had a camera and so people became part of the story but in a very, very abstract way. So, it was narrative but not like, 'this happens and this happens'; you, the viewer, fill in the blanks. It's about a woman returning to the room where we make some assumptions about her husband. He's disappeared or this was the last place he was known to be, or perhaps he died in the room. She is exploring the room, and you are exploring the room. You find yourself being intercut with the live camera and her story, so when you find the monitor which is under the bed, at an impossibly skewed angle, you are part of the story as well. It's very eerie and it worked really well.

MW: Are there any other projects that you are currently involved in?

RL: I suppose the project I am most deeply involved in at the moment is the building of my studio, which is made out of straw bales and car tyres and recycled wood and clay from the ground. I suppose, it completely ties in with my practice because it's all about recycled materials. You find a bit of footage and you recycle it or you find some tyres and you recycle them. It's all the same formal experimentation. I've designed it myself. It's a very unusual bit of architecture. I've basically been presented with the rules of how to work with these exciting materials, and then I've thrown the rule book out and made it very, very unconventional, even in the unconventional terms of building with tyres and straw. I don't think anyone's actually brought the two together in this country before and there are

certainly aspects of this building, that haven't been done before. So, on a physical, grand scale, it's a formidable experimentation.

MW: Have you documented the building?

RL: Yes, there is a website for this called bristolgreenhouse.co.uk and I've done it. I haven't done it with video, I've done it with stills and text because it's very hard to be up a ladder hammering and adjusting a camera, so I just kept it simple.

MW: Are you still very good friends with Peter?

RL: Yes, he is a brilliant person to be with and I see him as much as I can. I recently worked with him on a program he does called Japanorama, which is Jonathan Ross' exploration of the interesting aspects of Japanese culture. Peter invited me to go to Japan for a couple of weeks and it was just fantastic to be with him because he's got a very special energy and things happen with Peter that wouldn't happen with other people. It's absolutely extraordinary. So, we would go out every night and we'd always meet somebody who knew him. Then one thing would lead to another. I would just go, "Oh no, I'll just go home and lie down," but with Peter it's "No, we are going off," and then stuff happens. It's good.

MW: And do you think you will ever get back together creatively with Peter, other than working on TV programmes?

RL: There is a little problem in the sense that if we come back together and we just do the old stuff, we've both agreed that that's not really what we want to do because life is short. Although, I think we would like to get some of the multi-screens stuff out, because we feel they've not been seen. It would be great to get those out and do a show. We'd like to do that.

MW: Would you still want to mix them live, would that be part of it?

RL: We could do it. We could do it on the old VHS players and the scrappy old tellies. It's fun. It's just that 'click'. It's getting that timing right. You just spend a few minutes practicing. Anything live is brilliant. When you work in live television, there is nothing like it. Still doing the performance, there is nothing like it. It's fantastic. There is a funny little anecdote actually. When we used to do the live shows back then, we would find that a lot of the audience weren't watching the screens. They were watching us. Because we were looking at the list, it didn't really occur to us that a lot of people were watching us. At that time it just started dawning on us that actually, we were part of the show. This was the time before the super-star DJ. This was 1984, '85, '86. The DJ thing was just beginning because hip-hop was just occurring. Scratch was coming and hip-hop had arrived. Presumably, that's where the name for scratch video comes from. But, that idea of the DJ super star hadn't really happened. That was part of what was happening with us. People were looking at us as performers. Our fantasy is to get the old show out and have a night where we challenge whoever is the best out there now in terms of live video mixing shows. I don't know who they are. Hopefully there are lots of people out there doing it. You'd do a night like the old sound system clashes. So you'd have us set up in one side of the room

and they'd be set up in the other side of the room. We'd do a set and they'd do a set and then we'd alternate. Then the audience identifies with whoever is the best. I think we'd give them a run for their money, I really do. I think that a young audience would see our stuff and really get it in the same way that the original audience did.

MW: How did the art elite perceive the original stuff at that time?

RL: At the time, most video art tended to be very long. It had come through the seventies and the early eighties, and become rather stale. It had to be difficult and it had to be long. To be honest, a lot of it seemed to have to be dreary; certainly the stuff that I was seeing. We just didn't give a shit about that. We just wanted to do stuff, "Let's do it and do it now," and then when it was done and "Did you get it? OK, you didn't get it, what about this one, what about this one?" You don't have to take ages to put your message across. We were impatient. There was an incident, where a still very famous video artist was showing his work at an event. There were one or two people watching it and I was going "Oh God, let's turn this off." I turned it off and I put some Duvet Brothers on and the guy came up and called me some very rude words. But that was just how we were. We were very impatient. I did watch his video and it was an hour long. It was very beautiful, and that's a different thing, and he is very successful so good for him. But the point is that what we were doing then was frowned upon because it was too instant. But if you look just simply a generation later, Turner Prize winners like Douglas Gordon and Gillian Wearing, a lot of their work is very instant as well. I am not saying there is a direct connection between our work and their work, but what I am saying is that we were just showing the way that video art doesn't have to be slow, dreary and endlessly looping. I think that Douglas Gordon is playing on that when he does a 24 hour piece. He is actually saying, "Yeah, make it longer than this, God this is going to be so slow and so boring." In a way it's a scratch piece, we'd probably speed the cycle up and have it done in a minute or something like that but I think that element wasn't appreciated. I'd be very interested to see what people using video now think of the Duvet Brothers, because at the time we got very good feedback. But I'd like to know what video artists now would make of it. I'd be very intrigued to hear some feedback.

MW: I think they'd probably find it very influential.

RL: It's hard to say how influential it is because I don't know how well it's been seen. We get royalty payments from LUX for *Blue Monday* and *War Machine*. They may have *Laughing Girls* as well. They've got a few pieces and we do get royalties. It's mainly from colleges, but what students? Are they fine art students? Are they media study students? I know media studies people like us because we fit into the curriculum on that, but of course when we were around, video art was a completely separate thing from art. It was completely separate.

MW: Which isn't the case anymore.

RL: And those Turner Prize winners show the moment at which video art became part of art. They won in the mid nineties, so 10 years after we were working. There used to be video art festivals and stuff like that but I don't think they even exist anymore, because now video art is everywhere. Every exhibition has a bit of video art in it.

MW: Were you ever shown at festivals?

RL: Yes, we were at all those Worldwide Video Festivals.

MW: Did you go to any of them?

RL: Yes, we went to a few of them.

MW: Presumably you met other artists there who were making very different kinds of work?

RL: That's when I started watching the slow stuff. Basically I had to force myself to sit through the stuff because it was disrespectful not to.

MW: What was the reaction from them to your stuff then? How did they react?

RL: Basically, it was all about socialising in the bar. But we've always had really good feedback, especially if we were doing the show. It was an extraordinary spectacle. With stuff coming at you on all 21 screens, it's a very powerful effect.



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