REWIND | Artists' Video in the 70s & 80s
Interview with Mike Stubbs

Interview by Sean Cubitt, 7th January 2007

SC: I am here at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image interviewing Mike Stubbs on behalf of the REWIND Artists Video in the 70's and 80's Research Project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the United Kingdom, on behalf of the University of Dundee, Project Director Steven Partridge. So Mike, could you start by telling me the name of your job here?

MS: I am the Head of Exhibitions for the Australian Centre for Moving Image in Melbourne.

SC: We are going talk mainly about your own artistic practice and your curatorial work. In particular, it will be in relation to the 1970s and 1980s but we will also look at your subsequent career as well. The first question is – which of your works do you consider to be the most important and why?

MS: Even for the purpose of this interview, 'the most important of all the works' probably doesn't exist. But when I think about how the origins of video art in Britain have been historicised, or in the process of being edited into history, I've come to realise that possibly the two most important works are ones that I don't own any longer, because they of course were recorded on half-inch black-and-white. One was a video performance and the other was maybe the first ever scratch-video. I am now considering whether I should be reconstructing them. The two works were made in 1977 when I was a first year art student at Cardiff Art College. In terms of works that actually have some kind of material evidence of their existence, the earlier works, *Cooking with Katie* and *Naval Death* were two early video monologues, which marked the beginning of my video art practice. But clearly what we will discuss through this interview is how I have a very eclectic practice that ranges from being an arts administrator through to being an artist. Then, even within an artistic practice that has lasted over a 20-25 year period, it is one that has covered making films for television, through to making straight drama, through to video performance, and through to installed work or situation-performance acts. So it is quite a broad range. Even within the single-screen work, the range of works that I have made has been broad. However, in terms of identifying early, key works, or ones that clearly fit into an emerging practice of video art, the mid-seventies through to the early eighties was a period for me, when I was between Cardiff and then London as a student at the Royal College of Art. The works I made then were video monologues, there were video and film experiments. So there is also a lot of work in film, work in Super-8 and 16mm, all pretty much from the same period. The types of work were video monologues, performance/dance works on single screen, or performance works using media, which were effectively live works. I also made some experimental drama films. I made *Contortions*, in 1983, which is a 16mm drama looking at a deconstruction of the representation of unemployment. Then I made quite a few extended clips, putting the

sound onto films to go to the BBC. So I worked with a range of composers on collaborations with the sound and music in relationship to video. I guess *Cultural Quarter*, which was made in 2003, and is doing the rounds at the moment, is an important later work that has been shown in a lot of festivals and is in fairly active distribution at the moment. Of the other films, there is *Homing* (Channel 4/BBC 2); and *Gift*, a piece about the unification of Germany made with Ulf Langheinrich, a composer from Vienna. They are the ones that I go back to, and the ones that I still like. Of course, there are loads and loads of ones, which I am sure are historically important in some way or another and that certainly were part of the process of developing my practice, but I don't particularly like them. Quite a few of the monographic ones, of course, have got me in them. So – as for many of the artists who were actually working within this period, because of the number of the artists who do actually feature in the work – there is that just strangeness of looking back at yourself as a younger man.

SC: Are there works that are important to you and the development of your practice that are not necessarily more widely acknowledged?

MS: The ones that don't exist. These two, like the first ever scratch-video. Mike Stubbs did it. Can I prove it? It was me, working on a half inch studio deck, a big Sony, not PortaPak but a studio deck and another one next to it. Having recorded off air material of a Film Noir, a classic Hollywood movie, some TV advertising of cosmetics adverts, I basically just crash-edited it together, straight off air. It literally was 'crashing' if you remember how clunky those machines were. It would break up between the images. I was basically building up small loops using that off air material live and then re-editing those loops together. There were key phrases that I can remember, like "You needn't think you can push me around", which just kept coming back round again. So it was definitely an interesting and important experiment at the time. The other piece that I did at that time was, it was me semi-naked with a long piece of rope, like a wooden barge with a Sony PortaPak and a half-inch deck, tripod and a backing mic, with a Sony camera and a load of big rocks all on this wooden box. The work is me, pulling this whole thing, with this rope, across the studio of the art college third area studio towards me. But that was actually really difficult. So, it was actually a durational performance recorded live on camera. It was basically my thighs getting bigger and bigger and bigger and me under quite a lot of physical duress with blood on the hands from rope burns, trying to get this thing to move. It was very, very heavy. And then when it gets towards me, I come over to the camera and then switch it off. That was the piece. It's about 40 minutes long and it was pretty hard. So, those two works I would like to be recognised. In terms of when I look down here at a list of single screen works and then a list of installations, there is a whole range of work that I've got, which is just not documented but I think that was very much within the spirit of time-based art. Actually, I was surprised that I lived beyond 25. I just didn't think beyond a certain age range as having any sense of a future or any notion that any of this might of course have any importance. But that was an important aspect. I did do it like that. Certainly, I have never been strategic in planning my artist career. It has all been a happy accident. So I guess that there are probably performance works, of which there is hardly any documentation. You know, it seemed pretty reasonable at the time. Things didn't seem important and significant in themselves. There are some pretty big outdoor public artworks that I've done which have been sort of temporary and which don't really feature in my documentation. I've got a box full of early Super 8 films, which I've never done anything with. I know that at some point in the future I'd

very much like the time to be able to even find them, let alone watch them and find out what they were. But I've had a lot of Super 8 films.

SC: Can we talk about your aesthetic considerations and what your conceptual ideas were?

MS: Well I wasn't interested in aesthetics. I didn't really like art. So in a sense, rather than think about aesthetic, I was thinking about the ethos. Why choose one particular practice, medium, aesthetic over another? It was largely driven through rejection. So it was about a denial of previous forms, and that, very much, was what was exciting about video. It was, very much, a new medium. So in terms of traditional art historical lenities of aesthetics, that wasn't really my driving force. I can post-rationalise that now, and certainly with new layers of knowledge, I can apply the art history that I was forced to learn back on my own practice, to make those comparisons and links. But I don't think, at the beginning, those language sets weren't really at the top of my mind. Having said that, the fact that I was really attracted to ripping off TV material and making a scratch video in 1977, a year after punk and pretty much round the time of the Silver Jubilee, I think I can genuinely say it was an aesthetic decision. Likewise, doing things, which were temporary, or throwaway as opposed to wanting to make monumental paintings or large materials sculptures, was also of interest. So I think it certainly formed into the early days of a post-modern movement of wanting things to be more ephemeral. Also, I think the aesthetics of television were dominant. It was being one of the first generation TV viewers and certainly that formed a large part of my cultural identity. It was also there in terms of actually just wanting to get my hands on the medium. It defined all that I was surrounded by, and it made a lot of sense to work with it. It seemed to be a great place of opportunity.

SC: When you were starting out, had you been shown any video work by other artists? Or were any other works that were influential at that early point?

MS: Not really, no, though I had been told about some. In terms of joining the dots between the early history, Chris Monger who was my tutor, and is a film director now, had, I think, either seen a Critchley or a Partridge work at the first video festival in Coventry. I went to the second and the third student video festival in Coventry, that Steve Partridge and Zoe Redman organised. For me, that was a really significant moment in terms of getting exposure to other people's alternative practice. There was also an early Paik show at Hayward, which I saw. Also, I showed a lot. I showed through LUX or LEA as it was then. London Electronic Arts, at that point, became my distributor. It was quite early on, actually in 1979. I think it was as early as that.

SC: So it was still London Video Arts then?

MS: Yes, London Video Arts. So through spending time there and looking at tapes, I saw quite a lot of stuff in the late 1970s. I have to say that Bill Voila's *Anthem* was a massively significant piece in terms of a group of works, which I would, loosely speaking, term as music video. That was very important. There was also David Critchley's *Pieces I Never Did*, and Ian Bourn's work. There were other people who were effectively my contemporaries but a few years older. There was also Tamara Kirkorian and David Hall, who were massively significant in terms of the few examples that I could see.

SC: So it was mainly British based artists?

MS: British, American, Dutch and German. Speaking now in Australia, I am actually now trying to piece together a history of Australian video art and see who the key people were. At that time Peter Callas had done some curation, but actually that came a bit later. It was more like the mid 1980s. But without really trolling back through the lists and revitalising my memory those are some of the ones that I can remember. I want to go back to that point because in terms of what really influenced me wasn't other video artists. In terms of the cultural references, it was probably music. Culturally musical movements were very important as was cinema and television. So I have been influenced by bigger, more popular media, rather than the art world itself. But, I found myself in a position of making art.

SC: How were the works produced? Could talk a little bit about the processes of production technology?

MS: I don't think that was taught. It was an untaught practice in an art school in the 1970s. You made art yourself. So there weren't any clear models other than we didn't want to do it like other people did it. Having said that, if I look at the range of works from that period, some were made with significant budgets with full crews within the same sort of production model as feature filmmaking or television, whereas many others were written, directed and edited in camera by Mike Stubbs. So, clearly I don't think there is one clear way I was taught. I enjoyed very much working with the crew, that was a great way to learn, employing professionals who can do their job really well and know what it is. At the same time I still liked to muck around and do things myself.

SC: You mentioned using a Sony Studio Deck in 1977, were you also using PortaPak?

MS: Yes I was indeed, and also u-matic. I think this comes up as a different question but effectively what happened was, I had been working with Super 8 film at Cardiff Art College and I'd be coming to the Chapter Art Centre, who had a film workshop and also a video workshop. Both had a slightly different ideological basis. The film workshop was about the individual. It was very much modelled on the New-Wave. That's what everyone was really interested as a filmmaking movement. And, it was about people wanting to make their own films and be auteurs of some sort. But they didn't have any video kit and at that point neither did the Art College. However the community video workshop, which was effectively Marxist, was effectively a resource and facility for alternative forms of newsgathering. I think that's a quick way of summarising what they did. I found myself in one sense being politically active. Actually quite a few of the works were campaign types and in actual fact they trusted me enough, not like the rest of the other people that wanted to be film directors, which they were not at all interested in because that didn't fit into that political agenda, but because I had enough of that awareness. So they'd let me use their kit. So that was a way in for me to start to use video very early on. Then the Art College bought a JVC u-matic. And I can actually remember the technician coming to one of our year meetings and saying, "Well we've got this equipment, and we are looking for someone who is technically proficient with cameras to try it out". I can remember it was almost like being at school. I put my hand up. So it was bloke who could use equipment, and who got his hands on the kit. It was me. Then I hogged it for about 5 months and got

pissed the whole time and basically filmed myself making stories. They were the first: *Camera Sick*, *Naval Death*, *Cooking With Katie*. They were made under the influence of alcohol.

SC: So can you talk about when and why you started making work using video? Obviously you have begun to address now, but when was this?

MS: It was opportunism. I got offered the kit to experiment with. Why did I prefer video to film? I think it was because it was new. There was a novelty attached to it. Its relationship to television was pretty critical. Why use video? It was certainly not because it was light and portable. It wasn't at that point. The myth was that it was cheaper to use in terms of access to stock, but clearly it wasn't. It was just as expensive really. Was it the fact that you could re-use the tape? I don't think so. It was probably new-ness.

SC: Can you talk about your artistic processes and how they've changed over the years?

MS: Well over the time I've got less time for that practice therefore I've become more efficient. So I suppose what that means is that the process of experimentation or studio work no longer really exists. It basically means that things are done much more like a piece of writing and they are planned, and then they go into production. I don't have an open-ended studio practice because I have a job. What else would I say about it? Clearly in terms of technology, things have changed a bit but not that much. For example, I did actually make this one piece of work called *Waiter There is a Fly on my Wall*. The work was me following my mum and dad around a stately home in England but getting them to pretend they owned it. I was carrying all the kit and I am not a particularly big chap. I had a u-matic PortaPak, a Hitachi free tube, u-matic camera with a separate microphone gaffa-taped on to it. And I followed them around the stately home for a day. It was murder. I think that I was always attracted to being a one-man-band, and maybe that was one advantage of video over film. Super 8 was slightly like that. But I did actually do a week's workshop with Don Pennebaker who of course invented the first fully mobile ENG film camera, by actually making the physical modifications of the body of the camera. So I think, the thing was partly not being reliant on other people. The notion of independence was also enshrined within the ideological cultural movement of the time, and that was important, both in political terms of and also the opportunity of being auteur like the wannabe filmmaker, which of course we've got world of now. And I do see the whole thing coming around again. So being able to make stuff in different ways was important.

SC: Because your career is involved in the video workshop movement and the sort of community practice, with the curatorial work as well as your own artistic practice, do you feel that those somehow feed each other? Or are they very distinct?

MS: At other times if you'd asked me that question, I would have said, "Well of course". If you'd asked me the question 4 years ago, I'd have probably said, "Well social intervention, health care consultancy, meeting people - community work - are all part of my artistic process." Clearly they are. The range of work, from my later artistic life, has come out of social economic engineering or even critiquing that. So in terms of the types of the processes that I've used at different times they've been important. Certainly, being an animateur/entrepreneur/curator/administrator at different times

setting up projects, which have been conduit for other people to make work, has been an important part of my artistic practice. In terms of the precision of how we describe those processes, if you actually started to analyse them at the time of your death, there were certain times when being an artist/curator that would have seemed relevant. In my current role is the head of a government institution, effectively with a national remit, I can play on the collateral of having been an artist or from time-to-time be an artist. But if I was actively being an artist it wouldn't look very good. Whereas, within the context of an emerging, independent arts organisation like Time-Based Arts in Hull, it was acceptable within the mid to late 1980's to be an artist and curator at the same time. It wasn't an issue. It was always quite clear for me to be very active in both fields, and now to be both is a conflict of interests. So that has changed in time. I think that's partially to do with the freedom that's been allowed through political and economic contexts which forms history and also just in terms of combinations of self-awareness or maturity within the field that we work.

SC: One of the works that you were instrumental in getting produced was the Miners' Campaign Tapes in 1984?

MS: 1991 and 1984, more 1984. Instrumental? Of course everyone was instrumental. I actually don't think that I was. I don't think I led that project in terms of how this story is getting told. There were pockets of workshop activity across Britain. There were 6 key workshops throughout: Platform and Chapter were two, and I can't remember the rest. But when I say that I was not that instrumental, I mean that I am not really the person to tell you. Terry Dimmock is, or Chris Rushton would be, he had a bit to do with it later on as well. Certainly, I was active and I encouraged it and I shot some and edited some and went to the miners' meetings and documented. When the National Union of Miner Workers refused to allow the BBC to document any of their protests or actions, they invited the ACTT which I was a member of, the Association of the Cinematographic and Television Technicians, to basically put together a voluntary crew and document what was happening. So yes, certainly I contributed to parts of those works.

SC: Can you talk about changing technologies and how these impacted on your work and artistic objectives?

MS: Well, trying to draw some of these threads together, the whole notion of the dominant cinema, as something to break up and destroy from a socialist position as imported into neo-liberalist 70's Britain certainly informed a large chunk of activity in that time, all in good faith. So, I saw the raise of the 'Green Collar' and I saw an ethnic conversation arising through all the things that happened around working against racism. I can remember seeing people carrying guitar cases with the yellow and red stickers, which said "Keep music live" on them or "I don't use computers because they are going to destroy our livelihoods as unionised music makers". Clearly there was a lot of bollocks being said. I think there's probably more music being made now than there was then by more people. So in terms of the paradigms that existed the technological frameworks certainly were moving in parallel to changes in mindset and the development of thinking and looking at alternative models of production and distribution. Some of that was framed through ideology, primarily I suspect. It was all very useful and interesting, which the technology appeared to enable. It's very interesting when you track that back into the 21st century, which we are firmly standing

in because quite clearly the technologies that allow us to do YouTube, MySpace, Google, Vimeo etc. were being rehearsed in a very clunky way back in the early 1970's and probably before that in the 1930's. So it's interesting how things have gone and come back round again. Apart from being a naïve male and being into cars and motorbikes and cameras and technology, once I got over it, for me the technology is unimportant. I still maintain that the technology in itself is unimportant. I think the relationships between the formation of culture, communication *and* technology is the important bit.

SC: So I think we really covered this but I'll put it to you anyway. Did you have any particular ideological reasons why you wanted to use video?

MS: That could be viewed as a complex question in the light of some of the answers I've already given. There was opportunity, newness and feasibility. It was just the opportunity and the fact that I could do it. I suppose there was also the colour. To go back to the aesthetic question, there were certain things about the aesthetic value of video, which you didn't get with film, like the immediacy of being able to manipulate it was highly attractive, but there were also its colour values, which you didn't get without doing a lot of work within filmmaking. Also there was a sense of ease perhaps with video, like video was easier than filmmaking perhaps.

SC: You also, you've done works both for galleries and for activist purposes and you've also done broadcast work. Are there any particular reasons why one work would be made for one of those kinds of dissemination and others were not?

MS: This is interesting and again, if I revisit this over a period of time, using the oppositional model, the gallery system and the commercial art world seemed to stink as did the TV industry seem to stink and reflect value sets that I didn't agree with. It was that simple at the beginning. But clearly galleries are great places if you want people to come and see things because they know they are going to find art. If I want to see art, I'll go to an art gallery. If you go site specific and you do it in the street, people would come across it by chance, which in the early 90s or mid 1990s that seemed like a really exciting prospect. In actual fact I think it's found its natural path somewhere as being a case of better street furniture, things which are clearly public art, things which still exist in as being interventionalist ad-hoc actions. Likewise in terms of media, there was the idea of showing a film in a space, which wasn't a cinema. In 1981 we did a show called 'Not Just Another Art Show'. It was a combination of film so we built a cinema in a supermarket in central Cardiff and we built an art gallery with paintings and sculpture. We were trying to show an alternative way of showing art. But of course, it wasn't really that alternative. It was just the fact that we did it ourselves. And that's quite often the cycles that we see now. So it's absolutely essential that there's an alternative practice going on because that's how you learn. Likewise, I still really enjoy going to the cinema because I know I am going to get to see a film in a really great set of conditions with fantastic audio and a great screen. I think there are certain hybrids that are emerging which have learnt through those experiments. I was interested to see an outdoor cinema in Berlin, and it was very interesting the way the screen was built into the substance of the building. Then there are the big galleries, the super museums of contemporary art, which have become more closely allied to the entertainments industry. But that's also a good thing in terms of recognising that more

people are going to see art. So you can't have it both ways. I think that's part of the learning process that we are going through to track back.

SC: Do these sorts of considerations have anything to do with your move to Hull?
MS: Yes, very much so.

SC: When did you actually move there?

MS: I moved in 1985 and I spent 13 years there taking an organisation, which existed but was meeting in the pub once a month – Ye Olde Black Boy on the High Street –which was formed out of other music and open performance groups. So it was performance art and pro-music with an interest from Rob Gawthrop in experimental film. So I joined it and we started talking about whether we could get some funding to do some events, and then we did *Drums Along The Humber* with Paul Burwell. Then there was some money and I was appointed Project Co-ordinator for £2,500 a year. Then left it 13 years later having done the Root Festival for 10 years – a national arts festival which Hull no longer has – and having set up Hull Time Based Arts, which was a fairly major capital project, and with, at that point, about 13 or 14 staff. So it was it was a big investment and it was a collective initiative, which I applied my entrepreneurialism to and my natural ability to organise and advocate. We did some fantastic projects, commissioned over 250 art works, and tried lots of stuff in lots of different environments. We didn't have the building for some time so we were a peripatetic organisation. That thing of taking an opportunity and working with what's in front of you, I still think is very important. Some of my best works that I can refer to here cost £50. Also I've got a few films, which cost a lot of money and I don't think they are great. So I'd still maintain that whatever your practice, a good set of ideas and making do with what's in front of you is a good way to begin.

SC: That just leads me neatly to the question did funding stifle or enable you to realise your ambitions?

MS: Certainly, it enabled me. There is no question about that. I always used the example of Jon Jost. One thing which I came across recently which seemed very important was that funding for the sector of the independent film movement enabled Jon Jost, Jane Campion, Mike Leigh, Don Pennebaker, Michael Powel, Thelma Schumacher to come to Cardiff and give talks around the workshops, and from which I really deeply benefited. In terms of what funding means to arts sector, to an organisation or a support institution, clearly those things were great. They were useful. They weren't just about the money going into institutions where people could consume culture. However I did benefit very well from funding myself. I got into some early Channel 4 money and a bit of S4C money very early on when I was in my mid 20's, and then on the back of the success of using that money well, I got funded through the Arts Council and the BBC to make works that were between broadcast and experimental video. So I had a really good run. There is no question about it. I owe the Arts Council a big thank you – *thanks David!* So yes, I did okay at the funding. In terms of being able to gear that up to the next scale, I got close to raising £700,000 towards a feature film. I made two big films. I made *Contortions*, then I got funding through the Welsh Arts Council to make another film called *Soapless*, which I've never shown because it's awful. But it was actually the one with the biggest production value works made in Cardiff. Then for a whole range of reasons that project never succeeded. That second

film never really got made. It actually ended up as quite a good screenplay, and I got some development money through the British Film Institute to make another film, but it never happened. So in terms of the continuity of funding, I didn't quite get there. At the moment I don't have time to make funding applications, but I wonder if I'd even have the time to make a film if I've got the funding.

SC: What was the preferred context for dissemination of your work?

MS: The reason I like TV is that it meant that lots of people could see it. I was one of the members of 'Video Artists on Tour', which was a great way of being subsidised to go to other cities to show your work and get a, not so bad, small fee. I can remember doing a number of those to various small audiences like Torriano Meeting Place in 1992. There were 6 people. Even though it was a very, very meaningful show, in terms of the 'bums on the seats' mentality, it would be very difficult to justify that situation. But it seemed important at the time for the people in the audience and for me in having the opportunity for a really in-depth conversation after the video screening. However the thought of being able to get a 250,000 person audience for *Homing* which has actually been shown 7 or 8 times on British TV and shown around the world or *Gift*, the ones that were commissioned by a broadcast agency meant that a lot more people got to see them. I live by the believe that it's the people I went to school with, who I'd like to see the work, and not just people I knew in the commercial gallery world. That was important for me. Having said that, the tape was shown at a retrospective of single screen works in 1995 or 1996 and it was great to have that stamp of approval by a big internationally renowned institution. Likewise, I recently had work shown at the Tate in a group context and I'll know that a lot of people are going to see it in an art gallery context as art galleries have become more popular and they hit that side of the economy. Then there is also idea of doing something quietly in the corner. At one stage I did a residency in Gümüşlük in Turkey. I made models of hotels using local grasses and tourist holiday brochures with pictures of hotels on them. I placed the landscape and photographed them and then I set fire to them. About three local villages saw that piece of work but that was fine too. So I think that that you should try to stay clear of absolutes and do what you need to.

SC: I want to ask you about one piece that I have always really liked, called *Man Act*. What was the process of that?

MS: Which one? The colour one or the black-and-white one?

SC: The black-and-white one.

MS: There was a 1985 *Man Act*, and it was made by the company. Man Act was a performance group based, sharing space with the Cardiff Lab Inc. in Cardiff. I got involved with them and again it was that thing about technology and gender. I was someone who'd supposedly got interesting ideas and I also knew how to use the kit. So Man Act came to me and said, "Can you help us make a video? We want to document out show". And I said, "No don't do that. But if you want me to make a film I'd happily make one with you" So that was the trade off really because they didn't have any money. If they'd got a lot of money, I would have made the documentary and it would have just been a job. But in actual fact we made quite an interesting video experiment together. Then in 1991, Man Act the company had a new piece of work

called 'Sweatlodge' and I got a call saying, "We are doing the show at the tramway in Glasgow, Mike, can you come up and document it?" I said, "When?" and they said "Tomorrow" and I said, "Well I haven't got any kit" and they said, "Well we can buy some stuff can you come?" And so I arrived to see Sweatlodge. I saw half of the performance that night driving up and got up in the morning with a Super 8 film camera and a video camera, spent 3 hours completely improvising with 20 performers, took loads of shots and then did a 3 day off-line edit and then a one day online edit in Dundee with Claire Pollack. I edited it online, BETA edit. So it was done extremely quickly. And it was a pretty successful piece in that period. And then we went on to work with them on another work, which I've forgotten the name of.

SC: We should for the record perhaps just clarify the Dundee connection.

MS: Sure. Steve Partridge was appreciative of Gina Czarnecki's skills. In having set up the Master's Electronic Arts Imaging course, he wanted to retain her in Dundee. He knew that we were struggling with our long distance relationship and managed to create a post, which I applied for. It was a senior research residency and I was fortunate to be given the job. In actual fact, I suppose another way of relating that answer could basically be that a research residency came up in Dundee, it gave me a bit of time to evaluate my practice in Hull and actually critique what I've been doing, both in terms of the economic and social regeneration projects that I was increasingly involved in and also to look at my own artistic practice and focus on it again. So I did a residency with the Newcastle Gateshead Initiative and tracked the bid for the Year of Culture 2008. Through that process I made a body of work called *City Strap Line Industries* which then eventuated into an exhibition Baltic which also contained *Cultural Quarter*, *Time* and about five other works, a website, some social research etc. Also in the period in Dundee, for 2 years in a row, I set up a small time based arts festival called 'Burning Bush'. It was basically importing a bit of the Root Festival into Dundee but not quite with the support or with quite the need that Hull had of its Root Festival. And I taught there. I regularly taught at Dundee. Pretty much from about 1990, I'd go up there. Steve Partridge had been interested in my work and brought me in as a visiting lecturer and a visiting artist quite regularly at that period of time.

SC: So were there specific facilitators or curators who were important to the exhibition and broadcast of your work?

MS: Most certainly. The people that spring to mind include Mik Flood. He took a punt in 1980. He was the director of Chapter Art Centre, then to become the Director of the Watermans in West London and then the Director of the ICA. Basically I went to him with Dick Powel and Sian Edwards. We had an idea to do a mixed media theatre performance called *The Starless Cast.* He said, "This looks interesting, yeah you can have some money". So he gave us the theatre for a three-week rehearsal period, a week's run in the theatre and a budget to make it. It was amazing. So, he was influential. David Curtis has been an important supporter over the years. I would imagine that Rod Stoneman is one. He was the Channel 4 commissioning editor that didn't, finally, commission anything that I did. Alex Graham, who was at the ICA for a while, is another. Again I was avoiding the mainstream art world for as long as possible and it meant that didn't get into that sort of tradition. It's interesting if you look at like the Australian scene now, I can name 10 star artists who work with moving image or video, who are represented by 3 key galleries in Australia who have had a very

different relationship to the way that artists did at the time. It's interesting that I am working with Isaac Julien in the Pompidou Show. Now I can remember meeting Isaac when he was a mere lad, when he was still a part of Sankofa. He'd just finished making *Territories*, which I was very interested in. Again, it was that whole thing about the music culture, scratch, the re-appropriation of other people's media and new ways of telling stories. It's a really significant piece. But clearly now I am dealing with Isaac as an international art star. He is represented by Victoria Miro and clearly he is working in a very different way, in which the whole art market has assimilated different forms of practices. Things are very different now. So, I don't think I was in that game. I don't think that the traditional models applied to me at that time. It was more about commissioning editors or people who supported my work through funding, and what they thought was a good idea. And there were festivals. I did extremely well in terms of funded international travel in a period when it seemed to be a really attractive thing. I made fantastic friends and colleagues right across Eastern Europe and Europe through the support of people who were running festivals.

SC: Did you facilitate other artists' work?

MS: I certainly did, yes. On YouTube, if you do a web search for Heath Bunting, Heath Bunting has just made a new documentary film which is effectively a self-made documentary looking at his history of internet art and he starts his 40 minute documentary by thanking me for giving him £50 to do his first paid artwork. I naturally got involved in groups and so before Hull even, I was involved in various initiatives. And then in Hull of course I was working with something, which came strongly from collectivism and then I turned it into a job. We did lots and lots of commissions, we took lots of risk, we worked with lots of artists that had never done things with money before and I always found that quite exciting. Then I've developed a strong working relationship with certain artists like Perry Hoberman or Granular Synthesis or Ryoji Ikeda, where I've also quite early on taken the risk on them and watched them grow. So it's interesting being able to maintain a relationship when they've achieved a certain degree of success. I'm also still trying to find opportunities to enable younger untested things to get a chance really.

SC: Could you talk a little about your work with particular technicians and your collaborations with particular other artists?

MS: It would be foolish not to mention Roland Denning, who is kind of key collaborator on the zone of works, which include *Gift* and *Homing*: the two critical ones, where he was a co-writer and cinematographer and also we worked together on the production. So, we formed Metamedia Productions, which still has an office in Berwick Street in London. So we still have an office which is currently sub-let and we bought a Media 100 Systems for £100,000 on a three year lease which we still own, I think. It keeps the door open when it's a hot day. So yes, Roland is obviously critical in a lot of this work taking place, and also for having been the person that ran Chapter Film Workshop. But also my interest in the New Wave largely came through Roland's interest in Goddard, which was recently reminded to me by Ian Christie, that it was actually Phil Cosca who did the first full season programme at Hull University of Goddard films in Britain. Then Ronald went on and did one in Cardiff. But Roland also studies philosophy in Hull University and he met Phil Cosca, which was just a coincidence. Rob Gawthrop, was also very critical as an experimental filmmaker and

who also went to the Royal College of Art before me, but then was pretty much the driving force along with Joanna Millet behind Hull Time Based Arts when it was in its truly collective voluntary mode. We did the *What The Eye Doesn't See: Post Industrial Studies Number 1* piece. It was part of 'River Crossings with Camerawork', which involved mic-ing up a working steam train using Woolwich Train Station. We had all these people in British transport uniforms walking around with walkie-talkies, playing walkie-talkies to passengers on trains, giving them statistics on coal and nuclear energy. We had some performance artists spot-lit shovelling coal from one pile straight back into another, it was like an ongoing job. Then we had all these beautiful grainy 16 mm films that Rob made, which were projected onto the windows of the train museum. It was good. That was a collaboration among lots of collaborations. Gina Czarnecki, my wife, has had lots of input from her over the years. We did the Lighthouse piece in Whithernsea, which was basically a public artwork, using the glass chamber of a lighthouse where we had a rotating video projection effectively action projecting the non-signing of the Kyoto Agreement, two times ago. The piece looked at the relationship between coastal erosion, of which Withernsea is effectively going to fall into the sea, in relation to a lack of activity addressing issues addressing issues of the global warming. We had a soundtrack that was made by Gerald Mair, which went to our community radio and you had to tune into an FM station to hear it in your car. So, you had to sit outside the lighthouse, watch the video projection and hear it on the radio. That was another collaboration. I've done lots of collaborations with dancers and performers, for example, Roberto De Jonge and Maria Voortman from Rotterdam, who had an MPI/BBC co-commission for a dance film. I've also worked with Franco B on performance work, video and performance work. I've done lots of collaborations.

SC: You also have got real passion for music. Can you talk a little about your musical pieces?

MS: Part of my hobby at Hull Time Based Arts was putting on primarily African and impro to the public, so I was in music promotion for 4 years on my Sundays. So I did Bhindu Boys, Remmy Onglala, Ali Farka Toure, Anne Whitehurst, Dudu Pakwana – a number of people who are now dead. It was pretty significant music programme that was done with collaboration with the Afro-Caribbean Association and through Time Based Arts and good things to do at the Tower Night Club. I made good friends with Dave Mays who assisted in doing that. And then through going to far too many discos, I promoted quite a lot of people that made electronic music quite early onbefore they were famous and some pretty important DJs. I had a particular interest in people who were migrating from making music to making moving image or people who were interested in moving image and were making music. I've just bought for my MP3 player, the rhythm and sound remixes of Carl Craig track. So, I've still got an interest in music but I don't do any.

SC: You worked a lot with composers in collaborations?

MS: Yes, that ranges from in terms of commissioning a soundtrack. I was going to say it's a paid job, but it's not always a paid job. The soundtrack for *Cultural Quarter* for example, was made by a group called 'I Dream of Tall Buildings' which is a Birmingham collective who wrote to me, having seen previous films and said, "We really like your work can we make you a soundtrack?" And I said "OK", so they made the soundtrack. They did actually get paid for it in the end but that was speculative. I

quite like risk. So it was this great soundtrack. Simon Thorne made a few soundtracks, Ulf Langheinrich has done two or three, Mark Fell/SND also. David Shea, who is actually based in Melbourne, made a soundtrack. I worked on a dance video piece and Chris Wiltshire made the soundtrack for that so there have been quite a few different people.

SC: I've come to the end of my formal list of questions, but are there any other reflections you'd like to make about your career as an artist and curator?

MS: Clearly there were some really significant moments within this short bit of history that we are trying to document, whether or not you really felt you were part of something. In 1982 I was introduced to Rosetta Brooks and her partner who is actually quite a famous British artist. They set up a magazine called ZG. The connection came through Janek Alexander. I think he'd met them in New York. ZG was actually a very far-sighted journal of its time. It was really was doing what lots of journals are doing now, but it didn't really work. They didn't have a good enough marketing strategy or enough money allowing them to get it out to a broad enough audience, so they sort of remained an arts journal really. But they did certainly want to make video magazines back in 1982 when they got put in contact with me. I got as far as making the first ZG. I made another piece, which was called ZG Presents and I worked with all unknown artists or almost unknown artists at the time: Robert Longo, Cindy Sherman and Jack Goldstein. There were some really deeply significant New York names and they said, "We've got this. Can you turn this into video?" They gave me a lot of slides, and then I made some video and we started narrating this thing. It was actually pretty good and then Rosetta and her partner split up. She moved to New York and then Mayleen and Scott split up and the whole thing was a nightmare and that was the end of it. But I remember talking to David Garcia about that. He was talking about grabbing hold of the mare's mane. The idea of really being right at the heart of the movement and there was a moment around there in the 1980s. I'd been to New York, I went to a concert and got invited to a private party where I met Lar Lubovitch, Sun Ra, Steve Reich, Philip Glass, David van Tiegham and Meredith Monk. I met them at a party. And that was on in the same year that ZG asked me to do this video magazine and, you know, my life could have been different. But in actual fact it was different. That was the moment. Likewise in terms of being part of an active independent film workshop, when it was like really buzzing and it felt relevant and didn't feel past the sell-by date. Likewise in terms of seeing the emergence of a new media movement when it was dead exciting and totally relevant, the birth of the Internet and learning to write by having a computer, having been semi-illiterate until that point and then learning the internet. Then extending Hull's opportunity to Europe. Hull was this dysfunctional fucked up place on the East Coast of England with the lowest education at the time with the highest teenage pregnancy rate, but we were actually making its connection with Europe through V2, through Werkleitz Gesellschaft in the former East Germany through a network of Oberhausen. Biting into Europe, I think was what caught the imagination of the Arts Council, the City Council and the agencies that could assist it in evolving into something of a greater scale. So to answer your technology question better, with the advent of non linear editing, Werkleitz Gesellschaft were on the point of buying an Avid just as I was just buying an Avid to work with Granular Synthesis for the AVE Festival in Holland, and we looked at whether we could find some broadband capability, in 1991 or 1992, to actually transfer image files. I can remember talking to Kingston Communications about their new ISDN service, in terms of the ease of use

with which we can now download any kind of file size using ADSL or broadband, the whole thing about learning HTML or having to learn even how to operate an ISDN system in exchange, was very interesting. For me, that was the key moment in terms of charting a sort of Negroponte version of what it might mean to have a knowledge, economy, instant transfer of information, globalised economy and how that then related to art and the moving image. So again, if I had to spend more time and put up these notes of when things were really happening in terms of what's happening now – OK, this stuff is tracking backwards and tracking forwards – but we know that things are happening on a bigger scale in terms of the public, in terms of entertainment and spectacle industry. At the same time, we know the phenomenon of new economic models of distribution of media, production and consumption of media. Three and a half million viewers for some kid doing a 200-yard 'stoppie' or 'wheelie' it down the road to music is fantastic. I love it. So, have we achieved our objective? People are making and showing around videos to enormous audiences. Is that it? That may not be the sorts of bourgeois models of art-making that we had in mind, but that's just how it is, sorry.