
Beginnings: first tests, first experiences, first works

When did you start to get interested in video?

I shot my first film in 1971 (plus sound works and photographic works) and by 1976 had come across video in the field albeit at a distance. In September of that year I went to do a 3 year course in Communication Design which gave access to Video, Film, Audio, Graphics and a variety of media training. I made a short documentary with a friend between September and December 1976 using portapak and crash editing using two portapaks. The sheer immediacy of the experience of the video image and sound, replayed on what seemed to be like the most ubiquitous form of communications – television – won me over to video completely. The fact the edits themselves were imperfect in today's terms only accentuated the impression of immediacy. Some of my earliest works, as with other artists, were around the glitch – though having said that I also pursued 'perfection' of sound colour edit and so on from that point on as a parallel aesthetic gesture. By the beginning of 1977 it was apparent that 'we' immediately knew as much as our teachers (of the technology) that the grammar was to be invented in each work as the technology was unstable and changing, and that whatever we made we should immediately show to an audience – also this conceptual grasp enabled 3 of us to form "Vida" which we understood to be a declension of the Latin 'to see' (which later we realised was wrong). Vida was comprised of myself Terry Flaxton, Anthony Cooper and Penny Dedman. Many people clung to others on their rapid learning curve, yet the British Arts Council denied that more than one person could make art (groups could not). In fact between 1976 and 1981 we took equipment into a variety of situations to show (often) the subjects of the work the outcome in around 150 showings. These were community centres, galleries, and anywhere that would allow us to show the work – one extreme was to show a piece called 'Inside Comics' at the Birmingham Comcom to an audience of 400 comic book fans on one 28 inch screen and a good audio system. It's also worth noting that from around 1973 video enabled community video practices to bloom yet there was a distinct split in the UK between Community Video and Video Art – yet now artists working with communities is seen as a beneficial element in the artwork. It became clear that if your audience was motivated then as long as the sound was good, people could later view the images (as we did several showings of the comics production with people swapping seats so that those at the back moved to the front so that all could both see and hear the work in a participatory act).

What I am in fact describing here is a parallel advance in the sophistication of both the medium and our grasp of the aesthetics and construction of pieces of work that might engage people – and our own grasp of the ontology of video and its appearance in the world at that time. Why Video? Why then? In fact in late 1978 I had written a project called 'Talking Heads' about the television phenomenon which was about the nature of 'the media' – a position slightly different from McLuhan though in most parts similar as it debated the nature of the rapidity of media through the lens of Video and won a prize at the 4th Tokyo Video Festival (our first international screening was in 1978 at the Long Beach Museum of Art).

1971 Lost 16mm film (literally – A film which was about being lost – which I later lost)

VIDA Terry Flaxton, Penny Dedman, Antony Cooper – I wrote most of the pieces Dedman and Cooper credited with collaborations

Opening Up 1976 Documentary

Presentiments 1976/1977 (Art Video, Cooper and Dedman were involved)
The Fashion Show 1977 Fashion and Art mixed together (Cooper, Dedman and Eshetu were involved)
'U238' Film/Video Apocalyptic Promo Video and Film (Mainly Cooper, I was involved performing and editing)
Talking Heads 1978 (The speeding up of the Media/The Society of the Spectacle) Media Art Video Cooper and Dedman were involved
Inside Comics 1978 (The phenomenon of comics from the early days until Angry Superman) Cooper and Dedman were involved
Eisenstein: Programme of Attractions 1979/1983 (Eisenstein's formative years until he made his first film for theatre) With Michael Jones
Chinese Comics 1979 (Propaganda in Chinese Comics) Mainly Dedman, I shot this, Cooper Sound

What was the nature of your artistic work before switching to video? How / with whom did you train?

I picked up a guitar at the age of 8 and due to my own differences with other boys, started writing poetry, painting and composing music between then and when I did a foundation course in 1971. I was a loner – true I did an Art A level at school and so learned about some of the history of art but at school I was cherished by one art teacher and oppressed by another – so I was boundaried by good and bad experiences. By the time I did my foundation course I was painting large canvases in a variety of styles, Picasso, Magritte etc but didn't go on to a full three year course as I had realised that teachers in art schools were limited to their own practice and likes and dislikes.

After foundation course I became a full-time musician – I was 19 then and managed to make an album and write a lot of music some of which was recorded by different ensembles, do a variety of gigs (I had started playing in public at the age of 13) and because income was difficult via playing music and there were more bands than recording contracts, I started working on small sound engineering jobs (eventually working on a mix of a full orchestra on a huge mixing desk) plus I helped strip out mixing desks transporting them and installing them in other studios.

So I was both artistically and technically conscious before coming back to university in 1976 – so my time at college from 1976 to 79 was as a mature student and I realised that we could gain autonomy via Video and so we worked outside of the course for commercial documentaries for trade unions (in one case with 27 different unions). So though conscious of artistic practice by going to shows/exhibitions etc – as at that time between 1981 – 1985 London did not seem to have boundaries between music, performance, theatre, film, video, painting and sculpture. One caveat to this is that directly after college in January to April 1980 we three of Vida had worked solely to get enough money so that we could buy a colour Portapak to go to America to make a piece of work called Towards Intuition: An American Landscape which was by then, consciously, our 1st Long Form Art Video. Greater London Arts Council gave us the money to edit this piece when we returned. (whilst in San Francisco we made a work for Video West called 'Documentary Rape')

VIDA

1980 Documentary Rape (on the issue of how documentaries misrepresent their subjects)
1980/81 Towards Intuition: An American Landscape (How do we navigate when improvising? What Steers us when we let go?)

_ What is your first work, and what year does it date from? Can you describe it? Where and under which conditions was it shown?

Presentiments 1976/1977 (Art Video)

I had been to London Film Co-op, I had connected with and offered labour to London Video Arts and I had come across film crews working on early promos via music and I had even sat on top of Gong's PA to shoot a gig. I was also aware that London's Commercials sector was blooming and there was an intermix between experimental film and commercials (there were rumours of soho companies attending screenings to find and steal 'avant garde' ideas) – plus I had also myself painting full canvases with one colour so when it came to making Presentiments, we three of Vida took a set of concepts into the making of this 16 minute piece. Full frames held of one colour – flash frames of another to create after images. Scenes of the countryside with certain colours predominating, cutting with full colours. A soundtrack elements of Fripp and Eno from the No Pussyfooting phase – and sometimes no sound at all – Presentiments was about an oncoming feeling of doom in relation to what the media seemed to be beginning to do to society. So whilst making Talking Heads we also in parallel made Presentiments... and incidentally, recently (45 years later) I took the original footage and made a new piece that in fact was about the kind of painting I had done on foundation course.

In 1981 on returning from the USA we changed our name and one person to Triple Vision and from then until 1992 we operated making work for Channel 4 including 5 programmes on UK and European Video Art. All the while, in every role I took part in playing, every penny I earned was spent in the cause of making Video Art – which occasionally veered between film essay and documentary and very hard purist video art works. Sometimes the border overlapped such that for instance in 1983 Apple rang VideoMakers (1981 – 1985) to employ us to shoot Ridley Scotts introduction of the mac computer. Occasionally in my work I used my own footage, as if it were found footage – as with this project which eventually became Prisoners (1984)

_ Are there any sketches or preparatory notes?

Most pieces speak for themselves as video works – then and now. I do technical drawings for installations for technicians to work from. One installation travelled to about 7 countries so I had a template for that.

Access conditions / Technical issues

_ How did you get access to the video technology?

In London there seemed to a split between video art and community video. Some of the community elements had started as early as 1970 John Hopkins of TVX) speaks about gathering footage of a bust by police on the Indica Bookshop, in Holborn, then the offices of International Times, but recognising later that the video footage they shot of the police intervention was dark, they restaged the event and then rung the BBC who said come to our studios and the BBC then re-shot their re-staged event on a studio camera and it broadcast that evening – as a restaged performance perhaps this is the first video art event in the UK. Later on following TVX's lead. Basement Project had kit around 1974, West London Video had equipment by 1975 (though they must have applied for grants in 1974). Universities had television studios from early on in the 70's as with the RCA and some 1 inch equipment and there was a Serpentine show in 74.... (shot also by the Basement Project) But artists, if they made friends with community outfits, could access kit.

I think my answer is that I constantly placed myself in the flow of equipment access – for instance when at university I sought out early adherents such as John Hopkins at Fantasy Factory which I later worked at for a short period (77) – then when I left University in 1980 we bought equipment to go to the US to make work (and made work in SF), then on my return I joined a PR agency that set up the 1st London Multi Media Show (1981), then I taught ‘Television’ at London International Film School (also 1981) where I met an engineer who trained with Marconi, then I ran Videomakers a video facility in Soho from 1982 to 1985 (and enabled video artists to come and use the equipment – word got around and early adherents like George Barber got to use the studio) and all of Vida – soon to become Triple Vision worked there too - and we worked for MTV/Apple and made work in some of London’s highest level Post Production companies such as Miliere, Moving Picture Company, Complete Video (often on experimental Video art works and commercial projects on the same day), then between 1983 having sold a project to Channel 4 made documentaries for them from 1984 until about 1992 which enabled access to the very highest level of kit. Equally from 1981 through 2006 I worked as a cinematographer making sure that I shot both Film on Super 16mm and 35mm as well as came across early analogue HD in 1988/89 and tested cameras for Panasonic and Sony and did early experiments for shoot on Video and have a 35mm film version (the first was on beta to 35mm in 1986).

_ Did you seek access to TV studio facilities?

I was always in and out of places in London from the early 81 like Moliere and Moving Picture Company (and eventually the BBC where I was their Video Consultant for a short period) and also ITV studios as well through the 80’s.

_ What equipment was available?

From Portapak to 1 inch B&W and also colour, to Hi Band, through Betacam to 2 inch Quadruplex in the early days – then I came across HD in 1988 (the Phillips, MAC 1250 line system) and in 1999 shooting for 35mm transfer and by 2005 4k Red came on to the scene and by 2007 I was doing a Research Fellowship at University of Bristol in High Resolution Image Making – and my research went on to HDR with AMPAS ASC and BSC and a variety of Universities...

_ Who owned this video equipment?

Where I got it indicates who owned it (often facilities houses offered kit for free) – and I only twice ever bought any kit.

_ What was the involvement of the state and of art centers and art schools in the purchase or provision of technical equipment?

See my earlier note concerning community video facilities – also there was Church TV studios – after that I always either found a way to get equipment for free or self funded. The Arts Council paid for projects and rather than renting (which we occasionally did) we bought our own kit – but with TV projects bought time (or begged it) at high ranking post production houses. Later from 2007 I was in the funding flow with the UK Research Councils.

_ Has this technical equipment (standards) evolved over time? And why?

Of course: 'why it evolved' is a complex and would take multi-faceted answer... I don't know where to begin here as this is a book length in itself. I started on reel to reel half inch and (and have shot on all film formats except 70mm) and I am currently working on an 8k piece.

_ Where did you borrow or purchase it?

See above. I/we got equipment from anywhere from, during the early 80's Samulesons in London for NTSC kit to shoot in the UK and VideoWest in SF - and later in the US Chater Cameras in San Francisco for sourcing Red 4k cameras for production. But also I shot in many countries, like the USSR and Japan and most often we took equipment with us, whereas in Beijing I hired a RED kit there from a Canadian Indy facility that had worked in Beijing for 15 years (that was 2010).

_ How did the access to technical material affect your practice ?

From my answers to other questions you'll understand that I was always comfortable with different technologies and getting and using equipment was part of the ontology of video for me - as much as the aesthetics and production modes and social and even elitist forms of understanding of the why and how in moving image production, as everything comes together without trying - if you allow it to. This is not to duck the question - I'm saying that once you commit to an art form it becomes a continuum of ideas and technology, aesthetics and production, and the process realisation both intellectually and practically.

Initially film and photographic equipment could be got hold of at London Film Co-Op and also Community photography workshops from 1974 but from 1976 on I had university kit and from then on I found the way to make sure I always had access to equipment as part of my practice.

Once instance: I arrived in the middle of nowhere and a camera assistant turned up with some new 4k kit that neither of us had used before - we got out the manual and made it work because we had to.

Relationship to Broadcast TV

_ What looked like the TV broadcast in your own country ?

There were a few early pieces made - the 1st by John Hopkins in 1970 and the 2nd by David Hall in 1972. In 1977 I was rung by Top of the Pops on BBC1 to use my work 'The Fashion Show' because it had used the Kraftwerk tune 'Showroom Dummies' and they wanted to use it to represent Kraftwerk.

_ Was it state TV or private channels ?

Channel 4 began in 1982 when all independent makers - both film and video came together to lobby the government. Alan Fountain was the Independent Film and Video Officer as a representative to commission independent works.

_ What was your relationship to TV broadcast?

Channel 4 bought Triple Vision's 'Making News' around 1983 after we made it for a set of Trade Unions and also another called Health Emergency on a Health Campaign and we

never looked back. (Triple Vision 1980 – 1991). Initially we were commissioned to make 3 programmes on UK video art starting around 1985 and airing in 1986, (then 2 more on European Video Art from 87 – 88), I did a doc on Video Positive for Granada TV called In the Belly of the Beast around 88, we made 2 large docs on American and Soviet Foreign Policy relationships in the 3rd World, 2 programmes on the National Health Service etc – but also by about 1987 we were making video art works for the Arts Council which were premiered at the Bonne Biennale and also I was commissioned by Ghosts in the Machine to make 'The World Within Us' (87/88) which won prizes at Locarno and Montbeliard and a few other places (as well as screening on Avance Sur Image and Alice From Off Centre) – and for some years Triple had work in Festivals across the world (including a prime slot in Montrweal Video Festival and a retrospective at Mill Valley Festival and also a retrospective in Rome Film Festival).

_ Did you consider your work to be in some way oppositional to mainstream television?

There has always been the issue raised by early experimental filmmakers in the US that has been concerned with having a dialect for their own behaviour – after all they had 'Hollywood' to contend with, but I'm not sure if this question isn't asked inappropriately as many other countries – jurisdictions of behaviour – did not need to have Hollywood as it's opponent. And the question is twofold as it concerns both the actual politics of the system under which you produce your work (capitalist or Communist or Theocracy etc) and also the dialectic envisioned that the system under which you work in the grammar that is used is itself political. And so notionally 'experimental' work utilises grammars that the system under which you create, does not use. But advertising is a parasite on experimental and innovative work and often what today is aesthetically radical is tomorrow in use by the system... Plus, today with 8 billion on the planet everyone is a filmmaker. In the early days of video there were less a percentage of people using the equipment, but these were privileged in their 'access' - which as I have argued is about mindset.

Politically Triple Vision created TV programmes which were pick of the day in many quality and populist newspapers – and we also made TV work that got us in to trouble with the UK intelligence services - we were probably the only group to appear with Channel 4 in High Court on a charge of Treason for one production on animal rights which eventually finished the company. So do I get a badge as a functioning artist for being radical ? Nope.

Equally, aesthetically, we were using our privileged position to create work which would push the boundaries of the envelope of what was acceptable not only on TV at that time, but also the work that was not intended for tv - that was oppositional because of the aesthetics the work utilised.

_ Were you interested in having your work shown on television? Was any of your work broadcast, either within your own country or internationally?

Our work was broadcast in both the UK and other nations (France, Italy, Belgium, USA, Germany, Greece). At that time Television was an essential channel of distribution – and though arguably TV is 'the centralizing value system' we thought it important to be inside the belly of the beast to be able to try to make it account for itself. (We made the TV Programme In the Belly of the Beast for ITV company Granada TV on the subject of video art with a specific theme of why TV must be challenged in its role of pushing ideological determinants)

Development and continuation of the work in video or installation

_ How has your work with video or installation evolved?

From the early days it was obvious that the displays (Trinitrons) were capable of being put on each other or side by side or in a series such that video work could be displayed – which meant that ideas such as sequentially playing a movement back – or really quite obvious setups could be achieved. As soon as projection became cheap enough then the image could be liberated from the screen itself such that ‘kinema’ could be left behind. For myself I made works that could enter three-dimensional space and change it. However, because the ideas were what I thought of as trivial, I didn't engage in installation preferring instead to do something that few video artists did which was create long form works – hence pieces like Towards Intuition was where I went to first.

Having said that I made work for television such as ‘The Inevitability of Colour’ which was co funded by the UK Arts Council and Channel 4 and this was made specifically to refute some of Baudillard's ideas as proposed on John Wyvers opening programme for La Sept: L'Object d'art à l'âge Electronique. This was a Television installation in one sense because it consciously inhabited television to refute a piece of television. It also exhibited at the Tate Gallery and its extrapolation, three part ‘The Colour Trilogy’ (incorporating the Inevitability of Colour, Echo's Revenge and The Object of Desire’ which utilized the myth of Echo and Narcissus) was premiered at the Bonne Biennale. The next iteration was the 7 part Colour Myths and finally this now 40 year work completed in 2019 (begun in 1989) with around 40 parts. But in fact due to my relationship with the Bonne Biennale and a particular curator at that time I was asked to devise another installation for the 1992 Bonne Biennale which was called ‘White Goods’. I created the design for a living room where everything was white such that it could be projected on – an old man sleeping on a bed, a white cat on a blue sofa, a dinner party with only the guests hands shown on the table.

In fact the money ran out, but by 2003 I decided to create the dinner party and it exhibited variously until by 2008 I decided to do a 12 place settings dinner party in HD and that exhibited at 8 UK Cathedrals including Southwark, Wells, Winchester etc. Then in 2020 it exhibited in Xi'an and Vasteras in Switzerland and also Malt – then it went on to the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York for two runs in 2012 and 2015 and attracted around 1.2 million visitors each time. This then led on to another installation that also appeared in New York for 2 six month runs called The Intersection of Dreams attracting similar sized audiences.

Going back to my Creative Research Fellowship 2007 – 2010 I then originated a series of installations which asked the audience to lie down (a phenomenon seen everywhere now) but not at all, at the time. Un Tempo, Una Volta. Also created work in Venice Una Temp Una Volta which was a slow travelling HD image of the buildings of Venice as seen from a lying down position in a boat which drifted through the canals and was projected on a 6 meter screen hung at 45 degrees under which the audience gazed at the image above – this was inspired to speak with Gondoliers. In 2008 I set about creating portraits of communities and begin in Somerset and these were to be shown 6 meters by 3 meters and the subjects shot in 4k were portrayed life size. This exhibited in various cities and often I'd take other people's portraits to other cities – so the Venetians saw those from Somerset and Vice Versa. I did this also in Beijing, New York, Bristol, London...

_ Have you stopped working with video, and if so, what year and why?

I am 69 and I continue working with video (so that's currently 45 years, though it's 50 years in Moving Image as my first film was 1971) – in fact my last 15 years have been far more prolific than times before. My work is represented by Sedition art and I've had 50 new pieces on there since 2015 and new pieces coming out every three months or so. I also have work on online platforms, (such as Artpoin and new york film co-op) and in other collections and archives.

The choice of video as a specific medium or as one of several experimental tools

_ What were your uses of video: experimental or artistic tapes; installations; performances, theater pieces or musical concerts archiving?

It's hard to answer questions specifically as I have had many periods of producing work. In mainly experimental or artistic tapes (having said that my first works were experimental; and since 1990 in installations as well as single screen works and also helped others realise performances, theater pieces and musical concerts (at one point in the early 80's with people like Grace Jones, Eurythmics) but since 1998 most of my work has been experimental and abstract pieces with occasional realist pieces mixed in – plus installation works.

So I had worked with video (and shot quite a lot of film) from 1976. I'll try break this down by decades so that you can utilize what you need to.

The 1970's were a time of effusive and engaged pleasure at the act of video, from abstract art to McLuhanesque Documentaries.

1971 Lost 16mm film (literally – A film which was about being lost – which I later lost)

VIDA Terry Flaxton, Penny Dedman, Antony Cooper – I wrote most of the pieces Dedman and Cooper credited with collaborations

“Art Work” generally means Single Screen, though many a time I've used the single screen as an installation form (as with my current 2022 exhibition at the RWA Bristol – though this is in portrait mode)

Opening Up 1976 Documentary

Presentiments 1976/1977 (Art Video Cooper and Dedman were involved)

The Fashion Show 1977 Fashion and Art mixed together (Eshetu, Cooper and Dedman were involved)

'U238' Film/Video Apocalyptic Promo Video and Film (Mainly Cooper, I was involved)

Talking Heads 1978 (The speeding up of the Media/The Society of the Spectacle) Media Art Video Cooper and Dedman were involved

Inside Comics 1978 (The phenomenon of comics from the early days until Angry Superman) (Cooper and Dedman were involved)

Eisenstein: Programme of Attractions 1979/1983 (Eisenstein's formative years until he made his first film for theatre) With Michael Jones

Chinese Comics 1979 (Propaganda in Chinese Comics) Mainly Dedman, I shot this, Cooper Sound

The 1980's were a time of artworks, documentaries mixed in with artpieces and the occasional Installation – but TV featured quite heavily in my work from the mid 80's until the beginning of the 90's and the grammar of art pieces bled into television.

1980 Documentary Rape (on the issue of how documentaries misrepresent their subjects) (Flaxton, Cooper and Dedman)

1980/81 Towards Intuition: An American Landscape "Video Essay" (How do we navigate when improvising? What Steers us when we let go?) Flaxton, Cooper and Dedman

Going Local 1981

A Slice of the Cake 1982 With Joel Redman

Bad Neighbours 1982

And Then There Was One 1982

Health Emergency 1983 - an independent documentary that was then bought by and transmitted on Channel 4

The Gap 1983 (art piece)

Making News 1983

Eurythmics (art piece) 1983

Money Talks 1979 – 1983 Video Essay

Circumstantial Evidence 1983 Art/Drama

Prisoners 1983 Art Piece

On Video a Television History of Video Art (TV) 1985 - 1988

1. UK On Video 1
2. UK On Video 2
3. UK On Video 3
4. Europe On Video 4 TV or not TV?
5. Europe On Video Statement of the Art

The State of Europe 1988 (TV) 9 countries 18 groups – life as it is lived in the State of Europe

The Lift 1988

The World Within Us 1988 Art Work broadcast on and commissioned by Channel 4 TV and the Arst Council of England (Montbeliard and Locarno Awards)

In the Belly of the Beast 1988 (UK Video Art) TV Doc on Video Art

The Byker Wall – TV Programme Building Sights 1989 TV Art/Doc

The Boots West Building 1989 – TV Programme Building Sights 1989 TV Art/Doc

The Lloyds Building– TV Programme Building Sights 1989 TV Art/Doc

The Inevitability of Colour 1989 Art Work commissioned by Channel 4 and Arts Council of England broadcast on TV)

The Cold War Game Soviet and American power relations in the 3rd World TV Docs with Drama x 2 60 minutes

1. The Cold War Game Part One The USA (60 mins) 1989
2. The Cold War Game Part 2 The USSR (60 mins) 1989

The 1990's were initially a time of TV documentaries then going into art pieces Installations.

Intensive Care The UK National Health Service 2 x TV Documenatries

1. Health (60 mins) 1990 TV Doc with Drama
2. Care (60 mins) 1990 TV Doc with Drama

Rites TV Doc (female Genital Mutilation) 1991 60 minutes

Animal Rites TV Doc 1992 60 minutes

The Colour Trilogy 1) premiered at the Bonne Biennale 92

1) The Inevitability of Colour - premiered on Channel 4 in 1989 premiered at London Film Festival

2) Echo's Revenge (92) exhibited at the Tate

3. The Object of Desire (92)

Zagorsk 1992

The 2000's were initially a time of experimental Dramas then going into artworks and then Installations followed by single screen works.

Skin Deep 1999/2000 Art/Drama

Towards Aquarius 2002 Art Work

Forever 2003 Art/Drama

Wings 2003 Art Work

1. Georgia

2. Present Birthday

3. Frida

The Dinner Party Installation 2004

Dance Floor Installation 2004

Water Table Installation 2005

The Bristol Installations 2005

1. Footsteps Sound Installation

2. Pero's Bridge Sound Installation

3. Putting the Installations In

4. The BBC Come Visit

5. Dockers Window

6. Night on Pero's Bridge

Blink 2006 Art Work

One Second to Midnight 2006 Art Work

The Birds 2006 Art Work

On This Day The Eternal Flame of Chimera Burns Forever 2006 Art Work

One Second to Midnight 2006 (in Russian with English subtitles) Art Work

14 History Lessons, 18 Visions 21 Beatitudes 1989/2010 Art Work

including Colour Polyptych, In My Own Footsteps, Part 1 (07), Part 2 (08) Part 3 (08) - Epilogue: Unreal Timepiece (05 - 08), The Eye Projects the World (05), Timepiece (05), Echo's Compassion, Echo's Gift (06) The Mystery at the Heart of Meaning (07)

In Other People's Skins 2008 Installation travelled to 10 cathedrals including Vasteras Sweden, New York plus Milan, Xi'an and a few other locations

The Unfurling 2008 Art Work/Installation

The American Dream 2008 (integrated with Myth and Meaning in the Digital Age) Art Work

The Sum of Hands Installation and single screen

Dance Floor 2008 new version (Installation)

Un Tempo Una Volta Installation 2008

In Re Ansel Adams 2008 Single Screen & Installation

The Dinner Party new version Installation 2008

Portraits of Glastonbury Tor Installation 2008 6 meters x 3 meters

Portraits of Cannaregio Installation 2008 (Ritratti Di Cannaregio)

Autumn Dusk Café Scene 2008 Art Work

Portraits of the Somerset Carnivals Installation (2008 – 2009)

The Divine Being 2009 Art Work

Portraits of University of Bristol's Centenary 2009 Installation 6 meters x 3 meters

One Second to Midnight 2009 Chinese Version Art Work

Between 2010 and the present I have created many new works with new ideas derived from researching High Resolution Imaging.

Water Table new version (Installation) 2010

The Elemental Wave 2010 Art Work 6 meters x 3 meters

1. In Re Richard Long 2010

2. Smoke Piece 2010
3. Glastonbury Tor 2010
4. James Loves Sara 2010
5. The Unfailing Landscape 2010
6. Wood Wave Wetland Moor 2010

Until I'm Gone 2010 Art Work & Installation

Portraits of Shoreditch, London 2010 Art Work & Installation

Portraits of the Arrow Tower, Beijing 2010 Art Work & Installation

Portraits of the Flat Iron Building New York 2010 Art Work & Installation

Eventually I put on a show in London with one 60 foot x 10 foot screen with three individual portraits projects looping

In Other People's Skins (table installation) 2010

Three Plasma Portraits 2010 Art Work & Installation

1. A moving Image Portrait of the Window Cleaner Alfred Glasspole
2. A moving Image Portrait of the Poet Elixabeth Beech
3. A moving Image Portrait of the Painter Charlotte Humpston

Mes Petits Cartes Postales des Beijing 2010 Art Work

Self Portrait in the Digital Domain 2010 Art Work

Monumental Portraits of the Working People of Somerset 2012 Installation

Kings Canyon 3D Installation 2012

The Human Condition 2013

Trees 2014 Installation

Westhay 3D 2015 Installation

The Intersection of Dreams 2015 Installation

Reflection on Water 2015/2016

Portraits of the Youth of Bristol 2013/2016

Fuerteventura 3D Installation 2016

Reimagining Venice 2016 A triptych installation

I finished a professorship at the end of 2016 and then my work began in earnest

Stained Glass Nature 2017

Line Dance for Norman McLaren 2017

Cathedral Steps (after Max Escher) 2017

Drawings and Inscriptions 2017

Barcode Jesus in a Material World 2017

The Divine Being, Inscribed 2017

Portraits of New York 2017

The Consciousness of Trees 2017

Myth and Meaning in the Digital Age 2018

Building upon the Inevitability of Colour, the Colour Tryptich and the 7 part Colour Myths and the 14 Part "14 History Lessons" this 40 part 72 minute work was finished in 2018

To Stand and Stare: A Somerset Landscape 60 minutes Film Essay 2018

Reimagining New York: Drawing, Inscription, Abstraction 2019

Sanctus 2019

Self Portrait in the Quantum Domain

Without Meaning – 3 parts 2019

1. Sui Generis
2. Sine Qua Non
3. Genius Loci

Radiant Sound, Radiant Light

Reimagining New York 2019 (2 screen Installation 202
Reimagining Venice 2019 (3 screen installation)
Waterfall (with Emily Burrige) 2019
The Day of the Dead 2020
Under Every Desert, a Sea 2020 Art Work & NFT
Landscape of the Heart 2020
Cloud Sculptures Over the Atacama Desert 2020 A 'personal fiction' inspired by the work
of J.G Ballard
Anthropocene – 2020 all single screen and a 5 part Dance piece - plus has an installation
form

1. Worlds 2020
2. Mountain Thunderstorm 2020
3. Glade 2020
4. Borderless 2020
5. Consumed by the Sun 2020

The Laniakean Paradigm (Immeasurable Heaven in Hawaiian) 2021 - Both a 5 part single
screen piece plus has an installation form

1. The Consciousness of Angels 2021
2. Gravity Waves 2021
3. The Consciousness of the Foundations and Essential Elements 2021
4. Paradigm Enigma 2021
5. Arabesque: The Consciousness of the Least of All the Species 2021

Signs and Symbols, a loose collection 2021

1. Lamentation 2021
2. Presence 2021
3. Signs and Symbols of the Human Condition 2021

Personal Fictions 2021 – two works inspired by the short stories of Primo Levi

1. Metamir 2021
2. Parachronon 2021

MetaMorphs 2022 Art Work

The Golden Apples of the Sun 2022 Art Work

The Cave of Forgotten Dreams 2022 Art Work

Lux Aeterna Art Work 2022

Silver Blue Angels Art Work 2022

Lament Art Work 2022

Deep Ocean Blue (with Jutta Pryor) Art Work 2022

The Reverie of Forgotten Dreams 2022

Day of the Living Dead 2022

Diamond Beings Forming over the Surface of a Dying Star 2022 Artwork

Another Sun 2022 Artwork (LiDAR)

The Human Gaze in an Age of Quantum Entanglement 2022 8 parts, both singles screen
and a performance with two interrogators in front of a large screen auditorium

1. A Universal Triptych
2. The Core of Many Qubits
3. Occipital Occlusions
4. Gaming the Void
5. Radial (*nEither U nOr Me*)
6. Encircular (Neural Shunt)
7. Orbital Leap (Transaction and Transcendence)
8. Universal Colloquium (Magister Ludi) - The Transhuman Gaze in an Age of
Quantum Superposition

Another Life 2022

Yet to be exhibited or released online

For Bridget Riley Artwork
New York City Wearables Artwork
Svalbard Artwork
Newlyn Artwork
A Somerset Hillside Artwork
Colloquium Inter Angelli Artwork
Universal Wave/Transformations Artwork
Life on Mars – Red Slash Artwork
Lottie (LiDAR) Artwork/Installation
Diamond Beings Over the Takamina Desert 2022 Artwork
God's Love is Eternal 2022 Artwork
Portraits of Somerset Craftspeople 2022 Artwork

**_ Why did you use video specifically? How does this technology relate to your work?
What did video allow in comparison to other mediums?**

From this list of my work it has to be remembered that this is 47 years worth - since Opening Up in 1976 each work has taken much energy both mental and physical. The shorter works I call 'chamber works' (generally referred to they're single screen pieces, often used in a loop for installation – they're generally not 'symphonic' in form (though some like the television work with The Cold War Game The Soviet Union required myself and Jonathan Steele of the Guardian to write a history of Soviet activity – meaning it took a lot of research tantamount to a PhD. Meanwhile abstract work such as Anthropocene was much like accomplishing frame by frame animation. But the upshot of all of this is a moving image which practitioners are aware is a misnomer – nothing moves, just the mind. And if you wish to be specific, then it is video – 90 per cent of my work is 'Video Art' which is effectively a mindset toward the medium held by the artist – in this case an electronic medium. Though of course I have shot a lot of film over the years (some at 35mm level - which fundamentally means the production level has to be 'high') and though early filmmakers had to challenge 'the father' of production 'Hollywood' I never felt the need for a dialectic, an oppositional state to 'fight against'. I knew that Television was for years a non recorded medium so that meant my medium – which is 'a recording medium' could live alongside both film and TV and allow me to determine its meaning not against what had already existed, but in its own terms – and everything I have done since 1976, through to making my latest work some 47 years later – is made within electronic terms. And I intensely dislike the misuse of terms such as 'film editor' for someone who makes 'cuts' in data.

I've continuously seen my working practice as being created within the terms of technicity – that idea that we make tools to manipulate and change the world around us and in so doing are changed by those very tools. So the question 'how does technology relate to my work' can be answered as 'naturally'. I flow with this thing that has appeared in my life. Video seemed to me from the very first moment comfortable, familiar, related to my psyche and requires way of doing things that I feel good with (no matter what processes arose – and they changed frequently).

The answer to the question: "What did video allow in comparison to other mediums?" is 'everything'.

_ Has the tool of video changed your thinking about artistic practices?

Has any tool changes anyone's thinking about artistic processes? Yes, of course. And what's more it continuously changes me as I react to what it enables me to say and do – I and it flow together.

_ Do you consider yourself as a video artist?

That's only a difficult question if there's an issue of fissionability. I have heard friends who started as video artists and are still practicing as such calling themselves 'media artists', as if passing fetishes such as AI require fitting in with, when it's quite apparent that all that will remain of these fetishes, is their passing influence on the larger matter of moving images. I am certainly not a film artist (though I've probably shot more film than most film artists as an employed Director of Cinematography) and I like film for what it is. I am not a video artist in the sense of someone who used a Portapak or a person that came to video in the 90's 00's or 10's... But I think probably the term video artist (as I've said elsewhere) is a mindset and yes I have that mindset, but I see it as enabling, not containing. Others argue they are simply an 'Artist', as if that allows them a get out of jail card – It's a struggle to name oneself without tying oneself down.

Sound/Audio

_ How important is the audio track in your work?

What's with the past participle??? Sound is as important as image. Even the use of 'no sound' is as important as the image.

_ Did you explore the potential of sound or the relationship of image to sound within your video work?

I have worked in mono, stereo, binaural, surround sound – still do!

The status of the works

_ How would you define your work at the time?

Does this mean its character? If so I've been experimenting continuously – but importantly I have always had a mind to the ordinary person. I'm not interested in the curatorial mind or its agencies nor the academic mind and its agencies – more if a reasonably bright person can 'get' what I'm doing without me bending the knee to populism then that is my audience. Sometimes I make work that is purist, sometimes I veer towards the popular – but hopefully never touch the boundaries of either. And maybe that's why I am one of the most successful video artists you may never have heard of.

I realise that posterity is forgetful if you are not amongst the small number of artists the system requires to get the fashion parade going. There have been times when I had a what I call 'a place in the sun'. I've had 4 six month shows at the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York where around 1.2 million visitors have come each time (and if only ten per cent engaged with my work – which I have witnessed them doing then that alone is enough). I've had big shows, openings, premiers and felt good about myself and my art – and then it goes quiet. And it's during that period where you have to get real about what it is you are doing. For me that is having created a contract between myself and for want of a better term, 'the universe', that I will witness it from my position and make inscriptions in the sand about what I see – then I do it with all the solemnity and humour I can muster.

I think without my work no artist gets to be successful – that does not mean that I consider myself an ‘also-ran’. I can only go by audience response (and that doesn't mean what people tell you). I always keep a visitors book going as every so often people say I found this work to be amongst the most meaningful I've experienced. One day at a party I was talking to a woman about moving image art and she was telling me about one work that changed her life and I asked what was it about. She described it and it dawned on me that she was telling me about one of my installations. I listened but didn't say it was mine. I didn't want to break the magic so I didn't say it was mine. Instead I took away the knowledge that one person had had a good experience with my work and that has enabled me to carry on regardless of how I am placed by people who rewrite the canon regularly to place themselves at its centre.

_ How did you choose your titles?

Often my titles come in the middle of the night. I am always looking for a title that sets the work ‘off’... meaning I believe the title is an integral part of the work. On one piece I was trying to make a work with Dali in mind, it's an installation where the central image is of my daughter and her mixed ethnicity friends crucified. It echoes St John of the Cross. I was staying in Los Angeles and I got up at three am and stared out the window and far below (I was on the 11th floor) there was a traffic intersection – my work became ‘The Intersection of Dreams. That seemed fitting when I merged cityscapes fro LA and Bristol... Sometimes I wrote a text and the title comes fro the text as with my recent ‘Another Sun’ and its follow on ‘Another Life’.

Influences

_ Have other artists influenced your switch to this technology? And more directly your practice?

Every artists work that I see I take in (but not too deeply). I could name Da Vinci, Manet, whoever but I don ;t think that serves them or myself to do so.

_ Have other sources (newspapers, magazines, books, events, personalities, etc.) influenced your artistic practice at that time?

I use fiction to inspire my work – such as Primo Levi and JG Ballard (I did write a drama that was boradcast that started when I read a newspaper article) and I adapted a short story for an experiemental short (Plus I have written about 8 feature film scripts and many short stories). I don't let theorising interrupt my flow- as an academic I have written papers

Collective

_ Did you work with other artists? Musicians, performers, visual artists, etc.?

VIDA from 1976 to 1979 were a collective but in the UK the Arts Council would not give awayrd to collaborative art – plus I was devising a lot of the work. Also with triple Videion which was mainly there for TV (1980 – 1990)

When I ran a video facility in London's soho it was my policy to invite artists to use that facility when management wasn't looking.

As a musician I sepnt years improvising with others and ocasionaly still do.

The artistic scene: exhibition and performance venues (self-managed art spaces, festivals, institutions, magazines). In connection with other places/cities?

_ In your country, did you belong to the first or second wave of video artists?

That is a difficult question in the UK. In the US there was Naim Jun Paik and in the UK John Hopkins (but he is ignored by the UK system which prefers to put forward David Hall, 1st a filmmaker who had some film work on TV whereas Hopkins was the first to have video on TV and also obtained a portapak around 1968/9). Also there were some artists who were Hall's students who started work in 1974 and my first work was in 1976 so I suppose that makes me second wave by two years.... I can name a few people that were intermediate that would also be considered as second wave if depicted by USA terms but actually they're strong makers that have equal potency when you stand back and consider their work. And what about third wave YBA artists ?

_ How did information circulate between artists at that time? How did you hear about other artists? Whom?

So I joined with London Video Arts end of 1976 beginning 1977 and got involved with organising shows. My memory is a bit hazy but I can remember organising shows in Soho London early on. As soon as I found video I was all in. Plus we were swapping tapes with BAYVAC in SF (technician Bill Viola) and by end 1978 I have my first international screening and by 1979 my first international prize (Tokyo). By 1980 Vida had done around 150 shows (from galleries to community). I and a few others had staged the 1st National Independent Video Exhibition at the London Film Makers Co-op in 1980 as well (and we also did the 2nd at the ICA London a year later). There were shows going on in London all the time in the early days – the scene was vibrant.

_ What were the famous national or international places for the presentation or exhibition of video art?

The Serpentine Gallery in London did an early exhibition. Many of us had stuff on at the Tate, Film Coop, London International Film Festival at the South Bank, Action Space London and after we'd done the national exhibition then South Hill Park in the UK did this for a few years. Internationally I sent work out to and was asked to come to the Worldwide Video Festival in Den Haag, Montbeliard, Locarno, Montreal, Mill Valley in the US, Copenhagen – all over Europe and also places like the 1st Pan Asian in Kuala Lumpur and then it spread from there.

_ Was the question of conservation and collection of works raised? By who? What actions were taken in that direction?

London Video Arts was a library and Archive. When it merged with LUX (with the film makers co-op) early video has been forgotten (intentionally because it is overshadowed by early experimental film production in the UK). I had work in one archive (Arnolfini) where all the work was thrown away even though it was collected by a person who was to become a commissioning editor at Channel 4.

Distribution

_ Was the issue of distribution of your work important to you when you first began working with video?

TOTALLY ! So important that as I say we did 150 shows between 1977 and 1980. When television came along I considered that a form of distribution. When online came along via outfits like SeditionArt I joined that immediately.

_ Was your work distributed and if so, by whom and on what basis?

London Video Arts (which is now LU distributed the works I made until 1985 – and now only carries the early works and also at that time Concorde Films.

My work is available at these locations :

Sedition: <https://www.seditionart.com/terry-flaxton>

Makersplace: <https://makersplace.com/terryflaxton/about/>

New York Film Co-Op <https://film-makerscoop.com/filmmakers/terry-flaxton>

ArtPoint: <https://www.artpoint.xyz/artists/terry-flaxton>

Lux: <https://lux.org.uk/artist/terry-flaxton>

ArtNovo: <https://www.artnovo.net/home>

Website: <http://www.visualfields.co.uk/>

I have about 60 works available on sedition art and perhaps 30 available at New York Film Co-Op. There are about ten works at ArtPoint (though that will become 20 shortly) and about 5 NFT's at Makersplace. All of my work on sedition can now be made into NFT's.

_ Did the issue of distribution have an impact on the way that you worked or the kind of work you made?

No. I've always made what I felt needed making. Commissioned works always had their distribution channel organised at the point of commission.

Links with art schools: teaching, teachers, students

_ When did art schools start training artists in video practices in your country? Who led these courses and how were they imagined?

I've flirted with academia and even became a Professor (tenured) and obtained a PhD – all in the research area. I've taught in all sorts of situations over the years and taught cinematography at a high level.

Re training of artists in video I've rarely been impressed by systems of training for artists which neither concentrates on technical nor aesthetic considerations. Perhaps Bergen in Norway and Duncan of Jordanstone in Scotland were exceptions – and of course Isaac Julien's Institute in Santa Cruz at University of California where I still teach occasionally.

Link to the international scene

_ Did you participate in trans-national events and exhibitions, and if so, which ones (name, date), with which artists, and who organized the event ?

I've lost count of how many exhibitions I've had work in – something over 200 of all types, museums, galleries, festivals, one man shows. I have had about 5 retrospectives in places like Rome Film Festival, Mill Valley some years ago – and every so often things pop up. I keep exhibiting as a form of keep fit. This year 2022 has been pretty active and at the time of writing my work is in two exhibitions. I co-organised a couple of national exhibitions, two international cinematography festivals, etc. I organised an 18 group across 9 countries that met in Paris years ago....

_ Was it possible to produce works outside the country, and if so where and with what conditions or material (accessibility)

I've made work in lots of different countries, China, America, Spain, Norway, Italy to name a few. I either took equipment with me or hired equipment in situ.

Questions for further research

_ Who are the artists or actors in the video scene that you think should be contacted for this research project?

There are many but I suspect your liaison persons would know more than I do. For early video kit in London try Andy Porter and Tony Dowmunt via LCVA <https://www.the-lcva.co.uk/> Contact me if you need an email

_ Do you have archives of your work?

I have all my work on two sets of drives which is duplicated. I would love to hand the lot over in a few years time

_ Have your works been preserved, restored, collected? Do they belong to collections? And if so, which works and in which places?

Pretty much all my work is held in one collection or another :

Collections of my work are held at the following locations:

- AICE InVideo, Milan
- The Rewind Study Collection, University of Dundee
- The British Film and Video Artists Study Collection, University of Westminster
- Video Les Beaux Jours, Strasbourg
- The Lux Centre, London
- The Arnolfini Bristol holds a copy of 'The Fashion Show'
- The Museum of Modern Art Berlin hold a copy of 'Prisoners'
- The BFI Data base London holds various of my works
- Heure Exquise is taking my work (circa Spring 2022)
- New American Filmmakers Group (New York Film Co-op) works 1976 – 2021
- S[edition] holds various of my works

Website: <http://www.visualfields.co.uk/>

Sedition: <https://www.seditionart.com/terry-flaxton>

Makersplace: <https://makersplace.com/terryflaxton/about/>

New York Film Co-Op <https://film-makerscoop.com/filmmakers/terry-flaxton>

ArtPoint: <https://www.artpoint.xyz/artists/terry-flaxton>

Lux: <https://lux.org.uk/artist/terry-flaxton>

ArtNovo: <https://www.artnovo.net/home>

_ What are the essential books for understanding video art in your opinion?

I find all books written in America about video art seem to think that American Video Art is the centre of the Universe. This pretty much only leaves Chris Meigh Andrews A History of Video Art as the overview go-to book.

My work has been written about in the following books :

Foundations of Digital Art and Design with the Adobe Creative Cloud (Voices That Matter) 1st Edition 2013, 2nd Edition 2019
 Seditio Magazine, Jan 2020 Digital Practice
 Seditio Magazine, Feb 2019 Hypersight: On Meaning, Myth, Media and Technology
 Moving image Review & Art Journal, Volume 6 Numbers 1&2, 2017
 Experimental British Television, (ed Mulvey and Sexton) Manchester Uni Press (2015)
 A History of Video Art, Chris Meigh-Andrews, Bloomsbury, (2006, 2014 also published in Japan and China)
 Rewind, British Artists Video in the 1970's & '80's, Cubitt, Partridge, John Libbey (2012)
 A History of Artists' Film and Video In Britain, David Curtiss, BFI (2007)
 Video Art – A Guided Tour , Catherine Elwes I.B. Tauris,(2005)
 InVideo Catalogue, AICE MILAN, Jon Dovey, (2005)
 A Directory of British Film and Video Artists, Ed Curtis John Libbey/ Arts Council (1997)
 Diverse Practices, Ed Knight (1996), John Libbey Media, University of Luton Press
 Timeshift, Cubitt Comedia (1991)
 Picture This: Media Representations of Visual Art and Artists ed Hayward (1988)
 London Video Arts Catalogues, (1978,1984,1991) Arts Council and currently LUX online

Open questions

Some comments on my work

- 'Flaxton's aesthetic commitment is to making as much as he can as beautiful as the tools allow. But this aesthetic is always more than abstraction. Always more than formalism. The beauty in his work constitutes a grammar that is always part of a persuasive project. There is always a point towards which his luminous images are drawn'.
 Professor John Dovey, University of the West of England.
- 'Terry Flaxton has been an impassioned, indefatigable presence in British Independent Video for almost two decades. During this time he has assembled an impressive body of work encompassing powerful, polemical documentary (produced as a member of ground-breaking outfits Vida and Triple Vision) and highly personal, poetic video art. In Flaxton's eyes, a faith in video's transforming potential burns undiminished. More to the point, in Flaxton's hands, much of the medium's radical promise goes some way towards being fulfilled.'
 Steven Bode, A Directory of British Video Artists, Editor David Curtis, Arts Council of England, John Libby Media/University of Luton Press, 1995
- 'Flaxton has created a minor masterpiece in the clarity of his vision and the exploitation of the disconnect between two competing realities occupying the same space. In a world where artist's video installations can all too often be either obscurely portentous or mundanely repetitive, it is refreshing to encounter a slice of the everyday and an invitation to join in or observe, without pressure or humiliation'.
 Professor Martin Reiser, De Montefort University speaking about 'In Other People's Skins'.
- Work like Terry Flaxton's, from Prisoners (1984) to the Colour Myths (1990 – 91), went back patiently to the problems of making, the question of how video might achieve what television could or would not. Prisoners reworks material shot by Flaxton for a documentary commissioned by Apple Computers concerning Ridley Scott's direction of their famous 1984 commercial, then the most expensive ever made.

Scott had created a nightmare future underworld in his best Bladerunner tech-noir style. Flaxton's remaking of the documentary focusses on the extras, lastly played by East End Skins, whose racism blinds most viewers to any understanding of skinhead as a working class refusal of just that anonymity which the Scott commercial both condemns and glamourises. In The Colour Myths Cycle, Flaxton, perhaps the most respected video director of photography in the UK, uses a palette of colours and effects of startling brilliance to unfold a dialogue with the pessimistic post-modernism of Jean Baudrillard. Familiar things – rope, sand, water – are heightened in the shoot and in post-production to give them the aura of archetypes whose allegorical significances accumulate ever greater reserves of meaning. This is the opposite to the hyperreality thesis for which Baudrillard is best known, according to which the increase in the amount and speed of electronic images is the imploding black hole into which meaning disappears faster than it is created. The significant thing for this discussion is that in this cycle, Flaxton uses all the intensity and lustre of which TV is capable to produce his counter argument: demonstrating, through television, the capacity of TV to produce and keep on producing meaning. These tapes have often been criticised for the density of their soundtracks, which recount complex arguments in the guise of mythic dialogue between Echo and Narcissus. That critique misses one of the key elements of Flaxton's recent work: the constant dialectic between the popular and the demanding, populism and difficulty.

- | Diverse Practices, Ed Knight (1996), John Libbey Media, University of Luton Press

Short quote: 'Flaxton uses all the intensity and lustre of which TV is capable to produce his counter-argument: demonstrating, through television, the capacity of TV to produce and keep on producing meaning'. From Diverse Practices, Professor Sean Cubitt