

Interview of David Critchley

The interview took place in June 2022. The questions were asked by Chris Meigh-Andrews. The exchange took place via zoom (David Critchley was in London and Chris Meigh-Andrews in Colchester).

The interview was conducted in English.

C.M-A: When did you start to get interested in video as a medium?

D.C: My first interest was while I was doing Fine Arts degree at Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic, in the studio of Stuart Marshall. He was recently back from America, having studied new music with Alvin Lucier amongst others. It was widening out the whole scene of the art department into sound, video, film and photography. I first got my hands on an Akai quarter-inch reel-to-reel Portapack in that studio. The piece that I came up with, once I realize you could record for up to an hour, without costing an arm and a leg as a film would, I made a piece of work that was called *Changing*. It was all my clothing, every item of clothing I owned, on a rack as in a shop. I just simply recorded from a static point of view, set the recorder going and then changed through all the clothes that I owned, randomly changing things, so I ended up with weird combinations of the clothing on, until I'd worn everything at least once. I ended up naked, with a large pile of the used clothes on the floor in front of me. That was the end of the video. It never really went any further than that, except it was just the knowledge that you could make a lengthy piece of work, record it and keep it.

Did it come out of a similar performance that you'd done previously?

At that time, I thought of myself as a performance artist, really. I made pieces of work about eating twelve course meal in front of an audience until I threw up. Drinking: I drank a whole bottle of whiskey, I smoked a packet of cigarettes, lighting one off the end of the other all the way through until I threw up again. It was this kind of pushing the limits, but also applying it to very basics things: eating, drinking, clothing, all the basic stuff that we do all the time. But trying to stretch limits.

So, did it appeal to you that you didn't have to appear live, that you had this "surrogate self" that you could present to an audience? Was that relevant? I mean why did you want to record it?

I think to me, at that time, it was not that relevant. I actually preferred to do live work, and have an installation that I took part in, and people came to watch or experience. I was more interested in that experience of something occurring over time in a place. I realized that it's trying to break everything down to its most basic elements. To have a performance, you need a place, a time, a duration, a person or a performer, and an audience. That's all you need. So, I set that up: A place and a time, advertised it, and I just walked on a stage, stood there for few minutes until people started mumbling, and then I walked off. So, in a sense, I had done all the barebones of what constitutes a performance. I messed about in that those kinds of ways.

So, then you switched from this kind of live event, yourself in front of an audience in a particular situation, to recording things. What was the driving force that took you out of the live and into the recorded?

The piece of work that I made for some of the changing piece, it was for the video show at the Serpentine Gallery, which was called *Yet Another Triangle*. It was this idea of a triangular relationship that was unstable. At that point, the recording process, the performing process and the exhibiting process, all kind of came together in one piece of work. You couldn't make the piece of work without the three Portapack recording process, three people in a space moving around. I don't know whether you recorded this earlier, but the instruction was, to each of the performers was to keep the other two performers in shot. That was impossible for everybody to achieve, so there was a constant movement and jockeying for space.

I think that it's important that we're getting this, because I think I didn't realize we hadn't start recording. So, it's quite good to have this because I think that transition from a live situation to one where you started to think: "What happens when I can record something, what does it add- where does that take me?", and you started to think about the situation of the recording itself, of the relationship between the camera and the participant or whatever it is. I guess what appealed to you, was that you could add this other layer to the experience for the audience. You were adding a whole other layer which was to do with the relationship between the camera- the apparatus and the situation.

And then the screening of that equally put the audience in the same predicament as the people with the cameras. The monitors were on the points of an equilateral triangle facing inwards, and you had to stand in between able to experience the piece, but you could only see any two at any one time. So you, as a viewer, had to make a choice of where you were going to look. The sound created a three-dimensional environment in which to experience what the people making it had done. In fact, David Hall said a nice thing in watching the piece. He said it's almost like the experience of being behind the camera, to be there watching the piece. It's kind of really came through what was going on.

I haven't seen this piece, but from your description I get a sense that there's a real jump between say the clothing piece and the three-camera piece, because you realize what you could do with the medium that you couldn't do with a live situation. It's very quick that jump and it's very relevant to this thing about you've described, and I think it's very good so now we have that. We know that you trained with Stuart [Marshall] Were there other people besides Stuart, I mean David [Hall] obviously but he came in almost as a colleague interestingly enough?

[David Hall and I] didn't meet until the Serpentine show in May 75. At that point, Steve Partridge, Roger Barnard, Tamara Krikorian, Tony Sinden, all the Maidstone gang, David Hall of course, met Stuart, myself, Johnny Turpie, Pete Livingstone, people from Newcastle, and it was really the genesis of starting to talk about the idea

of something that became London Video Arts basically. There were other people around him in the college in Newcastle, Keith Frake, Johnny Turpie amongst others, Fast Forward and Pete Livingston was there. We were all involved in this area of media of whatever kind.

That's great, I think that covers that first thing very nicely, and I'm sorry I missed it in first time around, but I think you actually added it. I think we've got the thing about access but let's do it again. It was through the art school, wasn't it? And you said what equipment was available, it was this quarter-inch Portapack basically. It was the college that owned it. I think we probably have it now, I think we can probably let you off the hook, it's been several hours you've probably had enough of it.

I did write a kind of summary where they say open questions at the end. I don't know is it worth me blathering. It's just a paragraph. As an open question, this is with hindsight really, looking back at all the stuff we have been talking about, I felt that video arts, [11'58"??], was a specific approach that only lasted for a finite window of time, specifically about 1970 to the early 1980s. Before that, there were no accessible video facilities. There was television but we couldn't access it on the whole. After that, after the early 80s, everyone had access home video recorders, camcorders, etc. The whole thing just blew open. So, it was just that specific period of time where those who could get their hands on Portapacks basically were the people could make video art. The nature of the content changed, at that point people could make videos about anything, no longer medium specific but neither subject specific and therefore could be applied to anything. I saw my own last major piece of work, like *Pieces I Never Did*, as an expansive and ironic summary of many strands of my own and others' work from the 1970s. It was made in 1979 and after that I only used video as a tool to address content other than video itself being the subject. So that's about it as some kind of summary anyway.

I think that's really useful because I think it does encapsulate what you've been talking about in more detail, without giving us a nice overview. Can we use that as an introductory paragraph?

You did what you could, you got your hands on it through art centres or colleges at that time.

The piece you described, *Another Triangle Piece*, was it on three screens when it was presented at the Serpentine?

The presentation of the piece was nearer the making of it. I put it on three screens each on the Apex of an equilateral triangle. As a viewer, you had the same problems as the people making the recording. You could not see all three at the same time, you'd only ever see two. So, the piece was inherently unstable, both in the shooting of it and in the viewing of it.

So, it was an installation, I mean a multiple or multi-screen video?

It was a three-screen spatial piece, it was a spatial arrangement of screens in a gallery space, and of course the sound was very important because the sound moved around the space. If people actually crashed into each other, somebody would look, and the sound space moved around.

I'm just thinking that we've jumped from single-screen thing to a multi-screen thing in a moment, and just going back to this thing about video and what it could and couldn't do and what you discovered. Presumably one of the things you discovered almost by default was that there was this multi-screen format which was completely different to television, and a lot more to do with the architectural spatial problems or issues, than say some of the performance things you might have done were, because you're immediately playing on the electronic space versus the visual space or the acoustic space versus the physical space.

Certainly, the acoustic space was important to replay but, I mean even, after that, when I made single screen pieces, or would watch them as single screen, they were often made through multiple screens and again had a sound space, that followed a sort of passing backwards and forwards of different parts of it. I have got these things on screen here but I don't think that necessarily helps us.

It's going to be tricky from that point of view. I think what we can do is we can refer to some of these works and then if and when they come to say "well what about", maybe we'll show some of this stuff at the ZKM exhibition, then we can get back to and say how about this piece or that piece. So, what we'll do is we'll refer to them in our discussion- as you have. In fact, let me also say I think I might have missed the recording of that first set of questions so we might go back to those at the end, again starting with Newcastle and so on, but don't worry about it now. I'm just thinking about there's a very nice question here: Did the access to technical material affect your practice in any way? I think that's an intriguing one. I know you had to adapt all the time, but do you think what it boiled down to? In other words, did you know what kind of equipment you could get your hands on, and if so, did that affect the kind of work you made?

Yeah definitely. I think I've got a scribble here that I said. It was specifically about the nature and capabilities of the video technology.

Did that come out of what was going on in film at the time, avant-garde film or do you think it came out of the fact that you were messing with this technology and it brought up certain challenges, shall we say?

Yeah, I made film pieces at the same time. I went to London, I showed that the film-makers co-op and carried on making short film pieces, even got an Arts Council Grant to finish a film off. I work with film but I saw video as a different thing with different possibilities, not just the image thing, and in fact, the thing that annoyed me at the time, probably still does, is that the filmmaking fraternity would always criticize video for its low resolution black and white as it was at the time. The fact that you

could record for an hour was irrelevant to them, they were about this kind of beautiful film image. In a sense the video was about something else, it was about structuring time and space, whether or not you were working with multiple cameras and screens or singly, so it was different.

I just wondered how much influence there was from what was at the time a very dominant aesthetic in avant-garde film in the 70's. I sort of fell into the scene from outside in a sense, and the thing that struck me right away is how powerful in that co-op structural-materialist aesthetic was, and how dominant it was, I mean not just in film but in photography, amongst artists working with the medium. It's funny because there's a sense in which it seemed to be that video was coming from somewhere else, even though it looked at the time as if it were picking up some of the same issues but actually it wasn't. Some of the things you were touching on there, with this business about the screen, the space and the acoustic relationships to the recording space and all of that, were not things that the filmmakers were really interested in. I also remember how divided everything was. If you went to the co-op, they kind of looked at you askance. I remember turning up at some screening and David Curtis was at the door. It was P Adams Sitney giving a talk. He was the guy who coined the term "Structural Film". So, I arrived at the door, showed my ticket and David said to me: "What are you doing here, you're a video maker?", and I said "Well, I'm interested in film as well!".

I'm sure he said it slightly tongue-in-cheek.

(Laughing) I'm not sure he did.

You're touching on the good one here, because, as I say, when I moved to London, I was still shooting, making, finishing 16mm films with sound. I needed money and I got a little Arts Council grant. I had engaged with Dave Curtis who was the artist film officer and the co-op as a filmmaker. I think it helped me in the longer term, as I was already a known quantity and then getting involved in video was a move. But I already knew all those guys and they knew me, so that helped.

That's interesting! I don't think I was aware of that because I saw you as a video person. I put you in that box. Not just you but also Stuart Marshall because I met Stuart through Alex and through David Hall. David and Stuart lived next door to each other on Brading Road in Brixton. I didn't know about the connection with experimental music that Stuart Marshall was bringing to bear on it. I wasn't aware of that. I didn't know about that tradition. Let's just jump back in here. There's this thing about the relationship to broadcast TV which you've touched on. In each of the European countries that we're involved with, I think broadcast TV was different. There were quite distinctive differences between one country and another in terms of television. Do you consider your work to be in some way oppositional to mainstream television? Did you like the idea that it might get broadcast on television or did you not want that or see that as relevant?

At that time, I didn't want that. TV was very hierarchical in Britain, unionized, restricted for most people. There was a video show which I had that piece in and which we travelled to along with Stuart Marshall, Pete Livingstone, possibly Johnny Turpie as well. We met David Hall, Steve Partridge and Tony Sinden. As far as I'm concerned, that group and that meeting was the genesis of London Video Arts. We sat down and had a conversation. I remember having the conversation with Steve Partridge about what we do when we've all finished college in three months' time. How are we going to get our hands on equipment then? We started to talk about forming an organization there and then. So that was 1975, and by 1976 we were putting it all together and applying for money and getting the catalogue off the ground. David Hall wrote articles in *Studio International* and I managed to make the cover. Coming back to the broadcast TV, David Hall had a relationship with broadcast TV. His work was about broadcast TV but in my case, I was, in my own mind, separate of that. I was not interested in broadcast TV. I saw the London Video Arts exhibition programme and distribution as an alternative to television. Fitting in a gallery with an audience and watching some work and then talking about it seemed to me to be a better way to spend your time than sitting around watching TV.

It was less passive. There was an active engagement in some sense. I think you're right about David because when I reflected back and when I did that interview with David for the book, he was very clear that what he was looking for was a different audience. He wasn't interested in the art audience because he felt that they were the same people all the time and he felt they could reach a completely different set of people. Probably amongst British video artists, that's quite unusual.

It is when you analyse it through that historical lens. David Hall was already an established sculptor in the 60s and then a filmmaker. His 7 *TV pieces* were shot on film and then broadcast on television. He did have a different approach to it. He did a piece called *101 TV Sets* on one video channel – and then he made that fantastic piece of work at Ambica P3, *1001 TV Sets* to coincide with the end of analogue broadcast. A beautifully conceived and executed- and timed piece of work.

It's a different strand. He was so dominant. I was under the *aegis* of Peter Donebauer at the time and they had a big argument about what video art was about. It's ironic that in fact Peter ended up being a broadcast person- setting up and running Diverse Productions (Channel 4).

But let's proceed with the questions: There's a question now about how your work with video evolved. Obviously, your work did develop from those very first performance-oriented pieces- quite quickly, to something that was about the video medium itself away from performance. Is that right or not fair?

Yes, it is. The first pieces were kind of performance pieces. Then there was a period when I made half a dozen very specifically video technologically oriented pieces of work. That's when I had started at the Royal College of Art and had access again to a studio and a moderate amount of reel-to-reel black and white equipment, in collaboration with Brian Young who taught on that course. He also taught fine art at

Chelsea. They also had a load of equipment. There's one piece I made called *Memory 1 and 2*. I needed four monitors to stack and replay what I was doing and saying. We had to put together the equipment from Chelsea and the RCA in order to get that going. I made use of the fact I was in a college that had some gear. But, then, our department- Environmental Media, brought some U-matic equipment, U-matic Portapack and camera everything changed again. I realized it was sufficiently good quality, in colour and I could edit it accurately – at Fantasy Factory by the way because the college didn't have the edit decks. It meant I could go back, if you like- *Pieces I Never Did* is essentially a collection of performance or structural films, video pieces all edited together, put together, in a way that you couldn't have done possibly with black and white reel-to-reel equipment. For me, that was the end. I felt when I did three screens edited in synch down to the last second, everything had changed. It was no longer video art in the sense of struggling with the medium and its possibilities. Over the next two years, you'd be in an edit suite with mixing desks and sound mixing and vision mixing, etc. And the whole nature of it changed because it became about the content, about the subject, about what you're making these pieces or programmes about.

You've just done this thing here which says have you stopped working with video and if so what year and why. And you've kind of covered that but it's interesting. Is that why you stopped in a sense, or did you stop?

I did really. I've made *Pieces I Never Did* in 1979. I exhibited it quite widely over a couple of years. I made some small pieces as I was going along for the next two years and then I really did stop. It was partly to do with the fact I felt that the nature of the scene had changed but also I changed. I became a Christian and I started a production company with another guy. We made videos for the church, documentary pieces for the Methodist Church and the Baptists for the first three or four years.

Did you feel that the medium had moved on to such an extent that one of the driving forces for you as an artist had disappeared or at least had submerged in a way? Was it no longer as interesting to you because of the way the technology had developed and its accessibility?

It wasn't all to do with the technology; It was only partly the technology. As I said, once you'd got U-matic recording and editing, then people could apply that to any number of subjects. What really changed to me was London Video Arts. It was an organization which I worked at from 1982 to 1986. That was my job and the whole nature of the organization changed. The people who were involved in it changed. Their subject matter changed. I personally had changed. It was not just about technology anymore at that point because the technology was good enough that people could apply it to many different topics.

Do you consider yourself as a video artist?

I did for a period. Yeah.

Has the tool of video changed your thinking about artistic practices? Back in the past, do you think that's true that the video itself changed the way you thought about what art was?

I think, yes. It changed what you could make art about certainly. The first Bill Viola piece I saw was in Maastricht where we went to an exhibition. I took part in a "video manifestation" as it was called. Stuart Marshall, David Hall, Steve Partridge, the whole gang went to Maastricht and we saw for the first time Bill Viola's piece where he drops a cymbal in a flock of pigeons and then they all take off. It's in ultra-slow motion. So incredibly high-resolution and beautifully shot, great movement. It was like taking a look at possibilities that then continued to develop, especially by some people, Bill Viola obviously and others. There was a piece by Ira Schneider, I saw a little bit later in the States which was called *Time Zones* (1980). It was an hour's recording in each of the 24 time zones around the world played back in a circular arrangement of 24 monitors. You had an overview of a day in the space of an hour around the whole world. Just the fact that you could apply the technology in that kind of way, if you wanted to, those kind of possibilities became something that we could all do if we put our mind to it.

Did the experience of seeing that work or those kinds of works impact on your practice? Did you go back and pick up the camera or pick up the kit and think of it in a different way as a result of that?

No, I didn't. I just saw it. It's part of this kind of movement away from what I had been doing. My own interests changed. I was happy to observe it, to see it and take part in it in different ways, but I wasn't actively making work in that way then.

What date are we talking?

That's early 80s: 1981, 1982. I would say I made video art from 1973 to 1982. About to 10 years roughly. And specifically, about the nature of the medium from 1975 to 1979.

Why do you think that was so relevant to your way of looking at the world? It was quite important that way of thinking and that way of working, and it suited something about the way you looked to things- or the way you wanted to look to things. Can you throw any light on that?

I think it's a mixture of a couple of things. One is that the group of people who were involved – David Hall, Stuart Marshall, Steve Partridge – and the 2B Butler's Wharf people as well: Martin Hearne made films, Mick Duckworth did performance work, Kevin Atherton did video and performance. I think there is a conversation between a group of people who knew each other- there were more than the ones I've just mentioned. They shared that interest and then responded to each other's work, actually.

That's really interesting because I don't think that comes out a lot. There was this context that you guys had created together and for each other. There was a creative context that was centred around LVA. It wasn't just about access. It was about some kind of dialogue. You were responding to each other's work and responding to each other's way of thinking about the work.

You said you started making videos for other organizations. Did you think of any of those in any sense as having an artistic content or context?

At this point in time, I wasn't doing other. I was involved in the art scene through the Royal College of Art, the people there, through LVA and 2B Butler's Wharf, everybody involved in LVA. And then also the Acme thing. We lived in Acme houses, LVA had a slot in the Acme Gallery with regularly evening shows. Individuals did exhibitions at Acme. I showed *Pieces I Never Did* there in 1979, for a week or so. If you start putting all those organizations together, it made me really realize how social it was. It was a very social scene with the people taking part in all of those areas.

Video appeared to be an emerging medium. It was flexible for time and editing compared to film and performance. Performance is a unique one-off while video is recorded and can be screened flexibly and transported. In 1976 and then later on, I showed in Holland, France, Poland and then America. It became a much wider group of connections. As a group have been helped by people like David Hall, Stuart Marshall because they were older and more well connected as well with the music scene, with Alvin Lucier and people like that. There was a background with a social set of connections as well.

Do you think there's something unique about the British scene? Given that you were showing work in other countries, also having a chance to see what other artists were doing, do you think there was something that characterized the British work in that period that was particular and specific?

My immediate thought is no. I don't think so actually. People did a lot of different things. Some with music, some with sound, some with performance, some with technology, some started to stray over in the early eighties into rock music, pop music. Some people made pop videos. It spread and spread and spread. You couldn't just look at anything and say it's British except perhaps the language. I like what happened at a screening in Stuttgart at the Künstlerhaus called "Video im Abendland. (I'm not sure exactly what it means.) I met Nan Hoover there. I screened *Pieces I Never Did* and as it finished with "shut up, shut up" the audience erupted, applause, people standing up and they said: "show it again". I was very pleased obviously. I said "okay look, I'll show it again. I'll set it up but I'm going to the bar. So, I set it up. They all sat down for it again and Nam Hoover came to the bar with me. We sat and had a good chat on a drink before we went back. Then, because of meeting in on the good circumstances, Nan invited me to do a show at De Appel in Amsterdam. Marina Abramović was a friend of Nan Hoover's and she was busy on the evening I was going to do the screening. She actually came in the afternoon and had a private screening. I sat with Marina and we watched *Pieces I Never Did* together in the afternoon which was very lovely. These things just connect you up and I ended up from the Stuttgart

end of the story meeting a guy, Zdzislaw Sosnowski from Poland who invited me to show British video in Warsaw. I went over there and showed in a big building built by the Russians to dominate Poland in those days. This is the one where I arrived with tapes on U-matic and they did not have a U-matic recorder. I had to describe what we were doing to an audience of 300 people including the British Ambassador in Poland. Eventually they got a U-matic deck from the TV station and we were able to show the tapes later in the week. It began to have an impetus all on its own. You go somewhere, you meet people, you do something, they pass you on to someone else and so it goes. Thinking about it in the context of these questions, I realize that we could have done a lot more.

There was an opportunity there which maybe didn't develop in the way that it might have. It's always easy with hindsight.

What about the sound? How important was the audio track in your work? I would have thought it was crucial.

Yes, very important. Some of low-quality, reel-to-reel, black and white, pieces, revolved around the sound. *Static Acceleration* has an increasing beat for the first minute as fast as I could go and then the next 10 minutes, it has a regular beat. The video image is then stretched to fit the static beat from its original increasing speed. The sound is the structural element. The image was changed because of it. Then I made pieces like *Triologue* where I split a text into three collections of words. But again, spoke them back one screen, one monitor, one generation as it were at a time and then put them back together to make a complete sentence.

Did you explore the potential of sound or the relationship of image to sound? Yes, you clearly did.

How would you define your work at the time? I suppose the question is asking whether or not you thought what you were doing was art- or not?

It comes back to something we mentioned a few minutes ago. That is part of an artistic conversation between artists I knew and those from a wider group, including nationally and internationally.

How did you choose your titles?

They're either literally descriptive or poetically descriptive. Sometimes with a humorous or ironic element as well. My titles are all to some extent descriptive. I try and work in a bit of humour or irony.

There are sometimes double meanings.

How have other artists influenced you to switch to this technology? How other artists influence your practice and how other artists influence you picking up the video camera?

Do you think Stuart [Marshall] was instrumental?

I mentioned him straight away. Yes, Stuart Marshall in 1973 and for a number of years afterwards. Generally, I've said performance artists. Some using video. It could be Kevin Atherton or many others. It was a group of people basically.

Yes, so there was a focus on what you could do with video, but also perhaps what you couldn't do with it. It was about the limitations as well. I've always thought that limitations are more interesting than open possibilities. It's a lot more interesting to push up against the edge of something than it is to find yourself in a wide-open space where you could go in any direction.

Absolutely. I made a piece called *Instruction Limitation* which I just watched again, and I can't believe how boring it is. At the same time, that's exactly what it's about. It's an image of me on screen instructing myself to do all the things that you could do with a reel-to-reel Sony edit deck: slowing it down, speeding it up, stopping it, starting it, whatever. That's literally what it is. It's working out all the different things that did and then finding a way to do. In the end it ends up being so literal that it kind of loses it for me now. I find it funny now.

What about other sources? Other than that, say people who are working with the same medium as you? Were there other sources that really influenced your practice? Obviously, you've said performance. Do you think that the filmmakers were influential on how you work with video for example? Books, poetry?

Books about video art were few and far between then. Not like this stack of books I've got next to me now, including by yourself. We've got plenty. There were articles in magazines like *Studio International*, *Art & Artists*. I would say the art press and *Artforum*, and then the organizations like 2B Butler's Wharf, the Film-maker's Coop, the Acme gallery and others. Of course we were all aware of what was going on socially and politically around us.

Did you work with other artists, performers, visual artists collectively? You've talked about the collective way that you were reacting and responding to each other's work. So that's slightly different but I suppose that's really what that question is about because it's the heading is collective. So, I think you've covered that very well.

We definitely collaborated in terms of exhibitions, exhibition space, studio space.

We're helping each other with production and stuff?

That's what I was going to come to. There was a lot of helping each other out going on. With hindsight, we tended to not really credit each other too much. *Pieces I Never Did* involved probably a dozen other people, some of whom appear on screen. It was never kind of part of it in that sense. We were all still in that mode of operating as individual artists. It would help people out to achieve their aims and you leave it at that.

In your country do you belong to the first or second wave of video artists?

They're putting you on the spot there. I venture that I was probably amongst the first, to be honest. 1973 was about as far back as you find work. Clive Richardson made some similar visual performance pieces in 1972. Because he was at Chelsea and they had a Portapack. It was literally who could get their hands on Portapack and before 1972 and 1973.

I certainly would see you as first generation.

How did information circulate between artists at the time? How did you hear about other artists?

It was a large group of people who were basically friends who knew each other through a few key organizations and events. We didn't have mobile phones then. I remember early days of LVA having an hour-long phone call with David Hall from the phone box across the road from where I lived. He had to reverse charge the call so that we could discuss the formation of LVA. Stuff like that happened.

I certainly remember that too.

What were the famous national or international places for the presentation or exhibition of video art? National, international places that were presenting work, that were the key institutions during that period.

These organizations contained people who knew people. People like David Hall, Stuart Marshall especially, were in contact with people. We have LVA shows at the Air gallery. The Tate Gallery did a couple of different video shows, probably connected up by David Curtis. The Whitechapel Gallery opened. I showed video there. Serpentine gallery from the *Video Show*. I'm not sure about any others to be honest.

What about outside of London? What about in Newcastle?

They started at the Basement Group in the late 70s. I think they were in contact with the Newcastle City galleries and so forth.

Coventry?

I think Coventry was mainly through the art college. I did also a screening in the Herbert Art Gallery in Coventry. There are little things popping up here and there. The Arnolfini, in Bristol.

Glasgow?

Yes. I did a festival. What was the Glasgow gallery? The name escapes me. It's quite well-known.

There's a question of conservation and collection. Was the question of conservation and collection of works raised? By whom? What actions were taken in that direction?

LVA had a kind of strapline to its title. I can remember it. It was London Video Arts: The organization for the Production, Exhibition and Distribution of Artists' work in video. So that was like a mission statement from the early days. This catalogue [he shows something] from 1978 for which I took that photo by the way.

Of the TV screen

Sort of laying on the floor, looking up at the screen. I didn't think it was much good, but David Hall said: "it looks like a flying banana, so we'll use it!".

The first thing, very much instigated by David Hall, was to just contact people as widely as we possibly could around the world: North America, people in Europe and all-around Britain. And just let them know that this organization was there to distribute work. If they were prepared to lodge a copy of that work, then we would distribute it. That was by 1978 and was produced with Arts Council money. We had one machine to view things on. It starts bit by bit, with the distribution, the catalogue, then screenings and then, quite a bit later, it took till 1982 to buy serious production equipment. It did all get put together over six or seven years.

I suppose that's the most important preliminary attempt to try and pull together a collection of works and make them available. It wasn't until much later that you get the Rewind project, but now we're talking about the 90's? Even beyond that?

2004, 2005.

Until then, there wasn't anything going on with archival. Then we have a whole section on distribution.

Was your work distributed and if so by whom and on what basis? Was the issue of distribution important to you when you first started working with video?

Not to me personally, but it became a thing that was involving a lot of people. The distribution tended to be to art colleges and then fairly soon after became distribution to exhibitions and screenings. And then internationally.

Do you remember Video Artists on Tour? The Arts Council thing. Which was very useful.

That got people to travel around to all the colleges, local galleries. They got paid for it and the work was hired. There were other organizations starting up in Holland, in the States, in Norway and in France. It became a thing that countries would have their distribution outlets.

What's going to happen is that individual people are going to respond to their own national relationship to the medium. The idea is for us to focus on what was happening in the UK. So, then parallels can be drawn. I think that's the notion.

Here's this thing with links with art school which is really important. When did art school start training artists in video practice in your country? You've said that: at the beginning of the 70s.

Who led these courses and how were they imagined? I guess David [Hall] and Tony [Sinden]...

Stuart [Marshall]. Then other courses like at Brighton, Nottingham. There were a few art schools that led the way as it were, into media. And now it's the bottom line for most places. I was thinking that the other day. I had to go to hospital. It was Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. They now have wonderful artwork, very high level of artwork around the place. They've got a piece by Isaac Julien which is five very big screens playing beautiful images shot in the Arctic, or Antarctic. Very beautiful slow motion, water moving, ice, very contemplative. To just think of Isaac and his development, through St Martin's College, the moving into video, the type of video he makes now and then the people who exhibit it and buy it. The whole thing has come full circle. Everybody would consider that to be a normal piece of art these days, beautiful as it is. It's just become the way to do that kind of thing.

It has to do with these art schools and the way they started training artists who led these courses. As you say, it's evolved into a big deal. But at the beginning there were a handful of art schools that had particular individuals who had championed the medium. You mentioned the key ones: Stuart Marshall, David Hall. They were the two first ones that I remember going to Maidstone as a student when I was at the LCP and seeing what David was doing. That was my first contact with David. It was on some trip because Tony Sinden taught at the LCP. Tony used to run these screenings after classes that I went to. David Cunningham came in and would sit at the back and make remarks. I thought "who the hell is this guy? he knows everything". There were a few art schools dotted around the country; It wasn't just London. The Chelsea and the Royal College had kit but there wasn't really a sort of video focus the way there was say at Maidstone or Newcastle for example.

That's true. You are reminding me there were people at places like Saint Martins, Central Saint Martins as it became.

Did you participate in the transnational events and exhibitions? Again, you've talked about that. If so which ones? Name and date. With which artist and who organized the event?

So, *Video & Film Manifestation* at the Bonnefanten museum in Maastricht, 1976. I can't give you names, but the people from here who went were David Hall, Stuart Marshall, Pete Livingstone, Roger Barnard, Tamara Krikorian, Marceline Mori, myself.

That was the English-British contingent. Then it was a little while: 1978 *Montpellier Abstract Film Festival*, I had a piece in there, I can't remember what. And also, the cultural centre in Brussels, I showed some works in there, I didn't go. Then, *Video Roma* in Italy, 1979, I didn't go, then I did go to - but we showed work, this is why the distribution was obviously working *European Video* at the Künstlerhaus, Stuttgart, Germany which I mentioned earlier with the Nan Hoover story.

When was that?

That was 1979. And also in 1979, *British video*, The Kitchen, New York which had a catalogue with it as well. Then, 1980, *British video* in the Theatre Studio in Warsaw and also another Warsaw Gallery called Dziekanka. Then, Gallery Cavallino in Venice, it was a distribution job. De Appel Gallery in Amsterdam, I took British video there. A place called EILAC, Lyon, France, 1981. I'm missing out places like the Tate Gallery London. I went on a trip around the States, Pink Noise studios in Oakland, California, that was the studio of Fast Forward and other people who all had made up names, Doctor SO teric. PRIM video, Montreal, Seattle, that was with Allan Landy and Laurie Larson. SpaceX Gallery, Exeter and also I'm remembering here, I've missed one out which was still in 1981 on this trip was the Ontario College of Art. I think I kind of wind down from there on. There are more but that was 1982.

You'd had enough by then. Who are the artists or actors in the video scene you think should be contacted for this research project?

Some people have just not bothered to get back. Do you have archives of your work yourself?

Copies of work, yes, I've got a set of the tapes that the Rewind project made. So, I have those on Digi Beta and also as files on the computer.

Have your works been preserved, restored or collected? We know the Rewind project has done that. Other than that, one for example, other than Rewind to your knowledge.

There is the Lux, still there in distribution and then they're doing this BFI collection. I don't know much about it to be honest.

That's ongoing; I think that's important. So, there's the Rewind, the Lux and the BFI. I think those are probably the right ones.

Which works and in which places? Is it everything you made or only selected?

It's anything that I still had basically. I got rid of a lot of work at a certain point in time. Stupidly probably, we can't say. Most of what I made is preserved. Things like the tape for the Serpentine video show. Don't take this, but I remade that piece with a couple of people just because you could remake it tomorrow. You just give the same instructions, but the equipment changes. The piece is essentially still the same. I've pretty much got most things. I've not got a lot of old original experiments and stuff like that. But the finished pieces on the whole, I have still got.

What about installation type pieces? Also multi-screen works?

I think there's a question somewhere that talks about the development of your work. What happened to me is I had a timeout from video art making and then I ran a production company for a few years making the sort of documentaries. Then I went into teaching and then bit by bit I started to collaborate with Susie Freeman and Liz Lee to make the "Pharmacopoeia" work. By that time, I would use video as a way of creating things. The first piece I made with them is a big collection of 50 odd A3 photographs with small-framed contraceptive coils arranged on top of it. The images are fuzzy, colourful pictures of mainly people which I shot on video and then re-photographed from the screen in order to get that kind of fuzzy, brightly coloured video kind of look to it. I just would use video as a tool in amongst others, for other reasons if you like.

Do you think that your knowledge of the medium that you gain through working with it exclusively as an artist then fed into the way you're able to use it as part of a wider practice?

I think it's just familiarity. We're talking about the year 2000 and on for another 10 years. In fact, we're still doing things that have come out of that. I made another piece called *The Pits* which is about a guy who's depressed but I get a shot video of this guy talking and then that's included in a screen sitting on a psychiatrist's couch. It's a kind of loose way of using video just as an element within a piece of work that's about something else.

That's often the way it's used now anyway, isn't it? I think that the video art as a genre, it's gone, it doesn't exist anymore.

It's just another tool now. Photography, films. Well- nobody uses film now.

Two things: One is what are the essential books for understanding video art in your opinion; and the other is essays.

I'm going to go through these, though not in any particular order: Jackie Hatfield's experimental film and video articles mainly by artists- including yourself; they're very good actually. Then the *Analogue* book by yourself (and Catherine Elwes), very good piece. I've going to leave that until a bit later. Catherine Elwes's *Video Loupe*. Also, her book *Video art: A Guided Tour* by The *Rewind* catalogue is very comprehensive as well. *Diverse Practices* by Julia Knight which is an interesting sort of academic book. Then there's your book (*A History of Video Art: The Development of Form and Function*).

There is a general book around Butler's Wharf. There's *Artist's Film* by David Curtis; my name gets mentioned once in the same sentence with Marina Abramović which I'm very happy about. Also worth it to see the whole scene at the time is William Raban's 72-82, which is about the Acme gallery and what they did. This is just the wider context. It also includes a piece of my work as well.

