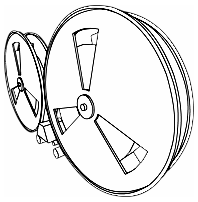

REWIND | Artists' Video in the 70s & 80s
Interview with Jeremy Welsh

Interview by Professor Stephen Partridge, Emile Shemilt and Adam Lockhart, 23rd January 2007

SP: Which of the works you have produced do you consider to be important and why?

JW: I suppose if I was to single out one from the earlier period then it will probably be *I.O.D.* from 1984. It was the first piece where I quite deliberately decided to work with a very graphic abstracted form of image. It was quite clearly referencing a range of other traditions or other practices within the visual arts including experimental film, but also including painting, photography and graphic arts. It was a hybrid work in a way. I noticed in Chris Meigh-Andrews' recent book, that he put it into a category of pre-digital or pre-figuring a way of making digital images, which I think was quite an acute observation. When the piece was being shown a lot in the mid eighties, like at the Worldwide Video Festival, it was put into a programme, together with very high high-tech works by people like Ingo Günther. These people were working with high-end digital systems but the joke about that, was that it was absolutely non-digital. The piece was produced by projecting 35mm slides on to sheets of rotating cardboard, shooting it with a video camera and then re-scanning it off a monitor. It was as low-tech as you could get but it defined a certain aesthetic, and a certain way of working that persisted and has re-emerged in later works at different times. It was also a piece that seemed to find an audience. It was shown in all the festivals and it was broadcast. So it seemed to jump out of the tiny little ghetto that we spent most of our time in, and actually meet a broader audience, so that was satisfactory for me.

SP: And other works?

JW: Later on, the last work from the 1980's is a 3-screen installation *Immemorial.* That was commissioned for the first Video Positive Festival and developed into a way of working much more with installation. It developed into working in a spacial sculptural way, which then became my primary concern, pretty much up until now. It's literally now, in the very recent past, that I've started to make some filmic, single-screen work again, after having basically just worked with installation and expanded media sort of projects for the past 15 years.

SP: Are there any works that might have been overlooked, even by yourself?

JW: I'm sure that that would be the case. There is a lot of stuff that at the time was thought of as being made just for the moment. That happened very often, in a really literal way, like in the days when we were doing the screenings in the basement of the AIR Gallery in Rosebury Avenue. Then, you literally would quite often just make a piece to show on a Thursday night and that was it. You didn't think that it had any life beyond that one event. So, when things did persist beyond that, and maybe cropped up other places, it would be uncomfortable because you'd feel like it was made for one context and perhaps didn't

really belong anywhere else. In that sense, you tended to overlook a lot. You tended not to think beyond the moment. You tended to perhaps undervalue the potential of some of the things that you were making. Of course the whole sector was overlooked by the fact that, for the British art establishment at that time, video art was of almost no interest whatsoever. It was many years later that it was discovered and things would get shown in more mainstream venues, but at that time, in the beginning of the 80's, I think being overlooked was the life condition of the sector really.

SP: Yes, it had ephemerality. It was a natural thing to do. It wasn't about it being dispensable. It was more about just doing something. You talked a little bit about the technology, particularly on the proto-digital work. There were quite a few works around, which either people thought were digital or they pointed towards it.

JW: Yes, it was at a time when, LVA had finally got an edit suite. Plus there were other organisations around like West London Media Workshop, what Gavin Hodge was doing in Luton and there were people down at Albany Video. They all had similar kinds of kit and there was a certain look at that time. It was also around the time that scratch video was happening. *I.O.D.* for example got lumped in with that. It was picked up in the programme, *Deconstruct*, that Mark Wilcox did. That was interesting and nice because there was an audience at that time for that kind of work. But, it was about something really different whereas most of the people working with scratch were doing what these days we would call sampling, or deconstructing mainstream media. I didn't think that what I was doing had anything to do with that. Maybe it had a lot more in common with the work that George Barber was making at that time, which was also was very graphic and pre-computer graphic. It was analogue-electronic graphic, you could say. I guess there were probably quite a lot of other artists scattered around who were doing those things. We didn't really discuss the aesthetics of that very much at the time because it was a missing language or a missing link. It became very much clearer in retrospect. Of course it owed an enormous debt to the tradition of experimental film, but because of the uneasy relationship between the video art milieu and the film co-op milieu, you weren't actually allowed to admit that those influences existed.

SP: It was about that time that the Commodore Amiga came along. So did the Mac, although it wasn't very functional in the early days. Did you get involved with that?

JW: A little bit, but I didn't really find out how to use it in the things that I was making. Around about 1986 I started to use computers a little bit and James Gormley who was the technician and editor at LVA at the time, he got into things like those little Sony home computers that came out then. He was making very simple graphics on those, but of course at that point it was extremely difficult to get the stuff out of the computer and onto any other medium. So, I used to do a bit, but it was very crude. I would make something on a computer and then shoot it off the computer monitor, so, it was immediately going from digital back to analogue.

SP: So when did the computer start to figure in the work?

JW: In the late 80's going into the early 90's. Actually, the first totally digital work that I ever made was also made by a very analogue method. I was one of the people that was

commissioned to make something for that big Spectra Colour electronic sign in Piccadilly Circus when Art Angel were doing a project there. That was programmed digitally, but in a very crude way. They had a computer operator sitting in a basement office somewhere in Piccadilly, and they had a very basic display that was just a matrix of dots. Each dot represented a light bulb and it could be either on or off and for every state of the animation sequence. Every individual light bulb had to be programmed to be on or off. It was a 20 second piece that I made. It was based actually on video stills from a very short sequence of my son who was very young at the time. He was only 9 months old. I just shot a close up of his eye movements, which I'd become quite fascinated by. Then I took stills of these eye movements and then turned then them into drawings. I drew a little animation sequence that was a very basic idea of a child interacting with visual language. There were these simple geometric forms, based on toys that kids have, like a round red object to put in a hole and a blue square object that they have to put in another hole. So, I made this piece with these basic geometric forms that were animated to fly about on the screen. It was like solving a puzzle, flying to the right place. Then there were this child's eyes watching them so the frame rate of this process was extremely slow, maybe 3 frames a second. For the 20 seconds, I had to produce these 60 drawings which would then go to a woman, who had to translate these 60 drawings into on-off, on-off. It took her something like 5 weeks to translate it into digital form. That was my first digital work.

SP: When was that work?

JW: That was in 1989. It was called *ABC Baby Sees*.

SP: There are quite a lot of musical references in your work. Can you talk a bit about that?

JW: Music was always a kind of touch down really. When I did my BA at Trent Polytechnic, for various reasons there were a lot of people coming there who were coming out of a contemporary music background rather than the visual arts. Michael Nyman was my personal tutor for the last couple of years. Through him, I was meeting other people like Brian Eno, David Cunningham, Gavin Bryars and a whole lot of other people. Through Michael, I became very interested in John Cage's ideas. That became a primary theoretical reference point at that moment. Through that, I got very interested in Fluxus as well and meeting a lot of other artists who were also working in multi-media performance art or an inter-media, trance-media kind of way with that sort of background. So, contemporary music thinking was a very important reference point. Earlier on actually, one of first short video pieces that I made, was a collaboration with Michael Nyman. I think it was in 1981 or 1982. He released his one and only single, which was his re-working of a theme from Mozart's Don Giovani. He called it a theoretical pop record, and so he wanted a theoretical pop video to go with it. So I made it. That was quite interesting. It was the only time I've ever actually made a music video in that sense. I'd also worked quite a lot with music when I left college for the last couple of years of the 70's. Then I played in a band for about 2 years and that was my main outlet at that point on the wave of British post-punk, where it was all art students in those bands. We all thought we would going to change the world and change culture, but the closer one got to the machinations of the music industry, the more one realised that it was completely screwed up and there was actually very little scope there to do anything at all or at least, if you wanted to do anything

interesting then you had to count on the fact that you definitely were not going to make any money. To be involved in the music industry without being able to have any of the benefits of the financial aspect, that seemed like a stupid thing to do really so I withdrew from that. But, music and sound stayed there and it's continued to stay, up to this day. For the past two years I've been collaborating with a composer on the integration of sound and the visuals remained important.

SP: Can you talk about when you started with London Video Arts as a facilitator and important works that you facilitated?

JW: At the beginning of course, the only way we facilitated was by getting stuff seen by people. So, before we actually had any production facilities of our own, it was very much about video art that was coming to us from people, actually from all over the world, which was really exciting at that time. That stuff would just arrive in the post. Every day a tape would drop in the mailbox from somebody somewhere in the world that had heard about LVA. So, we were able to show stuff that nobody was seeing. We could boast that we were showing works by Bill Viola and Gary Hill before anybody had heard of them. That was really interesting. Building an audience was the first thing we facilitated, but later on, once we had production facilities and we were able to secure a better standard of funding, then we certainly did do some interesting things. I think one of the first things, where I had more of the role of producer/facilitator must have been in 1985 or 1986. It was a collaboration with the AIR Gallery, where we made a piece called, *Video Window Box*. It was a 9-screen grid of monitors, totally analogue, fed by x number of U-matic video cassette players. I think we commissioned 6 different artists to make works for that and then it went on tour. It was shown in Manchester, Edinburgh and Newcastle. It was one of the first purpose designed touring exhibitions of video art in the UK. We learnt a lot from the process of doing that. Then I went on to do other things. The next one, which I remember fondly, was actually the last project that I ever did for LVA before I left there. It was in collaboration with Maureen Palely, at Interim Art. Again, it was a commission. Kevin Atherton was one of the commissioned artists and Isaac Julian was another, Stuart Marshall, working together with Neil Bartlett, was another. Also, there was Atalia Shaw working in collaboration with Cathy Acker. It was quite diverse mix of people. The point of the thing, was that it was about making portraits. We paired people up. It was like one artist with somebody else of whom they would make a portrait. Then it was made into a travelling video tech, that went out on tour to various places. It was interesting because it was very deliberately thought of as a project that would be about broadening audiences. It wasn't necessarily aimed at the hard-core video art audience that knew a lot about video art. It was about presenting interesting personalities from different areas of the contemporary arts, within a format that people could actually relate to. It was at a time when the idea of picking up a video and taking it home to watch it was starting to become quite commonplace, so, it was playing on that a little bit.

SP: How did you first get involved at LVA? What was your role officially and when was that?

JW: That was right in the early 80's. It was 1981, I think. I was at Goldsmith's at the time. After having moved to London in 1980, I went to Goldsmith's to do a post-graduate, which was part time in those days. Two of the other students on the course were also working

with video. There was John Scarlett-Davis who was really coming more from the film background, the Derek Jarman milieu, and then an Israeli guy, Duby Ilath, who was also already connected with LVA. I knew Dave Critchley from before, from the Butler's Wharf days when I, at that time had been working much more with performance and knew Kevin Atherton and various other people. So I gravitated towards that milieu. Then after I finished at Goldsmith's, things had started to be professionalized at LVA. At that point Dave Critchley, Jane Parish, Chris Rushton and I were all employed on a very part-time basis to start trying to get things on a more firm footing. Money started to come in from the Arts Council and then ultimately from Channel 4 and GLC and other things. Within a couple of years of that, there was actually funding to employ people properly, so it all changed then.

SP: How many years were you at LVA?

JW: I started working there in 1981 and then I finished in late 1987/early 1988. I left and then started up Film and Video Umbrella with Michael O'Pray the year after.

SP: What made you decide to do that?

JW: I decided that I had to get out of LVA primarily for my own sanity. It was exciting because the organisation had grown a lot. Suddenly we were employing a lot of people and the money was much bigger. We were dealing with bigger numbers and much more complex things, but by that point Dave Critchley had withdrawn and started to pursue different interests. I suddenly found myself being the one person who had been there the longest. I was the one person who knew how everything worked and by default had to adopt the sort of executive role, which in the end was just too much. I didn't want to have to be responsible for every aspect of everything that was going on and sometimes it felt like that. It was everything, from having to deal with the funding applications and taking care of that, to making sure that distribution was actually happening and things were going out, and that shows were actually being scheduled and happening. But, then I would have people phoning me up at 3 o'clock in the morning because they were having a problem in the edit suite. I just thought at that point, "Screw it! I'm not going to live like this anymore". So, I decided to go. I decided to get out and see if I could survive working freelance. So, for a few months after that, I was doing odd bits of part-time teaching here and there and working on some projects. Suddenly, this offer came from the Arts Council to join forces with Michael O'Pray and take the Film and Video Umbrella, which up until that point have just been something that only existed in name within the Arts Council as a method of getting independent film out to the regional film theatres. They wanted to formalise it and to give it some responsibility for promoting video art as well. So, in May 1988 we were formally incorporated as a company. For me, it was a very nice opportunity because I didn't have to think about all of the other stuff that had become quite difficult with LVA. All I had to think about was putting together some good programmes of video art by artists that I liked. It was not that I felt obliged to represent as one did at LVA, but I could just choose freely British and international contemporary video, put it in the programmes and send it out to the world. It was a good model, but after 2 years of doing it, I'd had enough of that as well.

ES: How successful do you think it was in terms of audiences?

JW: I think it was successful, always has been a successful model and still is now. Steve Bode took it up for a lot longer after I left. He took it over and now it's a very solid organisation. They are working with a lot of interesting artists, both nationally and internationally. They are producing to a very high, professional level. It ended up being somewhere that at the time when Mike and I first started, we dreamed of. We would ultimately have liked to move it away from just being a packaging operation into really being a professional producer. But, it took quite a lot of years for them to reach that point.

ES: Who were the audiences and did you have large audiences straight away?

JW: That varied depending on the content of the programmes. There was certainly 'bums-on-seats' accounting in operation. The regional film theatres and art centres had to report back to the Arts Council what the audience figures were, so that was being audited. We always had to think a little bit strategically. We might have wanted to send out something that was going to have a very narrow audience, so we had to balance that with something that obviously was going to have bigger appeal. By and large it worked quite well, but then I think one reason that under Steve Bode, they gradually moved away from that model, was that things were changing. Audiences were changing. The expectations of audiences were changing. Ways of presenting material to audiences were changing. The fact that things were broadcast more frequently obviously had an impact on that as well. Certain kinds of less mainstream film and video material would become available for purchase to individuals changed. Lots of factors influenced that, but for a period from the late 80's into the early 90's, it was a model that worked and the kind of programmes that we were putting together were also going out internationally to a lot of festivals and being picked up by galleries and museums around the world that wanted show that kind of work. It was quite an exciting time in terms of finding a bigger arena to place that kind of work into.

ES: How do you think the response was comparatively outside of Britain?

JW: It was pretty positive actually. I did get invited to go to a lot of international shows, promote those programmes and present that kind of work. I think the one thing that really worked very well about it was that the packages were very tightly curated. They were accompanied by a basic form of catalogue or broadsheet that provided contextual information and some kind of argument about why we were showing certain works, what was interesting about them and what the historical significance of the works that we were presenting was. For people who were having to deal face to face with an audience that was very good. That was very helpful, whereas with LVA, the collection had reached critical mass by the late 80's. There was just so much material nobody had an overview of it anymore. There was an ideology that still existed there, that was represented within the management structure of LVA that said everything had to be treated as being equal. You couldn't privilege one artist or one work above another, which made it impossible for the people who were trying to run the distribution to make any meaningful structure out of it. For people who were interested in exhibiting the work it was also impossible because all you could do was present them with a list of 2000 videotapes and say, "Well, take your

pick". It was an extremely unhelpful way of promoting the work. It was a hard-core ideology that demanded that that was we had to do it at that time. Of course, it all changed later, but for a period it was like LVA just became a bit of a black hole, and the Umbrella alternative was seen as being a more professional way of doing things.

ES: How was the response to your own work?

JW: It was quite good, although from the quite early 80's, from about 1984 onwards, I always found that my work was getting shown much more abroad than it was in Britain. It was regularly being shown in festivals around the world, and it was shown quite a lot in gallery and museum shows here and there as well. I don't really know why, but it was definitely much harder to get things shown in the UK. Through the whole period of the 80's, I probably exhibited in UK galleries not more than 5 or 6 times, but I showed a lot in other places. That probably wasn't unusual. Probably, most video artists in the UK had a sort of similar struggle with getting their work seen.

ES: Why did you think that was?

JW: There wasn't much knowledge about it. The British art world didn't know very much about it. It didn't have the critical language to deal with it. It was terrified of the technological aspects of it, especially as soon as you went beyond the simple business of just having a monitor and a VCR to playback a videotape. Most of them could more or less deal with that, but once you got into multiple screen set ups and more complex forms of installation, then they were terrified of having to deal with technology in that way. There was a period at LVA, when we were renting out quite a lot of equipment and a lot of the places were starting to kind of dip their toes in the water and try to do things, but the most bizarre things would happen. The most extreme example I can remember was the time when James Bromley was the technician and in charge of everything. He got a panic phone call one day from a venue somewhere in the far north that had received equipment and material from us to show a video art exhibition and nothing was working. They asked if he could please come and sort it out. So he got on the train. He sat on the train for 5 or 6 hours, arrived in this town, went into this gallery, went over to the power point, switched on the electricity and then went back to London.

ES: Was it very different outside of Britain?

JW: Well there were places that were much more aux fait with dealing with that, particularly in Germany, France and Holland, where video art had penetrated into art spaces at a much earlier time. There were infrastructures and there were people who understood it. There were museum curators who actually knew something about the history, who had followed it from the early days of Nam June Paik and Wolf Vostell. So there was a context. There was a history and it was talked about in a way, which was barely the case in Britain. Most art historians or curators or museum people in the UK, had no idea who David Hall and Stuart Marshall were. They may have heard of Nam June Paik, just about, but it didn't really go much further than that. So, there was a lot of work to be done on not just building an audience but building knowledge among the professionals in the art field.

ES: Do you think they knew about the Americans?

JW: Barely. I can remember when Bill Viola was starting to be a big name on the international circuit and places in Britain were beginning to show interest and show his work. They were all saying, "We are the first to show work by Bill Viola". We would say, "Excuse me, but we were showing that stuff 8-9 years ago and you weren't interested".

SP: Of course it's generalising, but it would be interesting to know whether it was just ignorance or neglect or whether there was sometimes an open hostility.

JW: Yes, there had been a brief period in the mid to late 70's, when European Conceptualism was still at its height and there were early video works. The first video art works I ever saw were pieces by Gilbert and George, for example. There was that stuff around me when I was a student, in 1974/'75. But then, when the big New Expressionist Painting boom came in the late seventies and early eighties, everything that was like video, including photography based art, was swept out of the way. It was suddenly completely irrelevant as far as the big institutions were concerned. It took a long time for just a few people, who were willing to consider the possibility that there might be something interesting happening somewhere else, to start to allow it in. But it took a long time for that penetration to really happen.

ES: Do you think that lack of historical knowledge is changing now?

JW: Yes and no, but it's very partial. When video art became totally mainstream in the 90's, and a whole generation of younger artists made it quite big showing that sort of work, and sometimes not so young curators leapt on it as the new thing, as if it had suddenly popped out of nowhere with no history, then of course I can't really believe that a lot of those British artists who profiled themselves during the 90's, were so naïve or ignorant because they'd all been educated in British Art Schools. The people who were teaching them had been there and knew it from the first time around. They were just calling their bluff in a way. They were playing on the fact that basically the museum and gallery people were completely ignorant about that history. So they were allowed to pretend that it was completely new and had never happened before. From that point of view, I think it's really important and interesting with things like REWIND, the work Chris Meigh-Andrews has been doing and what Julia Knight and other people are doing in making visible that submerged and hidden history. I think that the sense of continuity has been greater in other places, particularly in Germany, France, the Netherlands, The United States, Canada and a number of other places where there wasn't that kind of rupture. In those countries, people have been working with video, with new media over a long period of time, and aren't separated to the same extent that seemed to happen in the UK. It was very interesting when I went to Norway in 1990. My role there was to start the first department for electronic media in a Scandinavian art academy. It was like Ground Zero. There were some artists that had worked with it a little bit but it was quite unknown and considered very new. So I spent a lot of time in the first few years there doing interviews with people who were asking me about this new art form, I was always trying to explain, "It's not actually that new. It has been around since the 1960's. There is a history already. It does

exist." But, because it hadn't happen there, of course they considered it to be a totally new phenomenon.

SP: In the 80's a lot of the artists in Britain moved away from the galleries and were quite interested in TV and a music scene. There was a much more expanded cultural intent. Do you think that's a valid point?

JW: It was a combination of things. I think you know it was a combination of necessity and the desire to explore different arenas, because it was basically a waste of time to really try to get your work into galleries or any serious spaces, there were so few that were interested or able to do it. Actually more and more, artists were working with video, so there had to be some alternatives. There had to be other arenas. I think it was a unique time in terms of British Broadcasting. There was an openness to try other things with Channel 4 coming on stream in the early 80's. Then the BBC started to pay attention. It meant that artists did have that chance to reach a much broader audience and to work in a different way. They were able to work in a more professional way not least, which was an interesting thing. Then there were all the other aspects on where artists started to go into club culture for example and find an arena for their work there, which was interesting in a number of ways. It was interesting that it was also, not necessarily consciously, but nevertheless, a throw back to the beginnings of the European Avant-Garde. It was like Cabaret Voltaire all over again, without the Dada-ist confrontation. But, there were some elements of that. I remember when scratch was breaking out towards the end of 1983, and a club called The Fridge in Brixton was the first place that was showing that kind of work. It had a post-punk industrial aesthetic with a load of knackered old TVs piled up everywhere and hanging in chains from the ceiling. People could just record the evening news from TV, re-edit it and then go and play it back there. People would actually quite like it and that was interesting for a while.

SP: There was a certain irony to it as well, because it professionalized quite a lot of production, particularly Channel 4 and the franchise workshop. But for me, the irony was that it made all the work ephemeral, but in a different way. It made it ephemeral in the way that broadcasting has always been about getting stuff out there. It's got to be of the moment and it's forgotten completely.

JW: Yes, and the funding policies changed as a result of that. The funding of experimental film and video that the Arts Council used to do, gradually got more into partnership funding with the TV companies. That then produced a certain way of working that I think for a lot of artists, was very problematic, because it forced them to actually do things that they wouldn't necessarily have done otherwise, or it forced them to work in a way that they didn't necessarily want to. I remember that particularly by the late 80's, the work that was going on TV, most of it had stopped being in any way experimental. Most of it had stopped having the sort of essence that had been there in video art and in experimental film; about a formal investigation or a formal deconstruction of the medium or the means of transmission. It was obviously something that came straight out of the visual arts, but it had gone much more to a cinematic mode of thinking. So, you had a whole series of things that I think were absolutely awful. Visual artists were trying to turn themselves into film directors. They were writing terrible scripts. They couldn't direct actors. It was all very

nicely shot and very nicely lit. It was technically well made but devoid of any interesting content whatsoever.

SP: You mention the funding just then and could you tell us a bit more about funding generally, both personally as an artist but also at LVA?

JW: From the early 80's on, the funding for LVA was really not bad. It did gradually increase, and then it had a couple explosive periods of growth where there was money coming in from Channel 4. Suddenly there were sales to television where there was suddenly money to produce or to commission particular artists projects. So that was an exciting period. I think it became more and more difficult individually, to get funding during that period although more and more of the funding became strategically tied to particular commissioning schemes and to what, in the scientific community, was called basic research. The possibility to do that evaporated if you didn't actually have the means to self-finance your production. It became extremely difficult to get funds to do things when the funding was primarily being aimed at the production of short films. To get money in order to make a large-scale installation was more or less impossible. People did it somehow but it was an incredibly difficult thing to do. There was really no way of financing that kind of activity.

SP: It was a remarkably short period with the open bursaries and awards, where you didn't have to say what you were doing. You basically passed the test if you were deemed an interesting artist at that point. Then suddenly it was all schemes, and all sorts of strange people prescribing what should be done and what shouldn't.

ES: How successful were you with funding?

JW: I got funding periodically. I got different kinds of support. I used to get quite a lot of money from the British Council to travel, to go to international events and things. That was really important in terms of building a network and being aware of what was happening out in the world. Certainly I was in a privileged position then because having LVA and then the Umbrella in the background meant that I had access to a lot of information and a big network. That certainly helped me, but the actual money to make things was done on very tight budget. There'd be the odd commission now and again, like a Video Positive commission or Projects UK, which was another one. Then on another occasion there was this Live Art Fund in the Midlands that was a collaboration between the Icon Gallery in Birmingham and The Lighthouse Media Centre in Wolverhampton one year. I got a commission to make something there. I would say that usually every second year, I managed to pick up some money from somewhere to do something. Then a few things that sold I to TV brought in money, which could be put back in the production of work.

SP: Can we just get a bit of detail on those three commissions that you mentioned?

JW: The first was in fact Projects UK, in 1986. It was for a touring live art show called, New Work Age. Jon Bewley and Simon Herbert were behind it. I was commissioned to make a gallery-based performance work that was to be shown in several different spaces. It started at the Laing Gallery in Newcastle and then it went to the Cornerhouse. Then it

went to the Cartwright Hall in Bradford. I'd started with performance in the 70's so it'd always been there. I'd periodically gone back to it and liked that combination of using the recorded medium and the live event in symbiosis in some way. That was how I first started with video in fact: as a student at Trent Polytechnic doing performance where close circuit TV was a element of the installation in which the performance would happen. It was going back to that root, but exploring it in a different way. The piece that I made for Projects UK was called *Echoes*, which was a bit of a rant really. In many ways it was a stand-up, talking through popular representations of the contemporary artist in the popular media, contrasting it with popular representations of science and knowledge. It was to do with the ways in which the visual language was changing through things like computer graphics that were starting to happen through mainstream popular media. So, I was using video and sound and slide projections and different things to create multiple versions of myself within this performance. Then afterwards, when the performance tour ended, the piece was shrunk down a bit and remade as a single screen video piece, which actually did quite well. It was shown quite widely. The next commission was for the Midlands, which was a live art project. It was myself and Richard Layzell, who was another artist, commissioned for that. There were several others as well. It was using video as a kind of very active element of the performance. In this case it was much more site specific. They wanted works that were actually addressing the context of the West Midlands at that moment in the late 80's. It was in 1988. The hosting organisation for the production was Lighthouse Media Centre in Wolverhampton, which was attached to the City Art Gallery there. That was at the time when unemployment in the Midlands was at an extremely high-level and when all the traditional kind of manufacturing industry had collapsed. The demographics were changing because of immigration, particularly from South East Asia. Modes of production and the economy, everything was changing basically. It was a work that was looking at the changing status of that milieu and trying to make something out of it. It was partly a documentary project in the way that I spend quite a lot of time going around talking to people from school teachers to people involved in the arts, local historians and then just people who I found. One thing that I found, which was fantastic, was a very small abandoned factory that was like an industrial museum. There was a hardware shop and upstairs from the hardware shop was a workshop where they had made various kinds of machine parts up until some time in the 1970's when it went bust and stopped. Basically, all they did was put down their tools, walk out, lock the door and leave. Everything was absolutely left as it had been on the last day that anybody worked there. There were coffee cups with remains of coffee in them. It was amazing. What was even better was that it turned out that the guy running the hardware store underneath, had been the last foreman of this little workshop while it was running. He knew the whole history. He knew everything about it so the piece turned into being about him and his history. So I interviewed him and we shot a lot of video of this fantastic dust covered interior of this old factory. The next phase of the project, was that I took all this documentation of the abandoned factory to a local school, where nearly all the kids were Bengali. I showed them this video and asked them to comment on it or to say what they thought it was. None of them knew about the former industrial history of what Wolverhampton had been, so they had quite interesting interpretations of it. Then I asked them to make drawings and paintings of what they thought the factories were like now. They were doing drawings of sweatshops and stuff because that's what they could relate to. That's what they knew about, so it had gone from making parts for motorcycle engines

to making cheap clothes in a sweatshop. Not that I particularly wanted to do something sociological, but it was a moment that crystallised a lot of things that had happened in British Society up to that point. That was a nice way of taking hold of it. I've never been interested in making propaganda, or really agitating political art, but at certain moments you can take political content and deal with it in a poetic way, which I find interesting.

SP: And the Video Positive piece?

JW: The work I made for Video Positive was a three-channel installation *Immemorial*. It was a key work. Out of all of the works I ever made, it was the one that was the biggest hit with women. That was interesting. It was because it was very personal, emotional work. It was very much about identity and it was very much about personal experience. It was made at a time in my life when both my grandfather and father had died quite recently and my son had been born. I was very much tied up in this issue of male identity, and life and death and all of the big questions. It was a piece that was about memory and loss and trying to hold on to things. It was particularly about photographic images and how we use those as tokens for the absent person. It was theoretically leading quite heavily on Barthes' *Camera Lucida* and his writing on photography, but I trying to explore it from a very individual personal angle. I became an honorary male feminist for a short period on the basis of that work.

SP: You talked about influences and you mentioned John Cage. Can you talk a little bit more about your influences?

JW: It's always a difficult thing because it changes all the time. I don't have big favourites but my influences came from so many different things and not necessarily from other people working in the same field or genre. I was influenced by a lot of literature, Samuel Becket for example, not that you can see any particular reference to him in my work. But, I have always been very interested in his writing. I suppose you can see the influence from Cage. There is a certain connection there. I was influenced by J.G. Ballard's fiction, particularly the hard-core stuff, *The Atrocity Exhibition*, *Crash* and *Concrete Island.* His dystopian description of a post-technological world I had always found very resonant. That was something that came back heavily in the mid 80's with what was happening with technology and what was happening with society. In terms of moving image culture from the 80's, I think the one thing that most profoundly had an effect on me was Chris Markers' film *Sunless* (*Sans Soleil*), which I still think is the greatest film of all time. In fact, it was one of the few things that I go back to again and again and again. It functions on so many levels.

ES: What are the themes in your work?

JW: That varied a lot over time. Sometimes it would be something that would arise out of a situation where it was about addressing a given situation or given circumstances, so a theme would suggest itself. Other times it would just simply be something that popped into my head. It's different from one project to another.

ES: How has video as a technology affected your themes?

JW: I've relied on it so heavily, for a long time, so it was bound to have an influence. There was certainly a time, particularly in the early 80's, in the early days of all the LVA shows that a lot of us were talking about video as a medium. We were trying to find some kind of medium specific language in the sense that there had been through structuralist and materialist film. There'd been a definite aesthetic of film art and we were struggling to find something equivalent for video. That always eluded us. Then it went into something else, and then video became so ubiquitous or the electronic screen based image, became so ubiquitous, that it became meaningless to try to talk about it in those sorts of terms. It became more a condition of the environment than a medium in the end, so you couldn't actually attack it in that way. I now think of it in terms of, not video as such, but just visual electronically mediated information. That has been probably the most profound thing that's influenced the way that I've worked and the way that I've thought.

ES: Can you talk about your first use of video and what attracted you to using video?

JW: The earliest things would have been in the early 70's, when I was at college. Back then, it was just using video within something else, within a performance piece or installation, just to add another dimension. It was that thing of the real-time representation, having the real thing and then the image of the thing and the dialogue that they had with each other. I worked a lot with Super 8 and 16 mm film then as well, so there was a discrepancy between what you could do with film and what you absolutely could not do with video, or at least with the kind of video hardware that we had access to. So video was used in a very limited way during that period. It wasn't until 1980 when I went to Goldsmith's and had access to a U-matic editing suite for the first time. That was a big revelation. You could edit and you could do all of these things and it was real time but not at the same time. Because I'd worked a lot with music and sound, and was familiar with working in sound studios, editing audio and working with synthesisers and things like that, there was something familiar about it. I liked the idea that you were working with a stream. You weren't working with a thing. You were just moving electricity around and getting something audio-visual out at the end of it. I liked that aspect because I'd always been involved in ephemeral art practices, starting in the early 70's and being influenced by people like Lucy Lippard and her writing, *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object*, and Rosalind Krauss writing about sculpture in the expanded field. Because of all of those things, I'd always positioned myself in the sense that art was about making things that existed in a particular place, in a particular time. It was about the ideas, and it was about how you did it. It wasn't necessarily about the thing or product. So, beginning to work with video seemed like a very logical thing to do. In fact, I actually had a very brief hiatus, an in between thing. I'd gone through a long period, from about 1976 where I was playing music and I was also working with performance art and with a fringe, experimental theatre practice. I reached the point where I felt like that had run its course. I just didn't see any way of going further. For some reason, I hit on the idea that holography would be a good idea. I tried it and it was deeply frustrating. It was an immense amount of work to actually do anything. Then the result that you got was so boring. It seemed a total waste of time. Then I joined a course at Goldsmith's, and they suggested working with video. It just went from there.

ES: Were there many people working with video at that time?

JW: LVA already existed in the sense that it was a room in Wardour Street and there were some videotapes on the shelves. You went along and people talked about video art. They'd already started to do some screenings. I went to two screenings that they organised in early 1980. One was Dara Birnbaum. That was the first time I'd seen her work and that was quite a big "Wow". It was quite special. Then other American artists like John Sanborn and Kit Fitzgerald were showing their stuff. A few people were passing through and showing their work. Then I was asked to make something for an exhibition in Nottingham. There used to be an Art Centre there called The Midland Group and a guy called Steve Rogers, was curator there at the time, put together a Body Art show. It was mainly photography, with people like Maplethorpe in the show, but there were some video artists. I knew Steve Rogers a little bit from when I'd been working in performance. He asked if I'd like to do something for the show, so I made a video piece. It was the first video piece that I made and it was a performance to camera for that context.

ES: Can you talk about the shift from making performance works to making single screen pieces and then on to making installations?

JW: It all happened simultaneously when I was at Goldsmith's. I made my first video installation piece there in about 1981. I wanted to go back a little bit to things I remembered from when I had been a student and what influenced me then including European Conceptual Art and Jan Dibbet's *TV as a Fireplace*. I decided to do my own take on it, so I made an installation that was a bonfire. It was a few TVs with flames on them, and then with wood piled on top of it. Some years later the same piece was shown again at B2 Gallery in Wapping. There was a big empty space and I made a large installation there on the same basis. By that time it had got a title, I called it *Forest Fires*. It was a piece with slide projections on the wall of a forest. The whole floor was just like covered in forest debris, dead leaves and branches and piles of monitors showing flames in the middle of it all. There was a very nice anecdotal aspect to it. I also had a forest soundtrack with bird song that was playing on a looped audio cassette. The song of a blackbird was in it somewhere. It was summertime and the gallery was out over the river, in Wapping. They had one of those big warehouse doors that they kept open in the daytime to ventilate the place and all these birds started communicating with the piece. They were hearing bird song coming from inside the gallery and they were fooled by it. So they would come and sit on the open door, looking out onto the river and join in.

ES: What are your ideal contexts for showing work?

JW: There isn't an ideal context but I always like to work to the context that things are going to happen. To give an example of things that I've done recently, I've had a collaborative project now for three years with a painter and an electronic composer/ sound artist. We've been making expanded media works that are rooted in the aesthetics of modernist painting, but transcribing it into the moving image and into real time generated digital sound and imagery. One principle with the project had always been that we don't really plan, or make things in advance. We turn up in the space where it's going to be shown with a certain amount of material and some ideas. Then we start from there. So, it's always a response to the space and to the environment and to the context in which it's

going to happen. The last two of the more recent shows that we did, were last summer. One of them was in a tiny little Art Centre out in some mountains, in the middle of the countryside, in a converted farm building. We decided to make a piece that was taking a landscape as a starting point. We were looking at the contemporary reaffirming of the idea of landscape. Immediately following that, we went to do another exhibition at Scandinavia's biggest rock festival. That was a piece that was being shown in a big container on the festival site. It was an entirely different audience and an entirely different context. It had to be an entirely different way of working, so the piece we made for that was the opposite of a chill out room. It was a big metal container. It was the middle of summer. It was incredibly hot and it was even hotter inside the container. So we made the space as unpleasant as possible. I showed one tiny piece of video on a miniature LCD monitor, which was strobing images of black and white. It was very unpleasant to look at. Then we filled the space with speakers and had a heavy repetitive metallic noise that was shaking the whole thing. The idea was that all these people who were having a happy, trippy time at the festival could go in there and have a really bad time for a couple of minutes.

ES: What critical feedback or public attention did your work attract?

JW: It varied enormously from being totally ignored to receiving quite positive feedback. *IOD* for example was a work that was pretty well received in many different contexts. That picked up a couple of prizes at international festivals when it was new. It got some ok little write ups here and there. Occasionally things would get written about in the few publications that actually dealt with the area like Independent Video, which was then called Independent Media. It was the house magazine for all of us, for a number of years. Then some of the London weekly publications like Timeout and City Limits used to actually write about video art for quite a while. In terms of critical response in the UK, I think the daily papers at that time never wrote about stuff like that. One of the things that was good about the early screening programmes and events that grew out of Butler's Wharf and then went into LVA, was that you really did have a direct response with the audience. People would talk about what they'd seen and everybody went to the pub afterwards and the conversation continued. So you did feel like you were part of something. There was a definite dialogue around what you were doing, which was nice. Once things move out of that, then of course you never really know, unless you get press critique or you get some feedback from the people that work in the gallery or wherever you are showing your work. Then you are just sending things into a void in a sense.

ES: What attention does your work get at the moment?

JW: It's much the same thing. If it's picked up and somebody reviews it then that's one way that you can measure how it's been received at a certain level or within a certain context. If a lot of people come to the opening of the exhibition and they say positive things or even if they say negative things, if they say something, if they actually speak to you and they actually give you their opinion, that's probably the most gratifying thing, even if they don't like it. At least they have taken the trouble to come and discuss that with you. I think one difference from the time in the old days with LVA, was that it was very much a community, not just within LVA itself but LVA relating to this little sector that was building up with the

other video and new media workshops that were establishing. Everybody was talking to each other and discussing stuff all the time, on many different levels, not just in terms of the work that we were making, but life in general and politics in particular. It was when Thatcherism and Reaganism were at their peaks, so that influenced the way everybody thought and talked about everything. There was definitely a sense that you weren't alone. You knew you were part of something. You were a part of an ongoing dialogue. At a later stage when it gets more like 'working', you feel that you are on your own. You really have no idea what goes on. You send your work out into the world and you have no idea what people think about it or what's happening to it, or if it's working or not. The only way you can measure the few concrete things that you have, is if they get reviewed or if you sell a piece or something like that. That's some kind of feedback, but a lot of the time, you feel like you are in a vacuum. I think that is one of the reasons why I still like doing collaborative work, because it's one way in which you then feel part of something bigger than yourself and you have this dynamic happening, which is important.

SP: Now you're based in Norway. What lead you there?

JW: To a large degree, it was out of frustration. I was frustrated because of ways that funding structures had changed. I felt the options were limited in the kind of work that it was possible to make in Britain or maybe even particularly in London at that moment. There was some strange paradoxical thing. 1990 was the year that I went there and the last piece that I'd had commissioned by Video Positive in 1989, had been really successful in terms of getting shown a lot. It had probably been the most widely shown installation work that I ever made up to that point. It had been shown in Australia, Greece, France, Germany and a whole lot of other places. It was picking up a lot of positive response in all these international exhibitions. I wanted to continue working in that way. I wanted to make more of the same stuff but I couldn't get anybody interested. Nobody would fund that kind of project, there weren't any galleries in London or in Britain that were interested in showing it. It was shown in Liverpool so that was off the map. I just felt like running into a brick wall at that point. The work with the Umbrella was becoming more and more demanding. By that time Michael O'Pray had withdrawn. He'd gone to what then was called North East London Polytechnic and was running the film and video department there. So I was on my own. I was bringing in new people to work with and but the pressure was getting bigger. I felt like a needed to get out of this and find some space to work out what would be my next move. Quite by chance there was an advert in the Guardian one day, saying, "Art Academy in Trondheim, Norway seeks artists with experience of working with video and electronic media to start a new department." I thought, "I can do that!" So, I wrote a letter to them and then forgot about it because it felt like such a shot in the dark. Then, about 4 months later, I got a phone call saying, "Would you like to come over and talk to us about this job"
"You must be joking!" I thought. Anyway I went and they offered me the job. So that was that. I packed up, left London and thought, "I'll stay there for a year. It'll be an adventure. Then I'll come back to London and life will continue as normal" but it didn't.

ES: And so you were teaching?

JW: I was teaching. It was coming out of that depressing environment that was London in 1990. It was amazing in this very exotic place, in the very far North. It's a small city with astounding nature all around it. I was given a relatively big budget to establish a new department and when I first started I had 5 students. I couldn't believe it. It was like Christmas every day to begin with. Then, because I was the first person that was employed to do that kind of job it opened a lot of doors. I was suddenly in demand around Scandinavia and soon I was advising many other art schools in Sweden and Finland. I was advising how they could do it and what kinds of things they might think about. It was really exciting. It was very seductive and I just kind of settled into it.

ES: Something that comes up a lot in these interviews is how important the art school context was for the emergence of video art, both in fact that it provided the technology for a lot of people and also because created a community for them.

JW: Yes, it would never have happened if had not been for those few art schools that pioneered and created a milieu, and then fostered it. They carried on fostering it for actually for a long time. It was also the case that for many years the only people that bought our work were art schools in fact. Selling copies of videos to art school libraries was one of the meagre sources of income that existed.

ES: So when you were at Goldsmith's did you feel that you were part of the community there?

JW: Yes, I was very part of a very special community. It was a tiny group of postgraduates. Everybody had been outside of formal education for some years at that point and all coming from very different backgrounds and different practices. There were only 3 of us that were working with video. We had this incredibly good weekly seminar with Sarat Maharaj as the seminar leader. He introduced me to a lot of new theoretical work that I was not accustomed to, and that created a very, very intensive and very interesting discussion forum. That was one community and then getting involved in LVA was another. It was like two families that I had at the same time, both of which were really important in terms of crystallising certain ideas and certain ways of thinking and looking at certain kinds of possibilities.

ES: Do you think the sense of community is different in Norway or do you see similarities?

JW: Because video was new for Norway, at least within the Norwegian context, one thing that I experienced a lot in the 90's, which was often extremely frustrating, was watching history repeat itself. They were going through things that had happened in Britain in the 70's and 80's. It was delayed. Often enough I was saying, "No please don't go there! I know what's going to happen next." But of course they had to find out for themselves. So there was a kind of deja vu thing sometimes, which was a little hard to take. But, the whole world has changed so much in the last 15 years, and the speed of acceleration in technology and media and global communication has been such that these days, the differences are becoming so marginal wherever you are sitting in the world. If you are within a milieu that has access to all of these tools of communication, then you are involved in the same discussion. The local context that you emerged from certainly impacts upon it, but perhaps it's less significant than the way that you connect to the bigger global reality.

ES: Do you feel that contemporary art historians and critics have a sense of this early history?

JW: In many cases still no, because as yet, it has not proved to be something that is bankable in their terms. One thing that certainly happened is that the whole art establishment or institution has become much more market led and much more fashion conscious than it was back then. However good and however professional and however acute particular curators and critics might be, they won't touch anything that isn't going to work within the paradigm that exists at the moment. If British video art from the 70's and 80's suddenly becomes something that they want to get hold of because they see potential that can be exploited, then they'll look at it. Then they'll use it for something. But, if that's not the case, then it's just part of the undergrowth that's there. Although things may be changing a little bit now, there's still a constant pursuit of novelty and the next big thing. The next 'hot new name' has been so dominant in the whole art world for the past decade that it makes serious appraisal of any history a difficult thing. I think a lot of younger curators and a lot of younger art critics have been so heavily influenced by post-modern theory that they have an almost natural aversion to looking at things in a more retrospective chronological historical context. There is a great distrust of the idea of traditional historicity, which of course you can argue in many ways there are also some valid reasons for that. I think this tendency towards relativism in all areas of critique and discourse is a problem, because it produces this situation where curatorial practice often ends up as nothing more than shopping. You just go and pluck a few things from the shelves and put together a nice mixture. Then it's fairly easy to concoct an argument around it. Because there is access to so much theoretical material that justifies that way of doing things, it's very, very easy to construct convincing arguments for why you are doing it. But at the same time, it means that you can very easily cut everything off from the history and the context that it grew out of.

ES: Would you say that's a universal attitude?

JW: I don't believe in the idea of 'universal' because there are significant differences in different cultures in the world. So what applies to the Western European and American model is probably not true in Asia or Africa or many other places but certainly within our culture it has been a dominant tendency. But, you do see a turning away from that as well. You do see people that have become frustrated and are looking for other ways of thinking about things again.

ES: Were there any particular works that raised contemporaneous philosophical and conceptual debates?

JW: There always are. But rather than individual works it's maybe more that certain things have come around again. Works that have been interesting but that continue to have a similar effect on students or young artists today, for example the early works of people like Nauman, Acconci, Wegman and other American conceptual video artists. They were works that formed our way of thinking when we were students in the 70's. For young students, even now in 2006/2007, they still resonate in the same way. There's something there, which I think is very important. Obviously those artists have been deeply influential

on many of those who became significant or well known during the 90's. One of the other things that I think grew out of the stuff we were doing in the 80's was something that gave rise to the particular problems in terms of theory. Video, as a technology and as a cultural arena, was growing very fast and spreading out into many different areas of life simultaneously. Digital technology was developing very rapidly. You were getting whole new generations of people who grew up with digital technology and electronic media as their primary cultural reference point. It created a sense of where a particular aesthetic practice fitted into a larger cultural and socio-economic reality. That meant that you really could feel that the work you were making was part of a language that had a much greater resonance maybe, than the even more refined and narrow languages of more traditional visual arts. There was this feeling for some time that a practice based within those media and those technologies could actually supersede the discourse of what art had been and become part of something else, but at some point that flipped back on itself and art actually started to infect a much bigger environment. It would be very difficult to date exactly when it happened but at some point art became part of the entertainment industry, which it had never really intended to do, but it happened.

ES: Was there any particular contextual critical writing that you would agree or disagree with.

JW: Yes, I'd always read a lot. I've always read, pretty widely, a lot of different things and they've influenced the way that I've thought and worked. In terms of contextual and critical writing around video art, then there was a great lack of it of course. When we were all starting out, there weren't people writing about it. We were writing about it because somebody had to and nobody else was going do it. There were very few exceptions, like Sean Cubitt being one of the few people, Philip Hayward being another. At that time, in the early 80's, I was reading a lot of contemporary theory: French post-modern theorists like Baudrillard, Lyotard, Virilio, Deleuze. A little later, a lot of the writing started to emerge out of the discussion around cyber culture in the late 80's and early 90's. Critics were following on in the pattern that was set by people like Lippard, Krauss, Hal Foster and others writing about art at that period. Those writings were important and were informing what I was thinking about, but it was a long time before there was anything else. It still is the fact that in the past couple of years, there have been only 4 or 5 books published in Britain about the history of experimental film and video art. That's making up for a lot of lost time. They didn't exist. There weren't any. In an international context there were a few books in German on artists' video, which got published, but never got translated into English, so they were inaccessible. There was some stuff in French, which some of us could just about tackle, and there was the odd thing that came up in the States. A couple of early anthologies put together by people like Doug Hall in the mid 80's, were the first definitive writings about artists' video. Up to that point, the one book that we all had on our shelves and related to in some way, was Gene Youngblood's book, Expanded Cinema, but I always had big problems with that because of the utopian west coast hippy ideology, that especially in the 80's, in London, made no sense whatsoever. The world simply did not work that way. We didn't have any other canon that we could turn to, so it was a question of trying to find relevant arguments where you could, and then trying to manipulate them and mould them to suit the things that you were trying to talk about.

ES: Sometimes it might seem that more people are aware of these things within academia. Do you think that there are more debates within academia, and do you see a difference in the work created by artists based within academia?

JW: There certainly is a difference. The very fact that artists are researchers in academia is something that didn't exist in the 70's and 80's. That has created another reality. It has created another way of working. It has created another way of thinking, another way of discussing, another way of organising things and not least, it has created another way of distributing. It has been created for good and ill. One of the things that I find problematic with that, which I encountered quite often when going to conferences and things, is that I have the phenomenon of the conference artist, the person who writes papers about art projects that they are working on but it never goes any further. It never turns into art, or things that actually go into a gallery and get looked at and evaluated as art. It's only Power Point. Power Point is the ultimate artist's tool in a certain context. I think that's a really big problem because it also produces a pseudo-academicism, a quazi-scientific method, which is actually antiphonal to the way that artists do work. I think when you have this idea of art practice as theory, it has to be predicated on the way that artists actually do work and on the history of those media as they have existed. It's no use just borrowing the methods and the terms of some other scientific or social scientific discourse and trying to make art fit into it. It just produces horrible results when that happens. I think you have to have a very clear and critical view of what's going on, when you enter into this field, of what the academic art discourse has become.

ES: But certainly it's a new community, wouldn't you say?

JW: Yes, it is a new community and it's one that's developing rapidly. Because it is academia and because it has the resources that are available within academia then it has developed organs of communication quite quickly. It's developed for arenas in which things can happen and that's very useful, but I think for me, it's very important to not let it become a cloistered situation that you still have to maintain an act of an ongoing dialogue with what's happening outside, in the real world, both in the real art world and in the real world of everyday culture as well. It's no use just retreating into an academic ivory tower. Of course it can be very amusing to spend your life talking to clever people in other universities, but it's a bit pointless as well. It has to be something a bit more real than that.

ES: Were there any specific facilitators or curators that were important to the exhibition of your works?

JW: Yes, there was Projects UK. Aside from having work commissioned by them, they were always promoting. They were incredibly important in terms of the way that they exposed, not just video art, but all of what you might now call, unstable art forms – performance, short-term installations, people working with experimental sound and all that kind of stuff. They were there all the time. Then there was Video Positive. When FACT came along, that became really important. Chrissie Isles before she went to New York to the Whitney Museum. When she was at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, she was important in terms to bringing that stuff over to a wider art audience. For a time Yvonna Blaswick, when she was running the AIR Gallery and then when she first went to the ICA Gallery,

was quite a staunch supporter of the video art scene in London for a number of years. There was also Maureen Paley when she first started out with Interim Art. Before she went over into the commercial gallery field, she was also actively involved in that stuff. So there was a little core of people who were really important for a time. In Glasgow, the Third Eye Centre, where the National Review of Live Art first started in the mid 80's, was another place where new possibilities were being created.

ES: You mentioned earlier that you enjoy collaboration. Are there many works that you've collaborated on?

JW: Yes. There have been a lot actually. Collaboration has always been there. In between the making of individual pieces there were often little one-off collaborative events with other artists. It has continued in different combinations. There's actually one person that I've worked with for the longest time, a guy called Robert Warby, who is a composer/sound artist/producer. These days he is a BBC anchorman for Radio Three, for their contemporary music programming. We still work together. He's made audio for a lot of my projects during the years. We've collaborated since 1973. It hasn't been all the time, but back and forth, it's always there. He was also a Nyman pupil at the same time as me. He was a frustrated student of classical music, who had absolutely no interest in classical music studies and was deeply into Cage. He wanted to work in the field of contemporary music. We've had a dialogue for three decades on and off.

ES: How would you say that process has worked?

JW: I think artistic process of is very much like having a close relationship with a partner, or with a family. It operates on so many registers and it goes through the whole gamut, from intense mutual communication, to incredible aggression. It needs all of those ingredients. You have to go through conflict as well as very positive consensual things. In that way, it's a very rewarding way of working. You have to expose yourself to a whole lot of stuff that you can simply screen out if you are just sitting alone doing solo work. I think it's good for the soul.

ES: Did you achieve your ambitions of dissemination?

JW: One of the reasons for ever becoming an artist is the little megalomaniac inside you. You are never satisfied on that level. You would always like more, bigger, and better. We would all like to have the personal retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art or wherever, so you never quite give up the ghost. But, on the other hand you do become more realistic over time. You realise that certain choices you've made in your life have meant that certain other things are less likely to happen. I suppose I would have to say, by and large, that I'm not dissatisfied with how things have gone. I'm still able to work within an environment, in a milieu that I find very satisfying to work in. I'm constantly meeting new opportunities and new challenges. It works reasonably well although, of course sometimes, because we are all subject to the same whims of fashion, occasionally you feel disappointed because something that you've done you feel justifiably should be receiving more attention than it has done, but it's just that it wasn't in the right place at the right time. You have to be realistic about those things as well.

ES: Was it necessary to compromise because of lack of exhibition opportunity?

JW: It's always necessary to compromise for one reason or another. That can be to do with access to resources, access to finance to make the things, access to exhibition opportunities, or the quality of the exhibition opportunities that are offered. All of those things have to be taken into account, so there is always compromise. It's not necessarily a bad thing. It's to do with how you negotiate the terms. There are some things that you won't compromise on, that are necessary to hold on to in terms of your own integrity, but there are other things that you realise you have to compromise on because not to do so would just be stupid and counterproductive. You'd get nowhere. You'd have to be willing to negotiate basically.

ES: Would you look back on any works now that you think you had to compromise on at the time?

JW: I can look back on plenty of works and feel dissatisfied with them, whether that's because of compromise is difficult to say. We all make bad creative decisions as well. I've made bad decisions of all kinds. In a longer perspective, my feelings have been confirmed by discussions I've had with colleagues who are all different kinds of artists: painters, photographers or sculptors. When you look back at your work over a longer period you realise the things that really worked, that you are really satisfied with are comparatively few and far between. There are a lot of things that were ok, but they were only ok at that moment in time. They had a potential that existed for a certain period of time but then they don't stand the test of time particularly well. You notice everything that's wrong with them when you look back at them but that's something that you just have to live with. You recognise the things that did work and quite often it's the case that the things that felt absolutely right at the time, really did work and still do. With other things that you were maybe not too sure about, you were probably not too sure about them because actually they weren't that good really. It's better to let them fade away.

ES: So you don't ever feel tempted to retackle them now?

JW: Not retackle as such but through the way that I've worked, there's often been a reprocessing and reuse of the same or similar imagery, which I suppose most artists do in one way or another. Either they make lots of versions of basically the same idea, changing it formally or changing it one way or another, but it's the same thing. Specifically in painting, it's very common for painters to use the same motif again and again and again throughout their work. I've tended to do that. I've tended to very often use similar imagery or similar methods for using the imagery. I've quite often, very consciously and very deliberately quoted an earlier work in a later work. The more recent collaborative project with the painter and the composer has always been reprocessed. It's like a self-renewing project. We have a pool of raw materials and we recombine them in different ways each time we make a new project out of it. It's the same stuff just being edited in different ways to put it in crudely.

ES: Do you think your work has changed as technologies have developed?

JW: Yes and no. It's become a lot easier to make it and the fact that I could sit on the bus and do it on a laptop is obviously a huge difference from the days when you had to sit in a room full of boxes and be a bit like an octopus, having to have your arms everywhere and pushing lots of buttons in rapid succession. It was a bit like being a gymnast in those days. Now you just sit and push tiny little things around on a scratch pad. Obviously it changes things and the fact that it's so easy to undo something and to redo it, means that you can try lots of different versions of something you are working on before you finally commit. Even then you can still go back and change it very easily. It gives you a different feeling of control. But, it also gives you a different attitude towards whether something's actually finished or not. Things remain unfinished for very much longer in digital media, I think.

ES: Do you get nostalgic for old methods?

JW: Not really no. I am never really a nostalgic type of person. In the period from the mid 70's, when things like Butler's Wharf first happened and when LVA came along, it was incredibly important and informative, but it was only for our generation. Every new generation has had its own set of reference points and its own contexts that have formed it, allowed it to stamp its own mark on things, and to forge its own identity, but we all have to keep moving forward. I am always more interested in the next project than the last project. I'm a bit sloppy about taking care of and archiving things because I don't have such a strong passion for the past, although I have a respect for looking at things, and being serious about recording things and about setting things in perspective. But that's not really nostalgia.

AL: Can you talk about your future works or works in progress?

JW: I've just moved into a whole new territory, which is unplanned. The period I am just emerging from with this collaborative work has been very much about the meeting point between fluid digital media and the heavy long, long history of painting. It is particularly about the re-evaluation of some of the central presets of modernism as manifest in abstract painting and then through the tradition of avant-garde cinema from the 20th century and how that fed into the more visual experimental aspects of video art. That's been a painting centred discussion for the past three years, which I've stepped out now. I am doing new works now, which actually again relate to the history of painting or the history of art. It is a two series that I am embarking on. One series is of portraits and the other series is of landscapes. It's taking in an absolutely classical genre as a motif from art history and creating simple short, single screen pieces shot with a camera with absolutely minimal manipulation or digital fiddling about afterwards. They are very straight and simple. The portraits are of women. They are of women who are, in some way, profiled or active within different fields of culture at the moment. Of the first two that I am working with, one is an author, a writer of novels, and the other is a curator. I am going on to do musicians and maybe theatre people. I'm staying away from visual artists at the moment. With the landscapes, the person who has thrust me in that direction is Philip Hayward, who used to be one of the people that wrote about video in the old days. He's been in Australia for a long time now, teaching there has invited me to make something for a big international conference symposium that he's doing next year about island cultures. It is

about marginal places around the world. I'm making a landscape piece about some islands in the far north of Norway in the Arctic Circle. It's nice when opportunities arise and push you into doing something different and into thinking in a different way.

SP: Is there anything else you want to talk about?

JW: One thing that we haven't touched on which was incredibly important during that 80's period, was the influence of feminist theory and the work of a lot of women artists at that time, who were closely involved in our milieu. That certainly changed a lot of attitudes and it changed ways thinking about things. I had a very close collaboration with Cate Elwes for example, and a number of other artists that were around the LVA milieu. Even then, I think a lot of us that emerged from art schools in the early to mid 70's, had ingrained, quite macho attitudes about what an artist was. An artist was still basically a bloke and a bloke behaved in certain kinds of ways and that went pretty much unchallenged. It was reinforced by the education we had. We had very few women teachers in the colleges then and we simply weren't exposed to any idea other than that. The male artist would behave in a certain way and would expect to be treated in a certain way. Although there were a lot of girls at college they were pretty much treated as second-class citizens. They were expected to be decorative more than anything else. We were forced to re-evaluate all of those positions when we met strong women artists in the 1980's. That was a very positive learning experience for a lot of us to go through. That was one of the most important things about that era and it created a really lively discussion. Beyond that, through people like Stuart Marshall, Neil Bartlett, Steve Rogers and a number of others, there was a rising of consciousness around gender and sexuality in general. So, the gay issues coming into art. It was also something that we weren't terribly well prepared for when it suddenly started. It had to be something that we had to deal with.

ES: In Cate Elwes' interview, she feels that as a result, she was seeing more male artists making quite personal introspective works around that time. Would you agree with that?

JW: Yes, I certainly would. I think it definitely made a difference.

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