

“Screenings and Sausage Rolls”

Portrait of Carry Gorney
Lives between London and Eastern France
Artist, writer and psychotherapist

I was brought up in Leeds and my family were German Jewish refugees, my, they came from Berlin. Um and they were very um expressive I guess. And there was a lot of music, and there was a lot of waving arms around and and my dad had an 8 millimetre camera and used to constantly be filming and I've only recently made the connection kind of looking at old films that um that filming and recording um has always been part of my life. And I've now looked at that. There's some old films of 1937 before he left Berlin of the how the shop where he bought the camera and the um coat that he bought to leave Berlin in and I I guess that made me start thinking about personal stories and recording personal stories and actually valuing them because um because they're precious.

Studying drama at Manchester University in the early 1960s

I really didn't like the course in Manchester at all. It felt like it was totally about Western drama. You know you know a third of the course was Shakespeare, Chekhov, Ibsen all of all that stuff. I just made very few connections with it. The person who was very interesting there was Stephen Joseph who started the theatre in the round in Stoke-on-Trent in the early/mid sixties and he said if you want to be a theatre practitioner you have to learn how to do everything, you do the lights, you do the stage management, you make the costumes, you design the scenery, you understand how the whole thing works and that kind of total thing stayed with me um when I moved into the community arts field.

We did a studio production called *The Sport of My Mad Mother* by a woman called Angelico who did huge community drama productions. She did a thing for the Girl Guides with a hundred Girl Guides in it or something and I was very excited by that idea of participation and *The Sport of my Mad Mother* was set on a housing estate and it was it was in the language of the housing estate um and this is this is 1965.

And so it was just on the cusp of kitchen sink drama and John Osborne and Shelley Delaney and *This Sporting Life* and *A Kind of Loving* those sort of Northern gritty novels and and they were about real people and that was what was what was what was um, you're right, I mean that what was what was exciting me and what I was moving into. And um and that the language and the kind of adolescent energy in *The Sport of my Mad Mother* was yeah that was taking me to another dimension I think.

Working at the Manchester Library Theatre and discovering improvisation

So by the time I left Manchester I knew um that I didn't want to stay in 'the theatre' and after saying that I got at the Manchester Library Theatre straight after I graduated a wonderful director called Tony Colgate and he was part of a network there was David Scace at the Liverpool Everyman. These were all left-wing socialist directors and putting on those kind of plays. And I worked at the Library Theatre for a season actually before coming down to London. And was in a big improvisation project with Phillip Hedley, who I think is still going now at Theatre Royal Stratford East, which involved kids and again a massive production in the style of Angelico with over 100 kids performing different scenes and improvising different scenes. That's where I got in to improvisation and getting people to develop material about their own lives and was becoming increasingly fascinated by people's own stories and how you could actually present them in a way that was exciting for other people to watch.

Moving to London in 1967 in search of the alternative arts scene

The idea of London I suppose it was like like the stories I'd heard of Berlin and the um the energy and the vitality and the counterculture. And I kind of built up a fantasy that I would find that in London which I guess to some extent I did I think. So I was um I graduated in the mid 60s and I'd I'd moved down to London in '67 '68 and you could supply teach and earn 60 pounds a day. You only have to work two days a week and the rest of the time I was going around places like the Drury Lane Arts Lab and the Mercury Theatre Notting Hill and the Roundhouse and just exploring what was going on in the alternative art scene.

You know when it came down in my little brown dress for the white Peter Pan collar and looking very neat and lace up shoes and you know within six months I was dancing in bare feet down Chalk Farm Road with flowers in my hair. But it was I didn't really realise that I was moving into the whole hippy scene as well at that time. But I was quite quite quite earnestly focussed on on the art scene and left wing theatre but in sort of knowing that there was going to be something on the streets to engage in.

Meeting Ed Berman and starting to work with children and young people

In '68 I met Ed Burman who was um he was an he had not started Inter-Action yet and was working in the Mercury Theatre bringing in avant guard groups from the states La Mama theatre troupe and different theatre troops. And through Ed I met people who'd work with Bread and Butter theatre they use giant puppets on the streets. And um and um that's how I got involved and Ed Burman was at that time working in Notting Hill and doing youth work basically with kids under the motorway under the West Way. And I got involved with that and we were using

games which became a kind of trademark of Interaction's work creative games. We were using games with kids under the motorway and I did that for two or three months and then I decided if I really was interested in working with kids which I loved. Um I needed to understand what was happening what education was about and how you work with kids how you organize. So I then went back to Leeds which is where I came from and got a job in a secondary school and worked in a secondary school for about 18 months - couple of years teaching Drama and English and learning about the education system, learning how to teach.

Using video for the first time with mothers and babies a Family Service Unit (FSU)

So I was between Leeds & London. In Leeds at some stage I work with a friend in an in family service units which was a social work agency for very challenging families and I can't remember but we got hold of a TV camera and took it into this room of mums and their babies, this is in the late 60s it must have been '69 in family service units and we just this friend of mine Sue Roberts and I were just playing with a camera and we were both mind blown at the effect on these mums with their with their babies when you played back the tapes. So we we videoed a bit. We put the tech camera on closed circuit so there was a TV screen in the room that people could see themselves in in real life without with their babies and they started smiling and saying 'hey I can do this I'm not that bad with my baby' All the stuff went on and I will never forget I think we only did one or two or three sessions and that was the beginning of video and actually now 40 years later or whatever it is I'm still doing similar work. From there I was. I was. I thought it was extraordinary how powerful video was and could see immediately that you could give people a voice in and just basically give the camera to them to to explore what they wanted to explore and see themselves on the screen. I immediately saw the possibility of making making their programmes. And it felt to me so much more alive and so much more relevant than anything I'd been doing in theatre. That was the transition.

To me thats the heart of what I do, and what I've been doing for years. Just trying to capture moments where people get a sense of themselves, as a human being. Being themselves and thats ok, and actually feeling good about who they are and what they do. I think thats the reason I've been using video. Thats why I do it.

Inter-Action Arts

Inter-Action was one of the um I would say one of the major community arts organisations of the 60s, 70s into the early 80s and worked in Chalk Farm as a co-operative living and working co-operative. So everybody was paid the same and lived in condemned housing in Camden and we were one of a network of

similar kind of groups which sprung up very much round Prince of Wales Road, Queen's Crescent this area of Kentish Town/Chalk Farm. Interactions activities included a theatre in the West End where they did the first gay season the first women's season. They did a whole series of innovative programs for giving minority groups a voice and that was one side of our work and the other side of our work was community work we run an alternative education project. We started a city farm movement. We started using open space sports activities in the neighbourhood. I was involved in the group work and the development of group work theatre work and the development of arts activities for kids in formal and less structured situations basically.

On the road with the Inter-Action Community Media Van

The Inter-Action community media van was this big red van Mercedes van that was er was funded through an exhibition called 'How to play the environment game' which travelled, funded by the Arts Council, travelled around the country over a year. The van itself had two television screens on the side, a projection at the back, you could show movies at the back. It had a radio telephone system so you could phone up the council and have an argument or discussion with a local councillor about whatever the issue was. And it had um video editing equipment inside and Sony Portapak portable equipment that you could loan local groups to go out make their films and then they could show the films on the side of the van at the end of the day. And it travelled round the country and I was on the van. It spent a month in Newcastle and a month in Sheffield and I think I spent maybe the whole, that amount of time in each. I was with them when they were in the north of England.

I was working alongside the people, the more technical people on the van and a guy called Clive Scollay who was in charge of running the Van who was a very good community media worker. And I think that's where I learnt a lot of of just making films with with local people about local issues. We also integrated using video as part of street theatre to gather children together they sat in groups. That's all on the film, they sat in groups. They made their own films and then played them back asked their mums and dads to come at the end of the day. Played them back on the screen on the side of the van so that was the media van and that was around '71, '72.

Defying Infrastructure - taking art to the streets and in to peoples homes

I thought it was brilliant and I thought what I learned was not to work in buildings where a huge amount of money was invested, not to go to structures that that um you know middle class structures that are built in areas that where where people are expected to cross main roads and go through dangerous underpasses to get to do there but to do their thing but to be mobile and light on your feet and to

carry the stuff to where the people are with whom you want to work. And already by doing that and you were showing respect and showing that you cared enough to engage those people and in return they were they became curious and they became more open and they would trust you.

At time there was a lot of youth, detached youth work stuff that went on on the streets and in very informal places. I kept away from youth clubs. I kept away from pensioners clubs. I just worked really on the street and in people's houses and did that for a number of years afterwards. And there was something very exciting about filming people about about complaining about the traffic and the kids and doing it in their houses like you're doing this and and having a cup of tea with them and and it was a completely different feel and the kind of ownership that people felt over the material was completely different to if you asked them to come to an Arts Centre or a building. That's that's what happened there, that's what I was learning.

Mobility and the ownership of Community Video material

It's about, it's about that person or the people on that street owning their material which means they own what they're thinking about they own what they want to happen and they um and I saw my job really as just enabling them to have a voice to express that. Then the material has to stay with them. It's not it is not mine it isn't, it isn't to make me a you know a wonderful video artiste it's for them to be able to be very clear and have the confidence to um to express what they want to express and make the demands they want to make. And I mean that's at the heart of I think the work that was going on in the 70s at its best that that was what we were we were all. I mean I'm expressing something that was part of a movement here. I mean I'm not just talking about Inter-Actionbut I'm talking about a whole range of people who were involved with video or any expressive arts activity. But I think particularly video because it was transportable. And um people could relate to it because of the experience of watching TV. But that's that's at the heart of it.

And to me at that time and then for the following decade at least in my mind I would be watching very carefully the video people that I was connected with. How were they using the material? How were they reaching the people they wanted to work with? And actually what happened to it? So your then in to, who watches this? Who takes it to the people who need to see it? If it's a pressure group, does it suddenly become you know the middle class worker who's brought the equipment in who takes it to the town hall or does it, is it possible. How do it how do you make those those those connections? And um um and where else is it seen? How do you create local viewings?

That's why I like the van because you just parked it somewhere and you could you could watch it and the local community hall or on the street. We did

programs in Milton Keynes where we'd just park the car on the street and the back, on the edge of the street corner and have the screen lifted the boot, had the screen on the back and then people would come and watch it and you'd run screenings and screenings and sausage rolls during the evening and and things like that. But but the the whole concept of mobility was was absolutely fundamental for me.

Inter-Action in Milton Keynes

Inter-Action was invited by the Milton Keynes development corporation to create a community project to bring people together. At that stage this was '75 '76. It was a few isolated housing estates in the middle of the Buckinghamshire countryside with a most hostile and unfriendly network of roads. There was no transport to get to the local shops. There was three local towns at the edges of what was going to be the new town. There was Bletchley, Woolverton and Newport Pagnol but they were miles away from these housing estates. No transport to get to them. Miserable corner shop which was very expensive on the estates and people kind of dumped there from London, from Glasgow, from I think Birmingham but different part of the of of the country and the Development Corporation asked us to develop a community project and gave us a building um in the south of the city. Ah and that's that's what I I um I was I ran the project for oh two/three years.

The building became an albatross for me. And I was always struggling with how to use the building, people couldn't get to it. It was a 200 year old rectory. It's a very nice building, people couldn't get it because they couldn't cross the V8. Um get they had to go through an underpass, or get a bus, or go round roundabouts or it was, it was impossible. So I'd become more and more projects on the housing estates.

Sweet 16

So I did this project on one estate which was already identified as a problem estate. And got the kids who were under 16 to interview anybody who was over 16 on their memories of of what it was like to be 16: the music, the clothes, the boyfriends, the arguing with your parents. And it just took off.

And the most interesting part of sweet 16 was we sat in people's houses in their living rooms like this, and there was somebody, the person whose house was invite a cross-section of people on the street to come in. So there were people of 75 there were people of 25 there were people of 50 and everybody sat there drinking tea and laughing and joking and talking about their memories. And singing the tunes and it just gathered momentum so at the end of every week we had a street party where people brought their records of when they were 16 and

everybody did dances and so on and this was, and the video was a key part of making that work.

I was very interested in the use of video as at this time as a tool for just getting people together it wasn't um I was moving into oral history much more than a more politicized local politics local social stuff. And um I really loved this of people I loved this the kids listening to these elderly people's stories and then dressing up as they would. You know they pulled their stuff out of the wardrobe. The kids dressed up as they would have been at 16 and demonstrated the dances. And um it was lovely. It was it was a very interesting project. That was when I started working with the Milton Keynes cable TV community cable TV channel 40.

Working with Channel 40 - The Milton Keynes community cable TV network

It was called open access television. And the idea was that that people could access these local homemade programmes down the cable. And Swindon did the first experiment as open access with people just coming in and making programs. And then one of the staff of Swindon came to Milton Keynes and set up the second one.

And the idea was because the estates were cabled up that you could put lots of other things down the cable and why not put a community channel. And I thought it was an incredibly interesting possibility.

Debating the value open access TV with Channel 40

The people from Channel 40 were were very interested in working with me on it. And I had an a fundamental argument with channel 40 the cable TV cos they were what they called open access for anybody in Milton Keynes could come into the Channel 40 studios pick up a Sony Portapak and do whatever they liked. And I um I felt that to get richer material and err you needed to create a framework and a starting point and then from that framework people would expand it as their confidence grew and as their ideas developed.

Making Women Talking and Thing That Mother Never Told Us

Channel 40 worked very closely with me. Um they they because they were very interested in this idea of creating a framework rather than just being a resource in the studio again the building the people came to. And what what I did was was through play projects and other arts projects and Sweet 16 I knew networks of women around Milton Keynes and um I asked them if they'd be interested in just making a series of programmes that could be on the cable about their lives and

about the things that they were concerned with in terms of their kids growing up in the new town. And that's what we did. And I took the format that I really liked in Sweet 16. And we did it in people's houses and we sat in people's houses and talked about all kinds of things and it grew. And after we'd done a few general conversations which are in the film 'Women Talking' um they began to be more focused and said look we'd like to do some programmes about starting school and about the need for a hospital and about a programme called 'Home School Link'. And that's how they developed more specific programmes. I worked on it for a year. The initial conversation programmes in people's houses.

And what I did was we we have these general conversations which covered: Relationships, children, marriage, the way you were brought up, your dreams and wishes for your children, the need for a hospital they um and then more people would would would say they want to be part of it. Can we have another discussion. So the way I structured that was I brought the film from the first discussion into the second discussion and showed it maybe all of it maybe editing it or maybe just I dunno pieces of it and then stop stopped it. And then they started talking again. And we filmed again and we got very rich material very quickly.

I then had to umm raise with the women that they needed to to edit this stuff. And so everything took place in people's houses cos they had young kids and there was they the issue of baby sitting. So then I'd drag the editing equipment which was not small into their living rooms. And we sat at at night and we we edited or certainly logged the material and they they they chose every piece that was ever shown. They chose every word. And I was just a resource for it. I could not have done it without the technical support of Channel 40.

It was quite a lot of work to get to. For people to have the confidence that they could do this technical process. And of course the Channel 40 technicians, they were both guys who worked with me. they also did the filming for this and this one guy was brilliant. Cliff Evans. Cliff was in the community video movement of the 70s and he was there. He did the filming. You couldn't see him. You didn't. He just became the wallpaper. He was just extraordinary. And um but I was really grateful to have that support. It was too much for one person to do.

Most of the time the technology itself was a means to an end for me and I I actually feel quite ashamed that I was often dependent often on blokes to make sure that the lens cap came off, or it was plugged in or, my excuse for that is that I was always totally engaged with the groups that I was working with.

The women's movement & facilitating discussions on female identity

I read quite a lot around the the the women's movement at that at the time. Um The Women's Room and stuff by Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer and um

Shiela Robotham and a whole a whole I read a lot of the stuff and I went for a period of time I went to consciousness raising groups when I was in Inter-Action in in London.

What struck me about it was that they were all women, mainly women who were graduates and very articulate and people who had a lot of choices in their life like I did and I could make absolute choices about not being married about carrying on working the way that I was about um um having or not having children. Was it you know that we were all on the pill it was all, it was all kind of, it was easy then. I was very struck by, even before I went to Milton Keynes that women who lived on the housing estates, er who had not had educational opportunities they led a very different life and feminism hadn't touched them at all. And that that informed that 'Mother Never Told Us Project'. And I wanted to see what happened if you raise these kind of issues and these kind of conversations what, how that's, how those conversations would go and how they might be different.

It was that it was who are you? Who am I as a woman? And what is my aspiration and how do my personal private aspirations about relationships and about babies how does that connect and fit with my identity as a woman who wants to carry on doing stuff out there. And the women, the mothers that I was talking to in those groups on those films were saying what else what else am I? Apart from a woman who has babies and puts her husband's dinner on the table. They say some fantastic things about that. Now I come to the when I have the baby I'm in the foreground and then afterwards I'm back again. And you know I was listening to that and I was thinking, okay so if I if I have a baby so everything will be special but then will I have will I have to struggle like mad to do what I'm doing now. So it was that that was what was going on a lot.

Becoming a participant

I was no longer somebody here from a community arts organisation making the doing something with people I just through the discussions, through the relationships that developed in the programme. I was one of the 14 key women who became part of it. And I mean but you know to be completely honest my energy and my community work and animation skills by that time I was in my early 30s I think by then I um clearly I think I used those skills to get other people involved. But the fabric of the conversation, we were talking about what was preoccupying me as much as them and about um Women's issues and it was like it was the beginning of being able to talk about the things that you kept in your head or you only maybe whispered to a best friend.

And suddenly we were sitting in groups whether you were in more middle class groups here in Tufnell Park um conscious women's consciousness raising groups or I mean I was clearly influenced by that experience by setting up these groups and but letting it go where the women wanted to talk and how the women wanted

to reflect on um on what was going on in their in their lives. Um and yeah I was one of them, with some differences because in a lot of cases I had educational advantages that they had not got. But a number of them went off and got them afterwards.

I've often wanted to find them again now some of those women in Milton Keynes. And did they stay or did they move on? I know some of them actually did separate from their partners and go to college and and develop their own careers. I'm not necessarily putting a value on that. But actually where you know it, for me it raised and for them it raised where do we feel comfortable? Who are we? And where do we feel comfortable? And how do we express those things?

The Community Video Movement - a male dominated movement?

My experience through Inter-Action and Channel 40 and um Leeds to some extent, although that was earlier, was that that the community video movement was a male dominated movement. And I I have been fairly shallow and scathing in my life and said it was it was some boys playing with toys and equipment and technology. And it's a male it's a male thing. And I think that's a very facile way of thinking about it. But I think. I think certainly men have more confidence perhaps to handle the technology.

But I wasn't at the heart of the Community Video movement I was more generalist Yeah I was doing different different things. I was quite often intimidated by um very articulate, very um, very left politically guys who took, you know, took the reins really. I mean I think that was part of what going off to Milton Keynes and just doing my own thing on my on my own. I think that's also how that that that happened.

As you can see I chose to be a field worker and a grass roots worker and that's that's what I always was and still am, if I do that work. And it wasn't the grass roots workers who necessarily were the people who carried the banner of the rhetoric. Different, different animal different way of talking and operating.

From Milton Keynes to Long Beach California

I um left Milton Keynes and went to the States for a while, again with Inter-Action, and I used video in Long Beach California and made, made some videos which are not dissimilar with some Mexican, young Mexican American women, some of them were teenage mothers um about their lives in Long Beach.

Motherhood and re-training as a family therapist

And then I um (breath) adopted my son and that took over my life for a while. Um and actually it took me into a completely other frame which was about about relationships and child development and I I did, I developed a set of materials for working with. There's a thing called Nurture groups in schools this is back in England in London. I'm working with diff with children with difficulties and I joined up with the woman who had set these nurture groups up in in we're now in 1984 I think. And we both developed a programme for these kids in in in schools. And I was um struggling with all with everything that the Milton Keynes women struggled with. I was struggling with that and working and my little boy and um and then um politically the whole climate changed and we didn't have any money for any of this. Thatcher came in and I re-trained as a family therapist

Using video again as a family therapist in the NHS

What I've what I've been doing most recently is working in the NHS as a family therapist and using video again in a very very simple way simply filming often just mothers and their babies and young children but sometimes both parents. Um just filming if you like the magic moments, the moments, split seconds, that really work between those those in those between those family relationships. I um I film for about 20 minutes / half an hour and then I just edit these these magic bits together and they come back in and they look at them and they can see that they can do it. They can see that there is something really lovely in their relationship with their kids. Sometimes they can show these tapes to their mother in law to the family. They have tea parties and show them. But um it's very very simple and for me the wheels come full circle. This is what I was doing in Family Service Units in 1969. And now at the end of my career nearly 50 years later. I'm doing the same thing again. I've been allowed to do it in the NHS because I can describe myself as a family therapist. But the work is simple and it's the same, and it doesn't involve a lot of therapy speak. It's about seeing it's about observation and it's about the video camera noticing and noticing what's good and what's what's working and giving people the confidence to do more of it.