

Tony Dowmunt – Interviewed by Heinz Nigg for the Community Video Project

HN: I'd like to find out what the relationship is between your upbringing and your involvement in community video...

TD: I was born in Sussex, in a little village called Newick. My father was Polish, he was a Polish airman and he was, he came to this country in 1939, at the start of the war. Eventually to join the Polish air force here. My mother was kind of, I'd guess I'd describe her as upper-class English...and they met after the war. She was involved in the air-force because one her uncles was...he was very high up in the RAF, anyway. And my father was involved in Polish air-force association business, so they met through that. He was a mushroom farmer; he cultivated mushrooms on land that my mother had inherited. So I had a very, in a sense a very mixed background in that way.

I was born in the house that my mother inherited, and which he created this mushroom farm around.

HN: And what are your memories of your childhood?

TD: It was...in some ways kind of, sort of idyllic even. The garden, the house was enormous...I had a very strong sense of kind of freedom, in terms of being able to wander around a lot, and we had dogs, I loved the dogs. So in lots of ways it was really nice. I think my mother was quite a troubled person, and she was um for a time I think early on in my childhood she was seeing a psychiatrist, and I think she had a form of nervous breakdown quite early in my childhood. So it wasn't, it was contradictory in some ways. And I was also sent away to boarding school when I was 9, so that in some way was a sort of rupture with my life up to that point, and, yeah and has affected me emotionally in lots of ways since then but...

HN: And what about your father, your relationship with your father?

TD: He was, I was very very distant from him, until quite late on, until my sort of, when I was 40, 50...he was kind of, he seemed always very remote from the family, from *me* anyway, I think less so from my sister. And so, and I found him quite, in a way, quite intimidating, he was quite a distant presence. That very much changed later in my life, but I wasn't close to him at all.

HN: What was his original job?

TD: He was an agricultural economist in Poland...the opportunities for university educated Poles in England in the '40s were not great, so he re-trained as a mushroom farmer.

HN: You mentioned your sister, how many children were there in your family?

TD: My father was married before so I have a half-sister, more Polish half-sister, but also I only have one slightly older sister, so there were only 2 siblings in my family of origin...

HN: What were the positive values that your parents instilled in you?

[...]

What I...the things that I remember being really positive about my childhood aren't really to do with my parenting, although maybe slightly to do with my...in a way it was quite a secure home, and it was relatively prosperous, so at a kind of material level it was great. And the sense of space in the house and in the garden around the house was fantastic. I mean that, I still think I have that um...I've moved back to the same area I was brought up in, and I think that's a lot to do with geography and the feeling of space, in a way. So that's positive, I think, and that sense of internal freedom that you get from that sort of external environment I think has been very strong in me. In terms of how I feel about my background socially is that, I spent years and years, and in some ways it's still with me, feeling quite sort of alienated from the class that I was born into, and the kind of assumptions about the world that came with that class. And, modified to some extent by having a foreign Dad, but still having a sense that I was born into a class whose assumptions I didn't like and I've always felt, even before I understood about class, you know I always felt uncomfortable with my mother's attitudes to people who she thought were common, or from lower orders, there was that sense of kind of...But for me the people who worked for my Dad, who worked on the mushroom farm, were always much nicer to me than my mother and father's friends, in a way, you know, so I felt the injustice of that I felt strongly as a kid, and as a teen...

HN: What were your relationships like with other children and teachers?

TD: I can't remember much about...in terms of, I had one or two close friends, one particularly close friend, who I played a lot with as I grew up, so I had a sense of closeness with other people in the area before I went to school. I don't remember much about the schools I went to before, one was a little local school run by a woman called Miss Cole, but I can't remember her face or anything. And I went to a school called Lewes Grammar School, which was a sort of paying day-school between 8 and 9, I don't remember very much about that, apart from the fact that my mother got extremely alarmed 'cos she said I was getting a common accent 'cos I went to this place, apparently my Os, I've never been able to pronounce my O's properly since I went to that place.

HN: What did you like to do as a child before you went to boarding school?

TD: I think I'd started to become interested in drawing and art before I went to boarding school...a bit. Climbing trees I was seriously into...throughout my childhood...Apart from that, can't remember, can't think of anything particular...

HN: What happened to you when you went to boarding school, was it a place with (any) good memories?

TD: I think the fundamental experience of going away and dealing with being on your own is very difficult, and was very difficult for me, though I think that there were ways in which I was already alienated from my parents in some way...so it didn't make a massive amount of [different], it didn't feel like I was torn out of a cosy environment and put in an alien one, but it was, in some ways it was I guess difficult. But maybe it was more sort of confirming of the alienation than it was formative.

HN: Before you talked about your parents and your class...what about your, how many years were you in boarding school?

TD: Nine until thirteen and then another school from fourteen to seventeen.

HN: That's a long time! How has boarding school affected you?

TD: In different ways...the first school I went to actually really formed me creatively, so I have very good memories of that. I decided that I wanted to be a filmmaker there, and made...There was a teacher there who was [an] extremely talented guy, who energized a lot of us into being interested in film and sound recording and creativity. So I wrote audio plays and we had a sort of audio, radio thing that we used to get played to the whole school. And it was a very creative time for me, and I discovered that sense of the importance of me of creativity generally but specifically film. I got very interested in film by the end of, by the time I was 13 we made a, myself and this teacher made this kind of film, semi-autobiographical home movie type film, at the end of my time in that school.

So, though it was difficult being taken out of the home environment in some ways, in lots of ways I think that period is still the bedrock of my sense of the importance of creativity and my enthusiasm for film.

HN: What was the role of the creative or artistic activities? What was the purpose of art of creativity in your life? In that time...?

TD: I'd say, probably that what I was doing was sort of forging an identity for myself. That felt more kind of truly me than, than the kind of social expectations that I felt from my background. I mean...the film that I was citing that we made when I was 13 was about me as a sort of dissident boy scout - badly dressed, rebelling, falling in love with this sheep. And this sheep was this symbol, in a way, of difference, and something that I was kind of reaching for. Of course that's making it sound very serious, when now it's very funny to look at. But I guess for me creativity was a kind of vehicle for carving out an imaginative space for myself and projecting myself into this.

HN: Social class was a problem for you, what about boarding school and social class...?

TD: There were, you could, particularly the second school I went to, which was very different, which I hated in a way, I didn't [hate] the first I went to. It was very stratified – literally, because there was a house for day-pupils rather than boarders. And there was a sense that the day-pupils were different from the boarders. It was stratified, and a factory for producing young men who [at one time] were going to be conformist and who originally were going to become colonial administrators, and now were going into finance or law. So you definitely had a sense of it being a factory for a certain kind of class position, in a way. And that was because I was there in '67, '68. I think I left in the end of '67 but there was already that sense of ferment in the outside world, which was reflected in the school, and there were a number of us who were quite rebellious...both against their hierarchy in the school, and implicitly against the surrounding society in a way. The key document for that is Lindsay Anderson's film *If...* which I saw maybe a month or two before I left the school. I was that guy behind the machine gun, with that degree of anger and alienation...shooting the staff and parents at an open day...

[...]

15.25

TD: No I'm a peaceful soul really!

[...]

HN: Now it's very interesting to learn...what did you do after you left school? Was it a problem to be with the boarders, amongst this class?

TD: Oh yeah I felt...It's not a problem, in the sense that it's a privilege up to a point. But I never identified with what I thought I was supposed to identify with. I suppose the classic incidence of that – and there were boys who did – but the classic incidence I remember, we were supposed to uh, if you were in a higher form or a higher common room, you were supposed to be able to order around and punish boys in a lower form or lower common room or whatever. And there was a boy from a lower common room in the common room I was in, I was in the middle common room at the time. And I was spouting off about how crap I thought the school was, and how the rules were crap etcetera and after this younger boy had gone I was not physically but sort of emotionally assaulted by this character who had become, he was one of my colleagues in the middle common room, who had become so incensed not by what I was saying, although he didn't like that, but the fact that I said it in front of a younger boy, who we were supposed to have authority over. So the sense of that stratification, those rules were very strong.

HN: So what happened to you when you left boarding school...this was '67, '68?

TD: I was...they were aware in the school that I was becoming very disenchanted and alienated, so they put me in for Oxford entry, when I was very young, I was 17 or something.

And I managed to get a place, again very, it was really I felt, in retrospect I was younger even than my years. And they...uh so I had a few months off, did the gap...it wasn't a year, but 3 months travelling in Europe, and then went to Oxford. In a way, in retrospect it was like I was on this railway, it wasn't like I was making a choice, it was designed for me.

HN: And during your 3 months of travels, what did you experience?

TD: All kinds of hairy things really, but it was interesting, we slept on beaches...

[Break in recording]

TD: So it was um uh I mean it was in some ways very scary, because it was very sort of adult and I was very young, still. It was travelling with a close friend, so that meant it wasn't lonely, but it was scary a lot of the time, sleeping out, and all that was scary. But I think it sort of...I suppose the bits that I can remember really, the best stuff was eating very cheap spaghetti in Florence and being exposed to non-English culture in a way that was very visceral, because it was right there, sort of thing. I don't remember it being particularly formative for me, or much to do with my working life, but it was an important experience.

HN: And then in Oxford?

TD: As I say I think I was much too young, in a way, to go to University and to really exploit it, to really make use of it. So I felt scared and young a lot of the time. I did find a way through it by hanging out with American draft-dodgers basically, which is, happened to be where I ended up living, in a house full of American draft-dodgers. And that was very formative for me politically, and, in a way, it was where I learned to smoke dope, and the politics of the '60s were very present, this is like '69 and the Vietnam War was still going, they were in England to avoid all that. So it was very formative for me politically. I didn't become particularly politically involved in Oxford, except through those sort of social relationships. I was, I really pursued interests in film, there, a lot. So I was part of the, we used to meet in the Museum of Modern Art in the basement in Oxford, and sort of lie around on damp cold mouldy mattresses watching Andy Warhol films, all of that was really formative. And there was a Godard festival there, and I saw something like 14 Godard films in 2 days, you know. Which is also like, I ended up at the end of university, I always knew that I wanted to be a filmmaker, really...so I applied to film school at the end of my time in Oxford, and got in, with all of these ideas about Godard and politics.

HN: Before we go into that, what did you study at Oxford?

TD: English. Literature, basically.

HN: Was it important for you?

TD: That's what I was really good at, at school. And I enjoyed it. And the teacher that I had at school, he was one of the good things about the public school I was at, he was very

enthusiastic about Anthony and Cleopatra...I still love that play. So I liked it, but at Oxford I always felt like it was very stuffily taught. So I was always looking for different ways of attacking the curriculum, that subverted it. So I found bits of Marxist critiques...and I ended up studying American literature in my last year, because that was the only way you could study anything that was in the 20thC basically.

[gap to sort out microphone]

HN: OK when you finished at Oxford, how did you go about your film studies?

TD: I applied for a two-year course at a film school in Guilford. And uh yeah, so, because I knew I always wanted to do film. The, my experience of that school was um was mixed, in the sense that it was a very, I think this is true of every film course at the time, but it was very, very traditional. So the people who taught it were either on the fringes of the film industry, so making corporates or other sort of commercial 16mm filmmaking. Or they were from mainstream television. There were 1 or 2 exceptions to that, but basically that was what the staff was. And that was in an institution called the West Surrey College of Art & Design, which used to be called Guildford School of Art, until '68 when there was one of the art school revolutions there, and they were desperately trying to distance themselves from what happened in the late '60s. I went there in '72. It was very traditional, industry-oriented...they made it absolutely clear that they weren't about creativity, or messing about, wasting your time. It was vocational, and traditional, you were supposed to get jobs [at the end of it]. All of that I found really alienating; it wasn't what I was going there for at all. And you know I was there because, in a sense, I was this maniac Godard fan from Oxford. So I had lots of really intellectual ideas about film and about particularly I'd started to think about representation, which is what Godard's work particularly at that time, was all about. Representation and who gets to represent what, and the politics of all of that. So I was really into that, when I went there. So the idea of being trained as a mainstream filmmaker of television maker was off my planet, I wasn't there at all. And I also felt actually intimidated and alienated by film itself, the business that we learnt of loading a 16mm roll in a bag and the kind of, what can go wrong with film, which is multiple. I felt that the technology was massively alienating to me; it was very...you had to be very well trained to be able to use it. And that all felt kind of elitist and um intimidating to me. So half-way through my time at film school, I read an article in Sight and Sound called 'The Mirror Machine' by George Stoney, and it was about the use of portable video, particularly in the States and Canada, and what portable video offered. And it kind of immediately was, spoke to me as something that was a concrete alternative, both technically as video, and in terms of working techniques, to professional 16mm film, or professional television studio work. So I, myself and a colleague from the, another student from the film school decided to go to visit George Stoney and uh video groups in the States, and the Challenge for Change programme in Canada, as a way of understanding this work, trying to find out what was going on...I think it was probably about a month, we hung about in New York with

alternative video groups, chatted to George Stoney at the Alternate Media Centre where he was at the time, spent a week with Videofreex, who were a kind of...group, fantastic group who lived in Maple Tree Farm in upstate New York, went up there from, to Montreal, and hung out at the Challenge for Change in the videotheque in Montreal, so, it was a crash course in basically, community video or alternative video. And one of the characteristics at that time, of course, was that there wasn't as mass...people who were into the video, particularly in the States, where like Videofreex ran a community cable station, but they also had video artists as part of a commune who were doing far out stuff with video art, there wasn't a separation [between community video and video art]. That was, in a sense, the beginning of my working life, seriously - that I thought, this is what I want to be doing.

HN: Did you keep in touch with people in the States and Canada in later years?

TD: I certainly kept in touch with George Stoney; I visited George Stoney a few years before he died actually, in New York. And there are people that I know from the States...I don't know anyone from Videofreex anymore.

HN: They've just made a film...and they're showing it all over the place. Very successful in reflecting their history. When we look back now at these first encounters with community video in the States and Canada, what do you think it was from those ideas, what did you bring over to London?

TD: Well probably an enormous number of things, but the 2 things that occur immediately. One is that it is just the idea of accessibility, that the Portapak is something that anyone can pick up and use. And the link between that and politics, in the sense that uh, you know, most people are excluded from being able to represent themselves, and the Portapak is a way of redressing that balance. I think that...certainly Maple Tree farm and the Videofreex and the work they were doing, they had a kind of community cable TV station in Maple Tree Farm, which was tiny village actually, it was a few hundred people I think. That experience of being around when they were making programmes for that cable station, so those kinds of things.

HN: And what was your impression of that great pioneer in the States, Stoney?

TD: George was an extremely nice man, in a way, so it was like, my main feeling about him is that he was a really really good humane bloke, but also he was very, he was very connected to Challenge for Change, and he was very big in the whole cable TV community movement in the States, so he was very well informed. I think the main thing I thought about him then and in the subsequent meetings was that he was somebody I was drawn to because of his values really, very interesting bloke.

HN: Did you also meet Klein in Montreal, of [VTR] St Jacques?

TD: No...I can't remember who I met up with in Challenge for Change. No.

HN: OK so you came back to the UK, and what happened?

TD: Well I had another year in Guilford 'fighting the man' in the art school! Produced what one of the tutors said was the worst television programme he'd ever seen in his life. It probably is pretty bad, actually. It was a sort of Godardian pan up and down of a row of television monitors, with stuff playing on it, which was supposed to be a kind of critique of media in the present [?]. That was played in the 1975 Serpentine Video Exhibition, so that was, everybody played everything in that, so it's not a massive distinction [?]. And then after I left the school, I did apply for a few straight jobs. I think I even applied for something in the BBC, but didn't get anything, and in a way...my heart certainly wasn't in it. So I spent a few months working in William Whiteley's Department Store in Queensway, with a view to getting enough money to buy a Portapak. So I knew that what I wanted to do was working with portable video, and I managed to do that, and then I met...I can't remember how, but I met Su Braden, who was starting this video project on the Aylesbury Estate in South East London, but she didn't have any video gear, and by that time I'd got the Portapak. So we teamed up and started working on the Aylesbury Estate.

HN: How was it for you, coming from a very secure background, and all of a sudden you're working in an area of South London, at that time, how was it like to get to know the estate, and what sort of experience did you have?

TD: Well I ended up working more with young people than I did anything else. I had, I went, we had lots of ideas about community arts on this estate – it was a community arts project, not just a video project – and the fundamental sort of rationale of the project was that we were going to occupy spaces on the estate, which we'd got council permission to do, which were originally designed as places where people would have laundrettes, or community spaces. But none of them were used, so we said OK, we'll go in there and start opening them up and using them. Certainly my original conception of the project was that what would happen would be that suddenly everyone on the estate, all elements of the community would start coming to these places, and it would be the bedrock of a kind of social and community revolution, that it would start almost like autonomous free zones, on each of these blocks of the estate, because Aylesbury was 12 thousand people, it was an enormous estate. Actually what happened when you opened a room, was that any kids from the block would kind of turn up straight away to see what was going on. So we, the work that I ended up feeling like I was doing there wasn't community organizing actually, it was youth work really, youth play/work with kids, using video.

HN: And did they like the work with video, what was the attraction for them?

TD: I think the first thing is, I keep remembering what Andy was saying earlier, but the first thing is really about seeing yourself on TV. In fact I interviewed one of the group that I had worked with most consistently in the late '70s and that was the thing that the dominant kid in the group said, was that 'I came in here and I saw myself on video for the first time, it was

like wow!' A real kind of energy, energizing effect from that, seeing yourself on video for the first time. And I felt like that when I first saw myself on video, that's interesting! But they also, this group in particular that I worked with over a long period of time, we did things like, we did a whole project that involved them making a kind of mock Star Trek, they dressed themselves in uniforms made out of bin bags, and we had model work in front of starscapes of little models, but actually in some ways that was, I think in retrospect was actually the least successful project that we did. Because what used to happen was that the kids used to come every week, in turn [?] – I can't remember how we organized it, but it was basically on a weekly basis – and they would come and do something each week. Sometimes it was rubbish or just passing the time, but sometimes was extraordinarily kind of powerful that in a way that, as a group process, the one evening I remember most distinctly was, it was 2 or 3 months after one of the young people's Dad had died. And this kid came in and structured this whole drama around the idea of his having a guardian angel, and it was saturated with his recent experience of bereavement and stuff. But it wasn't explicitly about that at all, but it was clear that what he was doing was using that process of coming in, devising a quick video, shooting it, playing it back, all within 2 hours, that was about that group process and how he was using that group process. So that I thought was really interesting...

HN: And the thing about the Star Trek...that was not so important?

TD: The reason that it seems less interesting in retrospect...I'm not sure the [young] people themselves would say this, but, um to me it wasn't interesting because it was following a television formula, in a way, you know, the Star Trek formula. So one of the absurd expectations I had is that, is that the work that we did with young people, or older people, or whatever, would bust TV conventions, would sort of create a new televisual language through giving people access to video equipment. Which, that was one of my ideals, which for me...resided much more in the spontaneous work that we did...

HN: [Talks about work of Hall and Morley, taking popular culture seriously....]

TD: Yeah I agree completely, I was pretty puritan in those days. I was on the GLAA Film and Video Panel, and argued against Terence Davies being given a grant because he was a bourgeois individualist! I was a bit of an ideologue in those days, less so now.

HN: Working on this estate, video youth work became important for you, what about other areas of community video?

TD: I was very involved politically in the various organizations that were, you know, around collective organization of London video workers, so I went, one of the results of my meeting George Stoney was that he said you should go and see this guy Hoppy. So we went round to Chalk Farm to meet Hoppy. And Hoppy was running the Association of London Independent Video Groups at the time, and he was bored with it, so he just gave us the books and said here you go, can you go away and run this now? In his classic kind of way...So we did that,

and then that turned into the Association of Video Workers. So I was doing a lot of that. I think I was very, by the end of the '70s I was very...I'm not sure if disillusioned is quite the right word, but I was in some senses kind of dissatisfied with, because I'd had all these ideas that community video was really, should be really socially transformative, and should be revolutionary, people should be creating new stuff, and they should be critiquing the society more explicitly and all that, and all I was doing was hanging around kids and having a good time. I felt there was a mismatch between my ideals for the work, and what was happening. So I wrote a book which was about using video for young people, to summarize the experience, and I suppose in a way of closing the chapter on that work that I did. And went to work in Albany Video, which had been going for a while by the time I joined it. But the other strand of that history, was the running argument between people who thought that the process of video was the most significant, if not the only significant aspect of video – so the idea of a group making a video. The value of that was all about what happened in that process, which is in a sense what I was doing with the kids. And the idea, which was much more my idea in a sense, because I'd come from film school, was about producing different kinds of work and kinds of representation. That was a real ideological struggle in a way, between the different parts of the community video movement. I think I felt that I was much more on the side of the filmmaking, in a way, than I was in sort of process, per se, although I've always thought that process is a very integral part of the whole thing. But not the end point, necessarily.

HN: So what kind of conclusion do you take from that?

TD: In retrospect – I'm not sure I felt this at the time – I became, I wanted to move in the direction more of production, and of producing stuff, rather than just process. And Albany Video was, before I joined, already at the forefront of that movement, through tapes like August 13th or Us Girls, which both had some wide distribution across the country, it was very difficult, but they both had a national significance as videos. So I became more interested...and within a couple of years of my starting at Albany, Channel 4 had started in the sense that Channel 4 became what a lot of thought of as being the venue or the distribution media for community media, and that was certainly how Alan Fountain saw it as well, up to a point. So a lot of my energies then went into becoming a franchised workshop, and making tapes that were designed for, to some extent, designed for transmission on Channel 4.

[Break]

HN: Before we go into this more product-orientated story about Channel 4, I just want to go back to the process...and I want to go back to your book....

HN: Video with young people...you published that together with Inter-Action at that time, I think this was the first book which came out of the London community video scene, which I was aware of...what impact did it have, do you know if people worked with that book?

TD: I've absolutely no idea. I know people used it. I've not idea how or what significance it had, or how people did use it. It was pretty accessible, so I imagine people used it as a way of helping them you know do video stuff with young people, but I never had any sort of feedback about it. Apart from the fact that I saw once that a copy was going on Amazon for £70, thought that was pretty good!

HN: OK, so let's go forward to this first contact with Channel 4, and your productions. How did life develop for you, was it as hopeful time, the '80s, or was it a struggle?

TD: I think it was contradictory, because there were 2 major factors that really boosted the scene in London. One was Channel 4, and the other was the GLC, who were also around 'til '85, and Albany Video we got funding from them as well as Channel 4. So the early '80d were definitely, perhaps the best resourced time for community-based media. But it was also, you know, like '82 with the Falklands and the re-election of Thatcher later, and the society outside of the community video field, and outside of the GLC and C4, was clearly becoming hostile to community projects of any kind, and that sort of community politics. So it was contradictory I think...so I can remember myself being very aware that the political ground was shifting under us, even though we were in some senses better resourced. So that I had, that video that Joel Venet did, I can hear myself from that video, talking about need to reorient in these new circumstances and figure out, in a sense be more commercial, or more adjusted to the current circumstances. I'm not sure I'm answering your question...

HN: How long did you work for C4, and what kind of productions were you involved in?

TD: Well the first contact with Channel 4 was that Alan Fountain came round to all the workshops, including Albany, and said 'I'm interested in working with you, do you want to apply for some equipment?' So he could buy colour equipment, and so we did that, unsurprisingly, and we got the U-matic and colour cameras and stuff out of that. Um that was just a one-off grant. We then subsequently applied to be a franchised workshop, and were successful in that. I think we held our franchise for 3 years, possibly 2, maybe 4, but for a specific chunk of time. We made a number of videos in that period, including the one that I was most involved in, with Andy Porter, was Beyond Our Ken, which was a protest video in a sense, which was shown on TV, about the abolition of the GLC in 1985. It was arguing against the abolition before that finally went through, from the perspective of a dozen community groups in Lewisham and Greenwich.

HN: What was it about? The content of it?

TD: I think it was about a dozen community groups who'd all received funding from Channel 4[GLC?], all of them based in Lewisham and Greenwich, saying from their point of view, why the GLC shouldn't be abolished, because it supported the kind of grassroots work that they were involved in. It was a kind of, it was a sort of video that could have been made 5, 10 years earlier, as a sort of local grassroots campaign tape against the GLC, but in this case it

was made for C4, to argue that case nationally. So it did get some national exposure, and C4 had to, they were summoned to Right to Reply as often happened with the more left-wing C4 programmes, and they had to justify why they put money into this Lefty propaganda, kind of thing. And there were other...we did...Karen Alexander made a video with young black women, called Mistaken Identity, which I think was shown on C4, pretty sure it was, and there was another programme made by another young black woman called Carol Jacobs, which was about the local reggae scene, that was also on C4. So we made a number of programmes that were locally based, but became shown on C4.

HN: And how did this come to an end?

TD: You had to get your workshop franchise renewed every year, and they, C4 were in a position where they didn't have enough money to go round to fund new groups, particularly black workshops and workshops in Northern Ireland. It became clear that they wanted to move on from us and they did. I quite understood the reasons for that, and it seemed, that we vaguely expected it. Also we were involved with, the other thing that I made during the franchise period, or was partly responsible for making, was Being White, an uh anti-racist or racism-awareness tape for use in community groups, about issues of race and whiteness, which there wasn't any public discussion about that, at that time. It was a very simple kind of uh mostly talking heads video that nevertheless set out the issues very clearly. And uh Channel 4 didn't want to show it, which was their right under the workshops agreement – we made stuff and offered it to them, and if they didn't want it they didn't take it. A lot of my energy had got into that, before we lost the franchise. For me that was fine, it wasn't a tape that was designed for broadcast, it was designed for community education in a sense, and was very successful at that, and in some cases is still used in racism-awareness use, but was certainly used extensively for a long time after we made it. As part of what we did at Albany Video in distribution, 'cos we were, as well as being involved in production, we were also a distribution agency, so we distributed our own videos but we also acquired videos from all over the country, and internationally, that had a kind of use value in local community work.

HN: I think this catalogue is very interesting, because through the catalogue you see the variety of applications of community video...Before we move on to your next chapter, looking at this whole output of community video, community-based media work, film work, what for you was the most outstanding work...?

TD: Of our work or anyone else's?

HN: From other groups in the country...

TD: I think...within Albany Video's work, not stuff I was involved in, but some of the early tenants' work, for instance, where a tenants group would work on a campaign and show that stuff at a local council meeting, I think that work was really valuable, very energising in

terms of community campaigns. I mean in a way it's difficult to make value judgements about any of it. I think the Miner's Campaign Tapes that came out of a lot of the workshops, not necessarily community video but all of the workshops that were funded out of the workshops agreement, or before that, that was an extraordinary phenomenon, because it was the 1984 Miner's Strike when the mainstream media was uniformly, almost uniformly, apart from C4, critical and very selective in what they showed of the miner's struggle, and always shot from behind police lines and all that sort of stuff. And so The Miner's Campaign Tapes, there were 4 or 6, all of us in the workshops contributed in different degrees to sending footage in, and they were edited together. And there were tens of thousands of videos, VHS videos circulating in mining communities, of those campaign tapes. I think that's, in a sense, it comes right at the end of the period of community video [does quotes with fingers] per se, it um that I think was an extraordinary achievement.

HN: What about transnational, your contacts with the US and Canada...? Did you have...?

TD: My main contact has been with Australia, and in particular aboriginal media in Australia. That was an extraordinary story, because in the mid-80s there was kind of community video work going on in aboriginal communities I think from the late '70s onwards, but that culminated in the mid-80s in an organization called the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA), applying for the licence for satellite broadcasting in Central Australia which they, much to their surprise, won. And that was a, for me at the time, this was in the mid-80s, it, things were basically post-85 the GLC was finished, we'd lost our C4 franchise, you know, it was a big period of re-evaluation in a sense. And I thought, in a sense it was like what they'd done, for me, was an example of something really interesting that a community group could do, in a sense taking power of a local satellite broadcasting system. As it turned out, it was a much more contradictory and weird story. But I became interested in that and ended up making a programme with CAAMA about all of those issues.

HN: And where did you show that programme?

TD: It was on Channel 4 in the early '90s, it was a C4-funded programme.

HN: And now we come to the company you set up in North London [...] can you tell us a little about that?

TD: Well, the main chunk of work that Andy Porter and I did as part of APT, which was the company, was a series of programmes about television, so in a way they were about the kind of work that we'd been involved in. The first one was called Remote Control, and was an argument about the Broadcasting Bill that was in front of Parliament in 1989 I think – my dates might be wrong – but it argued for a particular kind of community production of the kind we'd been involved in for the last 15 years really, and against the provisions of the new Broadcasting Bill. And I don't think it had a massive political effect, but it was a kind of summary of arguments at that time. And then we carried on, making a series for C4 called

Channels of Resistance, which again was all about world television, but instances of local and community resistance to mainstream television models. So we made 2 programmes within that, one of them was the Australian aboriginal programme, the other one was Tactical TV, which was a summary of a conference in Amsterdam in the early '90s, which was, which brought together people who were into radical media experiments around the world. And we kind of summarized a lot of those in that programme. And then there were a lot of other bought-in programmes that we had nothing to do with making but we bought in and packaged as this Channels of Resistance series. Which was quite well publicised at the time, and was used quite extensively in education since, and I edited a book of essays which came out of a lot of those programmes as well.

HN: When you're telling me this, I start to realize there's so much material which you've been producing over a long period...in terms of heritage it's important to keep those stories together, and not just to publicise videos which are now being collected and archived, and to make sure that your signature on community video is not being lost. How did you get involved in teaching and eventually become a Professor?

TD: After the Channels of Resistance series, which was a real high, because it was, you know we could make interesting stuff and get it on TV, the work on C4 for me started to dry up, so that Alan Fountain eventually moved on, the people who took over from him [were] less politically in sympathy with the sort of things I was doing. For a long time we did, within APT, a lot of work that was always very badly-funded but was interesting – to do with working with new filmmakers. So we made a lot of 3 minute programme for slots after the news, which were good fun to make, and enabled us to carry on the sort of work of nurturing younger filmmakers and getting people involved in making films that wouldn't otherwise be made. And we also made a Video Diaries series, of slots, of 3-minute slots, which was again very good fun, and the Video Diaries stuff is kind of part of the evolving community media movement in a way. So I did a lot of that stuff. But I also needed to earn a living as well as doing these productions. So I ended up teaching the MA in Documentary here, and I've done lots of other teaching as well, but this became my main job. In a sense my interest in teaching has been the same as in any community media thing. Of being able to work with people to nurture their creativity and help them produce stuff. So it doesn't feel like a very different activity, it feels similar in some ways, but very institutionally supported, and having a salary attached to it, which is very nice.

HN: You've been doing this for 20 years. If you look at the work with students here, and you look back to community video, are there parallels? You mentioned before enabling people to explore their creativity. Are there other elements which are similar, which you felt your background helped you to do your job in Goldsmiths?

TD: I think the main connections are really about ethics and about politics and ethics of representation. One of the key issues, and this is always a topic of conversation on the MA, is how do you work with people in a way that's enabling and not exploitative, in partnership,

those kinds of issues. Although that comes very much out of my community video background I think. And those are always issues under discussion on the MA. And different filmmakers approach them differently, and some people work more participatively than others, but that's always an issue under discussion.

HN: You talked about Tactical TV, established media and the alternatives...do you see a possibility in 5, 10, 20 years for a young generation in this field? Or do you think this kind of participatory video making has come to an end?

HN: No I don't think so. I think that, it's funny because it's like at some level you can see that a lot of what we imagined in those early days, which was back to the idea of uh seeing myself on TV is so incredible, that idea that that medium that has excluded most people...you could see now includes people, through the Net, through mobile phones, through the almost universal sort of, at least in our society, the ubiquity of cameras and phones, and the ability to upload to the Internet and stuff. So the technical requirements for access have been met. And you could also claim, and some people in television would claim, that the uh issues of inclusivity...have also been met through reality television or various forms of factual entertainment. There is certainly...it's clear that there's a much more diverse range of people now on television than there were in the '70s, '80s, but for me the issue both with the net and with television in different ways is to do with um the forms of representation that are allowed, in a way. So the net is, remains very, kind of atomized, individualized - social media is kind of not really about the presentation, except in very isolated cases, the presentation of alternative views or representation. And in television, certainly, people of all kinds have been dragged into the representing arena, they are in some sense occupying space, but they're occupying space on the terms of a commercial television system that demands that they're risky or edgy, or conforms to some stereotype, like, you know, the classic is Benefits Street, where people are represented in a way that actually diminishes their agency. So they aren't in any sense in control of their representation. So for me the kind of fundamental issue that we were raising in the '70s, in terms of community video - which is the right of every person, and every social group in a society, to represent himself, herself, themselves - that has not been met. So therefore, the issue, what we're talking about in terms of community video, is still a live issue for me.