

29/09/2006

Case Study  
David Furnham  
23<sup>rd</sup> April 2004

Tape 1

AP

it's the Friday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, and I'm here in Hove with David Furnham in his home to talk to him about practice as research, and as I.... briefly outlined before we started going, this is not intended to be a seamless, watchable document, but it's a way of gathering information and we figured that the visual might just add another element that just may possibly be useful at some later stage... I'll just... I'll be going through the questions in quite a... semi-formal way, although we do branch off into conversation... and although the first question is really about, specific questions about research questions, did you want to speak very briefly at the beginning to just, to introduce the project on the Cinema of Comic Illusions and then we can move into the questions?

1:09

DF

OK... well... the... my whole work is based as an independent filmmaker through the seventies and through the eighties and nineties and then reaching a point of consolidating and reassessing and moving into that kind of research mode which became, sort of, came out, of the mid-nineties, and The Cinema of Comic Illusions is a, project which sits between one that went before... Tati: A Chance to Whistle, and my post-... and my doctoral thesis on documentary practice, and, there's now another one on the way, and, I'm beginning to be engaged with a third one, so it's like a trilogy of research by practice projects. it's never been difficult for me to... in a sense, enter the world of the research by practice project mode since, as an independent, you weren't governed totally by the demands of television, you kind of submitted ideas through the independent sector Channel 4, so moving from that kind of base, and that kind of independent professionalism with my own company and so on, and learning about the... what governs professionalism, and then moving into asking more direct questions about the... particularly about the documentary genre, I was able to, ah, set questions out of that context, but I've always been in teaching in higher education, in media production so that was another context in which, ah, you are always asking questions about production and it was very much a theorising outer production, and so, ah, when the opportunity to under... to begin these projects, ah, began, it's... the questions are set by that understanding of production process and how meaning is constructed within a... audio-visual text... so the exploration is very much set by examining the documentary genre. What was also happening was the break-up of the traditional patterns of television and patterns of documentary

output through the nineties and ask... saying, well, what happens if you take documentary ideas into the social context of the community, and, hence Tati: A Chance to Whistle, then the Cinema of Comic Illusions and now the Les Cyclistes is an expression of, ah, of investigating, in new ways to different kinds of audience outside of broadcast television.

4:09

AP

Yea... So what were the specific... 'cause we're going to talk primarily about the Cinema of Comic Illusions today, but also I think I'd be really interested, there's a question about future work... Les Cyclistes, and... talk about how that works, so if we... start out with , what were the research questions in the Cinema of Comic Illusions...

4:30

DF

I think they, very much concerned with creating a virtual world, a virtual... documentary world for the audience so that, one could... experiment with the relationship of live performance to performance and archive films on screen, so created a complete loop and immersed the audience in, an experience governed by a documentary so it was a... experiment in that immersion in the first place... it was also an investigation, really, of... how early cinematic experience worked, having looked at the Tati films in detail with a great concern with sound and image and the relationship of the two, which was very interesting to me, I think... it was... he had an interest in early cinema and it seemed to me that it would be a hunch to go back into those films, those early comic films and see how they worked... and when you see a comic film you don't... there is nothing there at all, it's just... the image... but really when you... what I... the great discovery... well, there's two kind of discoveries out of the Cinema of Comic Illusions was how... sound... worked to create meaning within those films and... how... how you could structure the whole event to create... this flow, which in documentary broadcast terms you have a narrative construction and... you can have it through representation... through performance, for example the Dickens-typtr portrayals... and you can tell a story by having junction points and ... the great thing is... about documentary is a loose structure... but here you could experiment much more with... finding out how sound... breaks its... into its parts of... piano accompaniment... ah... narrations... ah... performance, and sound effects and how those all collide within a... both a... within a film mixture which was both an expression of the absurd comic films, and my concern with today, which looks at... the absurdity that you observe in social space... public spaces and... bringing those... together which allows you , then... to have a kind of view about historical material for contemporary audiences... so it's a kind of "lived-in" experience... so it's nothing... that you're not seeing a reconstruction of a... an event "out there" which happened a hundred years ago... you're experiencing it as you are now, and it is meaningful to you, and it either works or it doesn't (laughs)... and hopefully... it did... and... sorry, do you want...?

7:31

AP

No I just... that really... sketches the outline for... your research impulses... for doing that and how... how did you... devise specific research questions out of those threads of interest?

7:47

DF

OK... I think they very much came from this... the nineties concern with, structure... particularly when you go to feature film construction... the whole attitude was with narrative storytelling: you have your three... three-act structure... you have your protagonist... you... you know, and so on and so forth... you reach a climatic moment and you have a resolution and all the bits in between... and it would, kind of, it became a, sort of, formula that was espoused by a lot... (laughs) quite a lot of people who never made anything... and... earned a lot of money from... doing so... but the... in that sort of look at that over-arching view, there's another way into film which I think has been neglected and needed to be mapped, which was in the detail of... within a scene and how what I would call "beats" or "moments of meaning" and so I wanted to question that the... assumptions of narrative and look at it the other way round, and... that was my starting point, really. So when I started with the Comic Illusions, it was very much with seeing the... performative pleasure and... and notating meanings within frames, as did the great comics like Little Titch... and... working at THAT end of the spectrum... rather than the over-arching thing, so... the... loose narrative structure which is the story of early cinema and the... Growth of an industry... was lightly marked but it had to be there because it told a truth... but really the concern was at... the other end with the detail of how meaning is constructed... in the minutiae and within the sec... the frame, really.

9:37

AP

And how did you translate those sorts of questions, I suppose, into... institutionally based questions in terms of having to justify the research within an academic context? Was there, or were there, specific sets of questions that you had to put forward within that context?

9:59

DF

(Laughs) There were, but it's four years ago since I set them! But I think... they were based on that documentary investigation... it was based on... looking at scene construction and looking at moments of meaning and getting those materials and re... and presenting a set... a sort of, a view, an attitude about early... early film which... comes outside of the cluster of knowledge that existed

and providing... an experience for a wider public as well as information which could then go to... to be distributed to the academy, as it were.

10:40

AP

And how appropriate do you feel, then, is the institutional demand for that kind of question for that period... I suppose, that process of translation from the particular... themes that you're interested in and involved with developing, and that movement into translating... them into something else.

10:59

DF

When I thought... through the PARIP conferences... I thought that... was an absolute moment of, ah... of support to... to what you're... trying to do. I think ... film production is... covers a lot of... attitudes and... thoughts about how you get to production and... how it's taught and so on... and... if you're theorising out of production con... process and concern of i... expression of ideas... this... that hasn't been over-registered, really... there's been a lot of XXXXX analysis, there's film theory analysis... but when you're actually a practitioner, you, kind of... there's a... it's an unsupported area in thinking about, well you've got ideas, and that you'll keep on working and there... it's a creative experience as well as well as an intellectual experience... but nevertheless... so that it... before, you might say... in the independent days of Channel 4 you're working on your own and you're talking to yourself a lot (laughs)... certainly I found the support of other people... to which the questions are also relevant... and other disciplines... and it was.... you know, to see that the disciplines share... problems... and issues... will... is... very useful because it su... it gives you support that you're not the only one out there.... and you feel less alone... and I was able to... write two articles from the... experience of the Cinema of Comic Illusions... one is a case study for the general media practice and one for... Living Pictures which is more to do with early cinema... the films themselves, as it were, so there was... quite easy way of defining two different... different articles, as it were... so that was quite good as well as the PARIP... website... and the... event has been fully documented both as photographic evidence but also as a tape of the show... so it's... it's all complete in that sense... but it... I think through the disci... what... I think the great thing about doing it is the discipline of the AHRB form... of... of the full questions... of... "What are your questions?" "What are your...?" and so on... which are well-known to everybody. I think it does actually focus your attention about what you want to do... and why you're there doing it... and it also helps you at the end, and in sorting it out for these different, sort of... ways of disseminating your attitudes and knowledges... it's a way of... setting up ideas for the next one, so it... there is a follow-through for the individual practitioner... yea...

14:21

AP

That's really interesting because obviously that's... that's the big point of contestation and a lot of practitioners aren't... as comfortable with that institutional demand to mould their work into that framework.

14:34

DF

On the contrary, I find that quite helpful... **ALTHOUGH** (laughs) the AHRB form is a devil in other ways! I don't know if you want me to... go into that now... but, I mean, certainly... the budget section... is incredibly... non-friendly to the production... activity... it is... certainly it puts you off if you want more than five thousand pounds because it... the form assumes that there will be a different kind, a different mode of inquiry with research assistants and so on and they budget it in that kind of way... they're not... they don't... everything about a production budget has to go in "Other" (laughs) and I find that very... well, it... appears to... to have a value bias for one type of activity rather than the other... uhm.. and I think... therefore the threshold of five thousand pounds is... problematic because productions, ah... if you want twelve thousand, then you have to go to the higher... the higher form (laughs) which is... kind of, not user-friendly, as it were, in that... in that respect. As far as the questions go, I think... they've been very... it's a very helpful process... although it's, it's quite... very demanding (laughs), especially with the word count, at fifteen-hundred words for the... small grants... so it does... does... take a long time to... to get... into that mode of thinking... and of course it's only... it sits along other applications... for me... the Arts Council... funding, which has a different remit, of course, so... but the actual project has to fit both... circumstances... and... cer... policies... and... therefore you end up talking, sort of, in two languages... both complement each other as... and they do DO that in very specific ways... for example... I do like the i... notion that the AHRB... does allow you to talk to the wider audience. I think that's a huge... necessary clause there, as well as the academy, and therefore you have no difficulty in making something that will actually **WORK** for... a community... **AND** give them... something that they hadn't heard of before, or experienced before... at the same time you are able to take that material as evidence... and think about it, and... and make an assessment upon it and publish that thought... so... it's been quite a useful experience, I think...

17:52

AP

And carrying on from, sort of, I suppose, broadening it out from... that sense of... the AHRB specifically, how would you talk about the ways in which your work has engaged with this notion of research epistemology in terms of, well, obviously, the "ways of research" notions of the meaning and... the value of research...

18:13

DF

Yes... Well, one of the... useful things I've gathered over... in my "past... life" doing an MA in curriculum development in (mock "intellectual-speak") higher education at the University of Sussex (end mock) was, ... illuminative evaluation... and that really was looking at evidence by... looking at data... what was... what documents are available... looking at... the social situation... who... how people are interacting... observing people... and... doing semi-structured interviews and, those kind of... and then, kind of, creating... sort of, set issues, sort of... out of that social milieu, which illUMinate the kind... the predicaments and... of a teaching situation in that case, but easily applicable... to... for example the Cinema of Comic Illusions OR Tati... I spent (laughs)... I GO and live with the exhibition, basically, and I th... to gain... to observe, to observe and, ah, you gain a HUGE amount of information from that... ah, how people ACTUALLY, over a sustained... well... through... of the fifty shows I was probably there for about forty... six, I should think, and you... you get the common factors of how people are responding to your work... with Tati over an eight-week period... you gained... you actually saw how people were using the mater-... the exhibition and the mater-... and your documentaries... your "works"... so it... through observation... that was one... one, sort of pri-... activity. I think the other is... TALKING to people, I mean that IS informal and it's not tot-... it's not reliable, it's not systematic, but you do get a sense of what people... are appreciating and the conSISTency of that... so it does kind of reinforce what you're... observing... and of course you've got the material itself which you didn't have before... to work with... in terms of analysis of media text. So all in all... and you've got... the other thing is... is... comments book, what you haven't got is... so much is... the formal system of peer review and I think that's being discussed at PARIP a lot and, particularly for... media production... who's to say... it's a media-by-practice project... and of course that's a huge issue (laughs)... my own feeling is... it's... because... be-... what it looks like... it's... there's certain evidence is... within the text that say it's a research-by-practice project... but... then it... it... and that's... that's a... and that's an important thing to say because it shouldn't be ignored... it's... it's not an ephemeral piece of work as one colleague... described it and... it comes and goes and... but it was seen by twelve hundred people and it was... from... both from the Academy... and from a whole range of people, subject specialists, from magicians, film makers... and ... film historians... through to... the local community... which included children... with educational difficulties... it include-... terrific audience... they were... I think... they actually listened to the sounds and the images and... I gained a lot from it. So there was a whole range of people and including (mock "mad scientist" accent) the bizarre and absurd (end mock) which I cannot ignore (laughs) since they intrude upon my life!

22:21

AP

That's arguably more people than read your average XXXXX journal article

22:25

DF

Well, yea... but I've got the article as well (laughs)! Yea... so...

AP

But it's... because it's an interesting issue because you raised the question that... well... the AHRB is supportive of work that spans those two communities, but then with the lack... of an effective, peer review community to deal with the public context... they're very good at dealing with the journal and the writing context... do you see the work that you've done as feeding into, I suppose, that generalised discourse around the status of research in the Academy.

23:01

DF

Yes, indeed... absolutely.... I'd bat a wicket for the... mater-... you know, the material as a show, it... I mean what it meant to me equiv-... what I undertook was equivalent to a book or ambient because, not only are you inter-... inter-... using your intellect upon the script and the realisation and the whole total process... and the research that went into the topic as it... you're also having to produce it... and... on top of... so its like having one thing on top of another... and producing in a marquee, in a park in Brighton, in 2003, was an interesting activity in itself! (laughs). And the risk assessment... became a book (laughs) in itself... so... I don't want to put forward... myself forward as risk assessment lecturer specialist (laughs), but, that was a hu-... you know, another undertaking which is part and parcel of production... and... one of the things that I think is interesting about the Cinema of Comic Illusions and the work I do is the... movement, or what you carry, from that industrial context of production... and... what I gain from... obviously from the wonderful experience of the eighties with Channel Four when you had pro-... you know, budgets and you had legal system and you... and so on... and... commissioning editor who, you know, was there to ... enthused about your ideas. That was a very good system because you knew exactly where you were... and you produced to a budget, to a schedule... to a... a standard... and agreed... script... and, it worked ... what you take from that into ... into... proj-... research-by-practice projects is a discipline, I think... it's a discipline... but you can change the notion of professionalism by the different time scales you're in and the different, kind of, legal relationships you have within it, and as you know, with Cinema of Comic Illusions I actually filmed the year ahead... at the De la Warr where we exhibited Tati 'cause absolutely consumed with the absurdity of transa- social transaction in a public place... and, having filmed THAT, that actually is then set up a whole, kind of, set of relationships with the performers who reappeared a year later and... I was always worried that, you know, they'd go off to Australia on a... on tour somewhere... but managed... they... we held together and... therefore that experience of... of an improvised way of working then got... was obviously drawn back into the... the live performance rehearsals and then into the show itself.

26:19

AP

'Cause that's... that's quite interesting 'cause now you've... you've referenced that notion of professionalism and earlier on you were saying that it has to work as... as a show and the next question was really about how the working engages with questions of professionalism and obviously the... the rhythms of timing and project management alter, but, I suppose if... if there's anything more specific, or more that you wanted to say about that about that relationship to notions of professionalism of undertaking research by practice...

26:55

DF

A lot... there's two ways... two things that come out of that... firstly is, the topic itself, how you research it... you don't have a... a kind of specified time... XXX to somebody else offers a research XXXX find the information and construct a narrative and go out and hire a crew for a limited amount of time filming... I suppose that's the model of... of professional practice. In THIS case I... I meander through a... a whole range of people and... digging out support and... through the museum system... both in this country and Italy and France... which is archive materials, film material... and you're able then to draw... you're able to... I think... have a more considered response as to what gets included... and the shaping of the material... so there's a kind of dynamic between the ideas as they're emerging and holding on to this notion of trying to create this absurd, total... immersion... in a... in this absurd world... and to bring the cinematic out of the screen, as it were... and you're finding things out so the long as you know what your theme is and where you're driving... the project... you're able then to say, well... you're not disappointed if some-... if you haven't got a... a hundred thousand pounds for a... a top magician... you've got ways of dealing with that which will bring in the same idea at a more real-... at a realistic cost... and you will have improved the project because of that, but you would have spent... you know, I've spent a lot of time with a... a fame-... a named magician... but in... and then going back to the BOOKS on the early magicians, and then coming back... and forth... and then... he... that person... withdrew from the project but that didn't upSET me because I was able to respond pretty quickly with an alternative, and then working with the actors to... in an Improvised form... to find an expression... which, ah... encapsulated a thought about the role of early magicians in cinema... and... just to cash it in... one of the actors then became... George Albert Smith the... the mind reader and, ah, was able to walk through the audience picking out objects which he then handed to his assistant who then... miraculously... well, most times ... came up with the right... object... but it was a way, then, of... creating that circle of move-... that... movement and dealing with circles of movement... amongst the audience... because... he's al-... I mean, he was... he was also a presenter and he was also... you see his films on the screen, and... images of him as archive... material so it... it could all, kind of, become one... and you still maintain that, sort of, idea... of, ah... of circulation and... immERsion! so that... you're... interacting with material over a long period



of time... and with thoughts that are gaining from... different museum... collections... at the other... at the other level, I think you're also looking at... perFORMance... I'm teasing out the script so that it becomes a... live activity... I spent, for example, an afternoon with Jonathan Cecil and his wife Anna Sharkey in their kitchen and it was a wonderful afternoon 'cause they're wonderfully eccentric.... actors, absolutely wonderful people... and... they had... it wasn't hierarchical, 'cause they just sat down and se-... "We'll make this work!" "It sounds a bit academic here, doesn't it?" sort of thing... and, they really gave it a shape, and a simplicity... which was... which we could then take to... to the shoot... and not... and just drop straight into it... so there was no, sort of, hierarchical activity was there... "This is where... the area we've, I've got to can you improve on it?" (laughs) and simplify it, basically, so... I think these processes... it's like a meandering to your fi-... and a... a stripping down... and a... XXXX overtime so that... the whole thing... w... only came together on the first day of the show, as it were, beCAUSE, and AFTER, because what's happening... you... you've got all this silent material that's only being brought alive when you've got the live performance against it, so you... you've got... I had a tape on... XXXX with hardly any sound, so nobody knew, except me, 'cause I was in my head, what was gonna happen.... and then, it could get refined and refined as the shows progressed, and you could see ways of... of sharpening the... the whole activity... so I... I do think that professionalism has HELPED... that underpinning that you will... if you turn up for a day's shoot, you will... you're there to maximise material and not just to... talk about it... and think about it... you're actually there to DO it and to get in on tape and then to take... and... the discipline of rehearsal... and going into the tent and so on is... is much the same... it's a.... it's a discipline, really...

32:50

AP

And at the end it gives you the flexibility at the point... that you need it, rather than having the flexibility up front and then not having anything to work with.

DF

Yes...yes... And keep-... it's... shaping... it's... chiselling... I know... and it's chiselling... it's... like a lot of... creative activity; if you look at puppet... puppeteers when they make...when they make puppets... I was... talking to John Wright "Little Angel" when he was alive... you know, and chisel away I say "Oh that must be marvellous chiselling..." "No you have to BASH the thing... and you have to... give the face out...!" you know... and it's... it's... it IS working with materials to shape it and re-shape... and... you get... XXX in a drive into that final... mode... and any-... if you go OVER that (laughs) then you... it, sort of, goes the other way again!

33:35

AP

Changing gear somewhat, I suppose, is the question about how your practice as research has engaged with... notions of pedagogy... how it feeds into your TEACHING practices... or vice versa.

33:48

DF

Yea... Well it's interactive, I would say, because... I've taught for many years with the MA video program at... Middlesex University and... we, kind of, devise strategies... and activities, or small-scale projects and one-off... tasks... which reflect the... this concern with detail, and at the same... I think... at another level it's... it... after making The Cinema of Comic... well, DURING the making of... Cinema... I took a day off and wrote a COURSE, and it's been taken up as a major... sort of flagship course of... undergraduate course called BA in... Film, Video and Interactive Arts and that could not have happened without that... that last six years of research, this couldn't've happened... but... I'm glad to say it's going ahead.

34:51

AP

And what were the... what are the details... how... what were the specifics of what's filtered through into that, or, is it not as easy to talk about.

34:58

DF

Well I think it's partly to do with this... taking the... taking an initiative on... on new technologies and saying... so much now is in the hands of the individual at a... at a very good, high level of... you know, of camera and editing equipment. I think... was it the first Sony VX1000 and the XXXXX Panasonic came out in... it was... fairly late... ninety-seven, say? ninety... I th... I wouldn't... I think ninety-seven or eight... we immediately jumped out of... jumped out...up... INTO that from the old... large ca-... heavy cameras that imitated, ultimately, the old Aero-... sixteen mil Aeroflexes from the sixties... and... this was kind of revolution.... 'cause... again, if you had that kind of... going back to the professionalism... there was a split between film and video and all of that which... won't go into now, but... certainly on the COURSE... once we got into... small camera... and it's... even up to last year I had... and, there was one Romanian students who ... you know "You can't be professional with this camera can you?" well, yes, actually... and... it's amazing when you sit there now with a... with the Avid Pro or... the Apple equivalent that... you know... I'm remember... in the EIGHTees... sitting at... Complete Video and getting a... a page turn... they were the in things in the eighties... and I think if you took half an hour, I suppose that represented about... five-hundred pounds worth of money, or something! You go "Ooo!" and great... and now it's, sort of, you know, "Bing!" and the students just walk in and... they just use it... so technoLOGical change.... has... is a, sort of, driving force of ... like so many... you know, other th-... in other areas... has... alLOWed us.... to consider... alongside that, I think, is... is this notion of... context of... I

don't know... of public... consumption... that you CAN make things and engage with museums in a different w-... you CAN make things... documentaries FOR particular audiences... which is, sort of, my next project is... having had the experience of a GENERAL audience with the Cinema of Comic Illusions, I want to take... the documentary idea back... y'know, in a sense, to its... sort of, fundamental of... of recording people in... in their... in their HO-... in their... in their loCALity, and then presenting a VIEW of a subject, in this case cycling, back to that... to that group of people and including themselves in that process, so it's, sort of, complete loop... again it involves perFORmance and again it... it breaks down narrative, perhaps even more into kind of installation-type mode... that the idea is then to have a... a vehicle which is a small cinema for eight people... a Citroen H van... together with a small tent... which is part of the resource that carries through from... Cinema of Comic Illusion and take it to a rally, or set of rallies...as... and... great, sort of... (whispers) I don't want to use the word "happening"... an EVENT! (laughs)... so... I was talking about curriculum, wasn't I...? The... there is... so there's a direct correspondence in this, sort of, attitude that you... that... of a flexible student who can understand the power of images... understand where... that there are... where you can go with narrative and... and beyond narrative and how you can use them in many kinds of ways, so you've got a kind of flexible (39:04) wa-... approach so that different students can take up different... options within the course so that they can get a profile... but it's a kind of... it's a fresh approach to thinking about sounds and images and ideas and that there is a whole... now a vast array of work... creative work out there, beyond television, so, hopefully it'll take off...

39:35

AP

And when you were devising the Cinema of Comic Illusions as a project, did you envisage at earlier stages that there would be... connections with your teaching practices?

39:47

DF

not... well... not directly. I mean it was... I mean, it was just one of those moments when you think "Ah ha! I'll do..." you know... it... I don't think... because the MA video... a one-year course... people in their mid-twenties, so... average... and they're coming on there for specific things... but it does help push that... you don't have to be follow the formula... in my d-... in my, sort of, day-to-day, tutorial-type, talk they pick up... this... so we had a really good... experimental tape yesterday... but that wa-... again, with more traditional... documentary and even a... a more corporate one, but, there's kind of spectrum but we... I don't have an ideological line "You must do this"... you just enCOURage and...bring out different... energies of people... and... encourage a passion for what they're trying to make, as well...

40:56

AP

Great. I want to talk a little bit more now about the, sort of, I suppose, the operational aspects of practice as research... you mentioned briefly obviously the funding of... by the AHRB and also Arts Council... I just wondered if you could expand a bit on... the various sources of funding that contributed.... XXXXX your institution as well.

41:19

DF

Yes... yes... Middlesex University... has supported these projects and... and match-funded, basically... certainly... they were very generous with Tati a Chance to Whistle... which didn't have an AHRB award but did have an Arts Council funding... then... Cinema of Comic Illusions had all three, and... I'm now sort of hoping that the next one will have all three again... and you... in setting out these projects, I think what's tricky is to... govern your ambition in relation to various outcomes that are possible in terms of finance... and hoping at the end of the day, you know, it'll all, sort of, match. This is where that kind of professional... cost control ethic is very useful because it says only spend what you've got... on the other hand... because of the different lengths of time and the different closing dates, there's no way you can get the money up-front and then do the project, which is the professional way of doing XXX... . It works the opposite many ways... you kind of have to believe in the project, to push it into this kind of reality, and I think that has been quite stressful over the different projects... because in the... Tati... I didn't know 'til about one month beforehand whether I would get the nineteen thousand from the Arts council XXXX... sorry, Southeast Arts Cou-... Board, as it was then... until very late, and theref-... but I had have... commit... 'cause I... you had to commit to the De La Warr pavillion not least of all, so it was always... frightening... When it came to the Cinema of Comic Illusions, was the other way round ... I think I managed to get the... Southeast Arts Board in place, but wasn't sure what Middlesex was doing since it was undergoing restructuring and... there appeared to be less money available and it was very unclear at one point, but it then clarified itself... and then AHRB came in, so... it, sort of, allowed me to create what I wanted to at a level, what I call a level of production, that I wanted to work at... The projects are quite am-... I think... to me are ambitious, given this sort of level of funding... but I would always ... you know, will always encourage people to think of projects in a soloistic way... rather than... reducing them to the kind of experimental... state of (accent) "This is this..." "Do this..." "Do tha-..." and it... it becomes... I don't know, without an audience, too... y'know, without a notion of... of the wider... au-... wider community... that's why... I go back to that age XXX definition, and... hold on in there because... you... unless you do that, I mean, it just seems like such an unfulfilling thing to... to make something in a void and test it and... yea... it's sort of... I don't know... doesn't seem very satisfactory to me.

45:01

AP

Well certainly I was... at a... conference last year and a representative from the... from the BBC was there and he was saying academics need to stop modelling things and actually produce something that... has a viability and a life of its own, in some ways.

DF

Yes... good!

45:18

AP

Well weren't you also funded in part, or didn't Brighton Hove contribute...?

DF

Brighton and Hove City Council... provided the... venue at no cost... and... was supportive throughout the project in giving me poster sites and, generally being quite helpful. I think that... their funding is severely limited, I mean there is no... there is only small funding which I didn't, meet the criteria of under the rules of the funding... more or less you had to be charitable status or something of that... you know, but... and there's only small funding anyway, so... I couldn't expect anything larger, and that was a, kind of, generous donation anyway... and they also helped in giving me publicity in... as a... prop-... Brighton City project. It could also be included as a Brighton Festival fringe event ... you might call it post-fringe event ... the festival finished three weeks earlier! But nevertheless it was counted as that ... so.... It all... I think it all helps with the status of the project and the fact that the local MP... and... his wife, the mayoress... the mayor... came to the opening and so on... so it was, sort of, backed to that extent... and of course it does create a good precedent for my next project, so if I... Les Cyclistes wants to turn up at the London to Brighton cycle rally in June, then that's not a problem... they will... help. in terms of on-site security... I don't know if you want to go into that... but, I mean...

47:42

AP

Yes, I mean 'cause that's the next question is about resource and plant context and all of those...

47:47

DF

Yes... OK... The camera came... camera students produced... were the crew... camera came from... it was on loan from college as a resource... the... the edit suite is... was mine that has been up-graded by the university, which was very helpful... basically shooting and editing is no longer a problem... I suppose the... it pushes it back more to... viewing context... it was in a safe haven at the De La Warr Galleries since it was a nice building... which was... which was protected... with a marquee... I had to make sure I had wire fencing six foot high... I had to have a generator ... which cost a fortune... I had to have somebody on site

twenty-four hours a day... internal alarm system... and... that is quite a headache running something... in a park... in a major town... cause you get... it's not so much that you get attacked... you get... it's the thought of being attacked 'cause you get lots of people wandering by having abusing arguments at... three in the morning... or... having gun pellets for attacking local... animals ... and so on... so that... there is a sort of tension in doing that, and that's why I think for the next project... it kind of influences you... with... you think "oh, I'm not going to do that again!" (laughs)... "I will get a vehicle and go for a day..." and then you can dismantle it in a day and then you don't have the overnight thing... so it's one way of saying that resources... kind of match the idea ... and... again that's a sort of interactive sort of thing as you're going through you kind of set these things up and you think "what is the feasibility?"... there's a feasibility test on resor-... "yea, I can do it", "yes I can do it..." how much pain do you want to give yourself, basically... 'cause all these things involve a certain amount of pain...

50:20

AP

'Cause obviously the complexity of sorting out the funding context in order to fully resource a complex... project like that... you do reach points where you pull back, perhaps...

50:33

DF

Well I was... you've got to have a certain stubbornness and a certain resistance... I really... there are times when you think... you know, you're running... seriously! (laughs)... you could run into serious problems! But... I think you just kind of... there's a certain dodginess to what... to me, anyway... that it... it'll happen... if you don't have that, it kind of... dissipates... or the possibility that it's going to happen at all ... so you've got to have that certain resilience... 'cause it... there ain't no easy final solution to getting that budget right on a research-by-practice project, because of the... if you're going to have mixed funding, and it's never going to be given to you as a lump sum up front in advance, unless... somebody changes some rules! and, you can't see that happening too quickly, given the... you know, the... the imaginations of the Arts Council in recent years as they regene-... you know... they've had their own cut-backs and own... and re-shaping ... Middlesex is... has reshaped itself and... and you have the AHRB on-going... in fact, that's probably one of the most consistent of the three! (laughs) but... they don't quite match... and because the personnel change because of the structures have changed, that makes it even more difficult, as well.... so, there's no certainty about anything...

52:14

AP

And they have somewhere to go before they catch up with... because there's a lot of discourse about research and development, for example, "blue skies research", but... it does seem to be very difficult to... to get to the kind of funding that's required in order to initiate...

52:28

DF

Yes... Well even on, this current proposal I've put in, I put it in as a two-stage plan to the Arts Council... but XXX the fact that I'm going to a different person... and a different organisation from Southeast Arts Board... and... as a way of trying to create certainty, more certainty than less certainty... if I ask for one lump sum, that might be seen as a risk to that institution in its... current format, so... seeing it as a two-page... two... I'm... they're then requiring for the work to be put in for Stage One before committing to Stage Two... that doesn't particularly worry me, but, on the other hand it's... it's another hurdle which, given that I've been making things for thirty years ... there's... it's not going with the person... you know, it's going by a set of rules, a rule book, and applying that, and you just... either have to live with that or not... make it

53:36

AP

OK. I want to... talk now about... we've talked, I think, about how Cinema of Comic Illusions, obviously... related to... Tati... but if we think about the future and you briefly outline Les Cyclistes, but, I suppose this is really an opportunity to talk about how elements from Cinema of Comic Illusions have fed into this current project and to talk about that a little bit, I think we've...

54:01

DF

Yea... Again... it's... well, it's... again it's different approach... different sort of inroads... but... the first one is... is... concerned with the hyper-real... which... I was attracted to obviously through the fi... the absurdist films... particularly the French early comic films around 1910 and... how they work... and that kind of manic... view of the world... and not so much to... to copy it, but to... let it infuse in... in developing a script... around cycling and... there's two notions of cycling... one is at the, sort of, the sort of Clarion... Club, which was a socialist club, a cycling club... which... is very British... British socialism in the twenties, I guess, and... that kind of tour de force professional ethic... and... how bodies relate to that, in a way, and... linking the two through a... a kind of s-..., short, silent film... hopefully using... maybe one or two people from the previous production... involving them there... I'm interested in that kind of cross-disciplinary approach of performance and video... and, indeed, installation and how that kind of metres out... I'm interested in the documentary idea... and... having had the generalised audience, taking that to a sp-... now... to specific audience and... how that... how that audience might be involved through... the

project... if I've... if they are filmed... and... then see them-... see themselves engaged and HOW they see themselves ... and... the social milieu of the installation, so... there are many... so in terms of... and working... so there's... in terms of hyper-real... in terms of audience... in terms of trying out some of the things I found OUT about... cinematic life of a live cinematic show and trying that out directly without... and... where the archive material is tangen-... tangen-... well, suPPORTing the main... action as opposed to the action supporting the archive material ... and asking questions about the hyper-real and how it adapts to a modern... audience... how it... or... and in MY mind, how it adapts... . which also links in the previous work from... years ago as well, yea?... or work, kind of, reinfor-... it... it... gets ideas from previous experiences and productions... working to that...

57:10

AP

I think...

DF

We've finished!

AP

We need to change the tape... PICK UP ON THAT.

## TAPE TWO

AP

So, we began to talk about Les Cyclistes and its relationship with Cinema of Comic Illusions and... did you want to...?

00:17

DF

So there's hy-... we covered something about hyper-real... and then I kind of discovered there was a... exhibition called hyper-realism in Strausberg... and that was kind of interesting to make that kind of fine art comparison... how they... how people... what kind of things were in the collection... and taking a photograph and then making it into an oil... kind of oil... acrylic painting.... and the kind of lenses they would... sort of... if you... wide angle and basically... a kind of manic view of the world... and... that sort of... that's also expressed through the early films... through a very interesting book by Ruth... Gordon... on.... Why the French love Jerry Lewis.... But she.... she's... I think she's a medical scientist... researcher... came across... her proposition is that... the, ah... I th-... the theme of badness and insanity work was... a topic of discussion in French socie-... culture generally around the 1880s and that got into Caberet... the Caberet artists then went into film and the films become an impression of that, sort of... culture and idea, so I kind of liked that ... and how



XXXXX creates... visual faces, visual gags and with so little effort is able to create little movements with his eyebrow to his eye to his lip and... to his chin and then back up again and it's... it's kind of wondrous to see 'cause it's so effortless and it's over in a... in a... moment and... getting some notion of that, and notion of... kind of (sternly) "anxiety!", which you saw in Collino's "Firemen": Collino in a world goes as a fireman to put out the fire only there is no fire!... and having created all this CHAos, falls to the ground and "Oh, my god!" and then gets up again and is given a medal!... for his trouble! You know... and you think... this is... kind of like... we're not so far removed from this state, you know, of... you... expectations are sort of usurped... and... and re-set, and... and that kind of improbability and it... I th... I just thought you could bring that to bear... on this... I've got this sort of image of... when you go on... ferries to Cannes or XXXXX... you see groups of pe... cyclists... you know, they could be in there... they'll be early retirees... I've got a friend who I met out of making an earlier film in Brittany about a Breton farmer... well in walked one day his neighbour, who is a retired professor of statistics and... he's a great cycling guy... and... he knows all the cycling people and... his house is full of old cycles and it's kind of manic... and... you can bring to... and it... you can... it's got that sort of Clarion Club... kind of, feel about it... it's a... it's a way of life that... and it's a mind-set and... an expression of "being with the bike in the open air"... "and it's free!"... and you're... "you're back to nature!" and... I got this idea of... that they set out from... as a... on a holiday, in a sense, to see the Tour de France... but the Tour de France is... is ma... is another manic thing of... professionalism and... it's got a whole history of drug taking where ... not a... before doctors were assigned to the cyclists, they had helpers, and the helpers gave drugs to their... to their... individual... cycle people and... (laughing) they all then took the drugs so everybody was... on its guts! You've got this image where everyone is... (trumpet noise) ... and everybody's coming out to watch this for about, I don't know... for a day out and they... they sit in caravans watching it on television... as it goes past, within a minute, and it's a kind of nice idea, and, for me, anyway, and... they sort of... they never quite get... to see the Tour de France... or they get mixed up in it... anyway I'm going to work on that, and that's in a sense set out of this concern for the hyper-real which we'll get... I guess... transmogrified into a much more, kind of, English laid-back state but... that's the starting point... and... you know, this notion of bringing sound and image to bear on that... one of the great things about Collino's Firemen is when we... we tested it, we all got... we're testing... where do we put "who says what" in the films... you just see the action... and... the great thing was to see... Collino... the star of the film... he doesn't get a li... well he only... he doesn't get a line... he gets one line, I think... but the... way you place the other expletives: "faster, faster" or then it's the second before the film speeds up... and... where you put the noises... what noises?... and then... how it... tucks in... amongst the live pian-... live piano-playing Stephen Hawk was just wonde-... wonderful moment for me, anyway, that... how you could see... that... and the audience, then, had to concentrate on what was going on and... one of the factors about... in a sense... going back to ci... Cinema of Comic Illusions was... what I obSERVE was that people were

like this... rather tha-... there were two type of audience... some laughed and... and were quite free with the material... OTHERS felt they had to concentrate not to miss a blooming thing, 'cause it was packed... and packed with... with moments of meaning which were either coming from the screen, from the action, or they were coming at... you know, at being planted with the sounds, either from the piano on one side or the... or the side effects... and then they had this narrative to cope with... and... the actions or the actors ... live... so there was a lot to concentrate on... so MOST people (laughs)... are making sure that they 're kind of registered everything... and, it says so... that... that... will sort of carry forward to the next production because... that sort of sense of immersion is now with me... and... apart from making this silent film I als-... the other kind of thing I want to do is... is the absurdity of... of a performer... in a... representational room, in a hyper-real room... so everything is driven by the... this notion of hyper-real... so if I got that sense of... that's what I'm driving the whole project then everything... it becomes easier to... to... to construct... and make decisions about what should be in and what should be out... and of course, I'm now going to these... these fairs in France where they have postcards... and there's thousands of people going like this: "Have you got anything on The Savoy" choo-choo-choo-choo (imitating sound of card flipping)... but they also... and then the word gets around... there's this English bloke, he's... he's looking for stuff on... Tour de France or... cycling so out comes all this stuff, suddenly ... and, but just like old Paris Match or... the cycling magazines from the fifties and... they're not so expensive that you can't, you know, get them and... you can lay-... they can be around... people can then feel... the artefact 'cause wha-... there's nothing greater than feeling the ar-... you know, being able to touch something that's fifty years old and... seeing the greats... of cycling in these... in these... magazines and photographs... and in films, of course, there's a... gr-... you know, the research of the film archives... reveals that in 1925... a French comedian made a... three-hour film where he places himself as a... he's a courier in... a... four-star hotel in Nice and gets caught up in the Tour de France... and wins!, you know... he remade the film in nine-... he made that in twenty-five, in thirty-one he made it as a talky film, a remake, a total remake and added the song, so there's this sort of (makes trumpet sound), sort of lovely, sort of marchy song at the end... 'cause of course every year they had their own... the Tour de France had it's own signature song, pretty awful marchy-type things, but... and then there were other ones to the musical artists... so, it's a rich territory, again, for... for archiving... for the archive... for history to... to play and to... to say something to an audience and at the moment I'm trying to work through the various elements... of topics of cycling... like pain... na-... being with nature and... pistons... 'cause it's a technology that... is, runs alongside cinema, of course, and... and it is, you know, klonk... gears... and hu-... but this time the human provides a piston to the gears... for propulsion in a landscape so that's... got it's own... kind of visual... interest, really...

10:19

AP

You talk a lot about... the richness of the material and how the audience focuses on... the DENsity in some ways, and also talking about the kinds of research that you engage in producing rich material and also talking then about decision-making processes, so, following on from that, how would you characterise, I suppose, if... if you can... your devising process? Are... is there a, I suppose, a “formalised” whether, that’s in a self-conscious way, the methodology to the way it should be...

10:55

DF

What I think is important... is, is how... what effect your having on the audience... what... you’re DOING this for an audience and... what is being... a really good re-read... I must of read it in the sixties... Eslin’s theatre of the absurd and so on... and that... you’re looking for a poetic image and you’re not driving it from A to Z but offering up one image after another to an audience and how that audience takes that on board and, either they’re going to be immersed... Tati was choice, definitely... Cinema of Comic Illusions was about immersion and coping with the density... so I’m... very interested in how the... the quality of the experience the audience is receiving... so it’s not just consuming but it is having to... to work with material and... how that happens and to articulate that... ‘cause it’s... the... it brings out notions of interactivity and you get this all this time with computing... works... that... interactive games and design... and... it’s not a question of pressing buttons, it’s a question of thought processes and how you’re responding and how you situate people to the material... which is why I’m interested in taking it as a site-specific activity that you’re... you’re... you’ll get catching people when they might be interested... and might have the time “Ah! We’ll just pop in and see that” so it’s immersion and it.. it... in a way it’s... it’s... you’re leading people to a point... well, yea, you know, you’re safe... but I’m going to take you somewhere... and offer you that experience and you... you have to work with that experience... in different ways...

12:57

AP

Well what are your processes for, I suppose, for assessing those relationships, the audience relationships... the efficacy of the work that you’re producing...

13:07

EF

Well... again, I think... as I said earlier... with the power of observation... every time because... it is about that... with Tati people... would sit down for a whole day... they, they would... I had enough... I would get several games on offer... they would match sounds to images, some people, about eighteen people spend a day each ... ‘cause... working out what sounds work with what... we had a... a fish... which randomly made a noise, but people thought it might be the stone they were standing on, or something they had touched... and they’d go... it was

out on the top corridor... on the top floor... and there was lovely thirties décor... staircase... and they started to go down and they'd hear it bubble up again and they would come rushing back up! And... they would look at the tapes... and I provided set... representational sets... from the Tati film so they... they were sitting in comfort and they would actually watch a fifty-minute documentary which to me... you know... galleries... space... is... is amazing... but it was the quality of the seats... and the fact that they were families and... they would sit there and watch it... and it... then they... or they would look at something on the screen and they'd turn around and they could see the artifact that was actually... "That was the... one that was in the film!" ... and that was a very pleasurable association for... for people... I learnt, and... they could wander around... and... they didn't have to wander in... they could go in any order... if they went out on to the beach they would see other Tati characters already there... so it became a whole, kind of, experience. With the Cinema of Comic Illusions I felt it was... it was much more... a denser version... you... I like that word you use 'cause it... it's exactly that and... in a sense, if you didn't keep up with it, it didn't matter either because to me it just kind of... to me it just kind of flowed (draws out word)... and you could enjoy it in a different way.... So I'm hoping with The Cyclists that... again it's taking it... in a world... and a in a constructed world... a pop-... it's a... I like the notion of popular culture that... it's documentary... it's documentary for the people to the people ... it's a bit ol' corny that!... but, I mean, it's true! And... of course, the... not only do you... you see people and you... XXXXX... on a Tati... they were coming back... and they were bringing their friends... and they were saying "Oh, I can show you... this..." ... "Come and have a look at this..." ... "Let's sit down we can watch this..." ... or... there was a strange man who had a little brandy at four o'clock... who'd sit... come in and sort of look around... he was almost like the objects of the... of the exhibition... so it was all... it was this, kind of, wonderful... SPACE, really... and... so it would be Tati on the film and then came Tati within the exhibition and it was really very satisfying... and... I wanted to say something else about... it's how people using that space and engaging with... that's... and that's very important and... as it... it's been important to me as the making of the tapes or the show... how people are c-.... relate to the... to the material in a space... in a social space.

16:42

AP

And how does... how then does that audience observation, in a way, feed into your research in a more formal way... does it feature, will it feature in writings or is it feeding in... more through the way in which you develop future projects?

17:01

DF

It will feature... it... with the development of another new curriculum, actually... and that only happened this week! (laughs)... so... there are other people at

Middlesex University interested in... creative... curating ... and there's a... a possibility of developing an MA around that... and that's... that could be exciting.

17:34

AP

'Cause there's clear links also obviously with interactivity in play and how that works against traditional notions of reception...

17:42

DF

Yes indeed... I mean, obviously within the context of Middlesex University we've got a new games MA... starting... and, of course, games has reached... it's a sense, it's a kind of trajectory, a development, really of... that it is now discovered that, you know, narrative and how you would think about character within games is becoming more important... so, that's another aspect again, and it's not just... interactivity is not just there clicking, clicking, it's... up there! ... is where it's happening and, that's what... and I've been able to discover that, in a sense, without too much computing equipment! ... is quite nice! Mm...

18:30

AP

And... I g-... suppose moving on to the questions, again, sort of questions of... I suppose the ethics of practice as research, that sense, in terms of how you've conceived of notions of ownership of... of the work, I mean, which seems like an obvious question but what are your thoughts about who owns the work... how've you conceived of who's, who's made the work...

18:56

EF

Yes... Well, Coming from the production background, I'm responsible for driving the project, as director, and... as producer, but, having said that, one values every... research... subject... subject specialist and their contribution and you value and assign the creativity to the talent that you are... you are working with, so... although it's an ordered system, as it were... it's my project... never-the-less... you give people the space in which to fulfil their function so that you're... it's not a... so much a personal... thing... is that... the Mission of... is the success of the project... so everybody's contributing their expertise... and you're trying to get... because it's... I had this attitude about improvisation and... of... of... of LISTENING that it's not as hierarchical as producer-director which suggests... I'm able to collaborate with... with a dancer at college... a dance... choreographer... with actors ... with ... fellow special-... specialists... colleagues that are specialists in... tech-... technology... devises like the fish, the interactive fish devise... with... musicians... there's sub-... and a lot of subject specialists and... in... that ranges... in the Cinema of Comic Illusions it was the Cinema Proje-... Projection Trust who are a wonderful group of people, enthusiasts in a way who've... who re-make projectors from the past... to... to...

curators of archive materials at Gaumont and ITN and the museum in Turin in particular... and.... your... it's a voyage... it's a journey ... very odd... and, you... I suppose as a documentary maker you're... you're engaged in a process of trust, maybe, that nobody's exploited... everybody has the appropriate credit... and... you're there for the success of the project and your interest... kind of, genuine interest, so it's ... that kind of thing has been quite rewar-... I mean that's one of rewarding things about doing... and meet-... engaging... and meeting so many people is that... it's not... you're not looking over the shoulder at another colleague and saying (mock "intellectual speak") "This person's got one point more than I have..." or something... it's... it's a truly collaborative exercise... but... I suppose it goes back to this professional... production ethic... knowing... why we're all there!

22.29

AP

Right. OK. we've talked a bit about... I think how... how the Cinema of Comic Illusions, particularly, ha-... has this on-life through the audience being there and carrying that experience away with them... I suppose we... we come to the question about documentation and the world of documentation of the event itself... and I... obviously I saw some of the material that you were working on on the computer earlier and just if you could talk a little bit about what your ideas are on documentation and how you are using the notion of documentation to provide a different kind of on-life for the project...

23:11

EF

I think it's... it... it has be-... it's true to say it's quite difficult... I think the... doc-... I made a document of the actual show... and... because of cer-... it was done... alongside the show itself and quite quickly... and tak-... taking different tapes of the show... and because the show exists as a sho-... as a live performance... that doesn't quite translate to a filmed version of it... what you get is a document of it... which is archival document... it's... it's a notebook which... may or may not be useful to other people... what it can't be is exhibited in... as kind of cinematic expression, the cinematic things are in it, it's not consistent ... so I wouldn't hold it up to be the cinematic version of the show... having said that... I would have liked it to have taught, I think it had... it... in a sense it... the outcome justified that ... unfortunately I... I didn't know of the Arts Council touring scheme so that didn't... it wasn't in my mind, at the beginning... which it should... in a sense, perhaps it should have been but... it would have been good if it had a few more appearances... but there are certain problems with that, namely, actors... get on with their lives and do... and move for-... move forward... so holding the production together would... was... would have been difficult... obviously with, if you look back for Tati: A chance to Whistle that produced three documentaries which hold up on their own and were subsequently shown in Verona University and Bradford Film Festival... and a few other places... but, it is quite difficult as a single entity to find... and locate them quick-... that material

elsewhere...which is a disappointment to me... but it does exist as, as I say, as a... as a recorded document of them... of the... show. There is also some... I did take some shots of the audience... as a long-shot to note that intense observation, I don't th... find it terribly satisfactory... I mean, it just says what I say, you know! And, so in the terms of that documentation, it's THERE but... it's less powerful to me than the... fact that I was there, for so many of the... shows, and observing... deliberately observing, I don't know if that answers your question...

26:33

AP

It does about that... that... I suppose that sense of documenting the show, so... what are you doing now with the various... or I suppose the first question really should be what... what do you consider to be the artefacts of Cinema of Comic Illusions... where are they located and how are you going to... re-configure those... And that... that can be loosely or tightly defined by you.

27:06

EF

Yea... I think it... what it gives me is... is... .. completed extracts and... therefore I'm able to... use that material... to... to other audiences... as a presentation of the material... and I can... use it as teaching materials... I was able to take it to PARIP for the second conference and... talk about it in that... in that way... so I have got a commodity... to talk around, in that sense, which is... unlike the extract... is, you know, showing you that it works for film... but it's not consistent... and I think it's a totally inconsistent product as a cinematic experience if you didn't know context, so... as a... as a sort of aid to presentation it's definitely there for future use. Of course all the... the material then I was able to write two articles... and I think that was a valuable undertaking.

28:26

AP

And what about the other material remains from the marquee, I mean, we talked before the interview about how you have this... amount of stuff that lingers and stays with you... have you given thought, or how have you thought about that material culture of the project and how that might go on to future projects, or how that might be, I suppose, used in other ways....

29:02

DF

Oh Yes!

AP

'Cause obviously it's not just the audio and visual material that is an on-life.

29:09

DF

Well I think... You need to plot... 'cause... in nine-... 2007 is the anniversary of XXXXX, for example, so that... if I've, and I have been... slowly ... gaining material through the Arts Council grants to have a look at, so with a vehicle... and... video projectors... and... with an edit speed... I'm fairly (draws out word)... sustainable... and are able... "Have vehicle, will travel!" I've also got a four... four-metre... screen... with... with a good surround... so... I can now do open-air presentations... I do have a lot of beach hu-... ah, the beach huts from the exhibition of Tati, I do have Mrs. Baker... so... I do have various artefacts and... wonderful projector from nineteen-oh-... nine... so I... I'm beginning to think that I'm able to... to mix and match things and take it to different festivals... and re-work material... and I've got these exci-... you know... I've got these exciting absurdist films from Cinema of Comic Illusions... and... so... in a sense I have a lot of baggage at my dis-... Props! ...I am not sure... (laughs)... and I feel that quite... it's quite an interesting pro-... idea... that I could now go out and... anywhere and make an impact of a presentation... without resourcing to further financing... but that's... those are sort of... things for the future, really... I really want to concentrate on just getting the next project complete...

31:32

AP

'Cause that question obviously has to do with... how we might re-think the locations of the research and obviously... because... parti-... I think particularly with people who are working in live theatre-type performance, the continuing focus on the video record, whereas of course they have no books of notes and stage designs and scripts and ideas and drawings and the rest of it, but that, for all the reasons that people work in film are familiar with, is not given the same kind of privilege cultured capital way, however you want to talk about it that XXXX the video document is given, so, just in terms of... because Cinema of Comic Illusions was materially a very rich project in terms of generating whole range of traces, material traces of it just.. yea... thinking about how those may or may not relate to the idea of assessment, 'cause obviously in the background to all of this is this notion of research assessment and how... how you've conceived of the project in those themes, if at all, how... how and what is looked at and assessed for something like... BRAE or in terms of the report that one has to write for the AHRB...

32:53

DF

I think... it's a quite... it's an interesting... that's a relevant question to me because... I'm aware of... I make art... I make products... but I also design that environment and that design is as important an outcome for me as... for RAE return... as the product and... certainly gong back to... with Tati it was clear to see that product was... the design of an exhibition... created design of an exhibition... 'cause that was... models... and a lot of thought went into the



relationships of things in there ... and the same which was carried through to Cinema of Comic Illusions with a kind of pre-... pre-viewing of material that was possible before the start of the show and with photographic material with the inclusion of the... of... an early projector, which was part of the show but people could visit that afterwards and did... as well as a display cabinet with materials in it so that... was a whole kind of designed... tent... I think there were problems with seeing it as an exhibition... mainly to do with the generator having to be turned off 'cause it was so blooming expensive! But certainly... people did look at things before the show... they tended... they didn't do that after the show, but they did do it before, definitely... so there was a kind of design going on which took a lot of... I mean part... that... as we said earlier about the importance of the space and... as an original feature... that should be located as part of the XXXX return... separate to the artefact...

35:14

AP

Right. I suppose the next question, really... is, really how... how you thought about and conceived... or how you've thought about the contributions to knowledge of Cinema of Comic Illusions and I suppose that... how that has changed over the time of the actual process of the project and the aftermath of the project....

35:49

DF

I think I was... because I'm coming outside of the general group of academics concerned with early history... they're sort of... they're on a trajectory of exploration within that field and I'm sort of an outsider gathering... walking into a topic, as it were, as I do with anything... so... whilst I'm respecting that discipline and the people working in it... my concerns are... I'm exploring costume... I'm exploring objects... as much as the physical substance of the film itself, as it were... and the ideas of the narrative or whatever that's happening with it, depicted within each frame... so I've got a different take on it. I'm also coming from it from a production point of view: how did these guys make these films work and what devices of the technology were they using to make... creatively within that comic format. So, I'm exploring that which is not the traditional... really the traditional view of... film... early film theory... which has, you know, it's had a lot to do in a short t-... period of time.... in... just sort of knowing the... knowing what's out there and how it might XXX within a social fabric of the day... I'm more concerned with using the materials as an expression... of what it means to people in the wider community and how THEY might relate to that and... finding ways in... which it... is an expression of the sheer energy and XXXX of those films... and making them kind of live... so there's a kind of different agenda coming on between the early film historians... and... what I might be doing...

38:10

AP

OK... We've talked about the dissemination of that notion of contributions to knowledge, I think with Cinema of Comic Illusions... how were you thinking about dissemination in the context of Les Cyclistes? I mean you've talked about the travelling exhibition but beyond that... are you still... are you thinking about those notions of disseminating whatever the...

38:33

DF

Yea... I mean I think... you see... one of the problems for... of makers... filmmakers, as you might say... is... is finding outlets for the discussion that you want to actually have... and I su-... I think it would be of interest again to the two.... to the two periodicals I've already mentioned... because it's dealing with the hyper-real and contextualising early film his--... early films... or maybe a bit later than the earlier ones that we've already discussed but... so I do think that, as a case study for the general media practice, it would be of general interest. I think there is another... I haven't quite found the right forum to discuss the... the intimacies of documentary as it were... I think that's the... it seems to kind of get near it but I'm not quite... it's not there... it's not registered quite rightly... so I think there's... I don't know whether that's lacking on me or whether it doesn't exist, I'm not sure... but certainly I would welcome an engagement more with the film theory because I think my proposition about hyper-real is that you can find it in all sorts of documentaries and feature films and it kind of transgresses and it's a way of constructing film... and you see it for example in... the... French documentary on primary school children...

40:21

AP

Oh! XXXXX?

DF

XXXX! Because, again, you've got this sort of... you've got all these little children who, kind of, spontaneously... sort of, slightly... dis-... sort of, dislocated... and they just sort of say these wonderful things as they sort of pass by and... creates a whole interest and that's very much in the spirit of the absurd and the enjoyment of that and the detail as... little girls... "You're my friend" ... yes...you're my friend... "yes"... "Are you my friend?"... "no"!... (laughs) It's just that timing and that "oh!" and get that kind of trilogy things.... and... and you might find it again in, sort of, Emily... the absurdist characters that are drawn... wide-angle lens... so I think it transgresses a whole, kind of, range of films... and you find it XXXX... it's that whole kind of set of films... which deal with the absurd and a way of looking at the world in long-shot and... and in the minutiae of performance detail... and I quite like to... to tell people... there is a consistency and you don't have to see films as... you know, that... there not as quite as static... the classifications have gone on in the past... not that static... there is something that goes... that is so wonderful... that is so filmic... and the thing about silent films... the early films... A) it was never silent B) it was a live

performance and... it really had a whole kind of energy, of chaos... you know, it literally... the chaos of the screen doing this to you... and that needs... that IS the cinematic experience for me... which gets lost in... so much of the, kind of, photoplays that it's up against... through an industry... it's gone all kind of registers... "I'd like to register that!" "That's my mission!" "Register this!"

42:37

AP

And I suppose one avenue for that kind of dissemination would be the... the next PARIP conference.

42:42

DF

Absolutely!

AP

I gather you can get people working...!

DF

Yes! (laughs)

AP

Get us all riding round Breton Hall Sculpture Park on bicycle!

42:55

DF

XXXXXXXX??

43:02

AP

And... emerging from questions about contributions to knowledge and all the rest of it, I suppose, what... how do you see the work that you do in terms of contributions to the practice-as-research communities per se? So not necessarily people working in film practice as research but that meta-discourse of practice as research.

43:26

DF

Well I... I can only go back to PARIP because it has been so... I mean I hope... some of the dancers and the... people... and performers... and the poets and... meet there. I mean I just think it's just such a wonderful idea that seems to work... I think... it seems to have got... it became more formalised, I think... there's a tendency, isn't it, to formalise it and... which is... I know I kind of like the... that openness... it was... I mean it was a huge... refreshing experience... and I think everybody appreciated that... so that I hope people will find it... a quirky documentary filmmaker as interesting as... a film... who's working in

something completely different... and... you do find there are similarities that you didn't know about or... "God! They've got the same problems as you!" and "Oh!" And I think that's just... is a really good idea... 'cause it's without hierarchy and it's... there's a certain openness about it... it's not... we're not protective when... we don't feel protective... we just sort of give it a go and see what happens...

44:55

AP

And I think part of the formalisation of the processes this year are really a way of speaking to some people's critique about... that we shouldn't be mixing up all of the disciplines 'cause it doesn't work... but also that sense from some members of the community that they can... cannot speak about practice as research within the terms of the Institution so we are obviously asking a range of people very institutionalised and formalised questions to see... what actually happens when you do that. Initially my feeling was that this would provide the empirical evidence to show to the Institution that you cannot do this, so this is the... is this an inappropriate way of talking about practice as research... whether that will turn out to be the case at the end of this process I think is still very much in question. I've been quite surprised how the formalisation has actually created some spaces for flexibility and informality... But I suppose... beyond that sense, then, of the practice-as-research communities, or perhaps extending from that contact with a range of practitioners... have you given thought to ways in which you might work and explore practice as research differently, both through the experiences of your own project which of course is kind of a given because there are obviously ways to do things differently, but has... how has contact, or how has operation within a network of practitioner researchers given you pause to think about the way in which you conduct your own research...

46:40

DF

I haven't answered that... It's certainly within my own institution... ResCen... the Chris Bannerman Research Unit... And meeting with the people that are involved with that, people from theatre, people from fine art... performance and... so on. I think it's quite... it's a very interesting starting point and... meeting with people... there are all sorts of... I think with institutions there are lots of interesting people with, kind of, common ideas or common interests... and I suppose we're only beginning to... to meet up and see potential for the future and I think... I suppose an exciting... I mean that is an exciting prospect... and people, as I was saying, about... who've got an interesting, creative... and talking that through and seeing where... you know... what that holds... is a, kind of, new course... because that... it will... but just by meeting people you will... it inevitably reflects back on your own ideas... and... and drawing in different talents again to the project work, I think that's how it happens... you find you can get on with somebody and therefore you're... the barrier is not there and then you can say "Well, let's think

about doing something"... so I think... my... the bit... the thing is that... within, sort of, practice within schools of art and design... cross-disciplinary, where there is trust and where there is respect and where you can have an openness... will... it HAS to lead to new, kind of, new approaches using technologies and... just new kinds of products for new kinds of audiences... and meeting the modern-day condition... so... that has to be a good move! ... you can't be stuck with tried and trusted formulas! That's not how it works! It's an engagement with people and with technologies... and... wrestling with bureaucracies and... cross-funding situations and... but it's all there because it's an excitement and a passion to make things and react to the world... chaos... you find yourself it! (laughs) So that... I think... you can only hope that this kind of cross-disciplinary thing will extend and produce new courses as it's beginning to do, produce new works...

50:02

AP

So that messiness isn't extraneous to the work... it seems... it's very center.

50:07

DF

Yes... yes... strange as it is! ... strange as it is!

50:14

We're reaching the end of the questions, as it were... the final question on my list... and in the process of doing these case studies I have... there is a last question that isn't on the list... but how close has been the relationship between your own thinking about practice as research and this... research... or this interview context... 'cause obviously I talked just briefly about setting up this very formal context...

50:47

DF

I think it's... no that... I find... there's a correspondence between the two that... I've been allow-... I mean, I've said what I've experienced... it's amazing that... you know... it's... six ... years (laughs)... on two projects! It's a bit frightening, really... but they have, you know, multiple outcomes (laughs)! It's... and just the volume of... engage-... of pe-... of work that's included and the number of people that've been involved... so I've been able to talk about all those things and it's been... just the thought processes of going through those productions, I think... come back into the interview.

AP

And what's... missing? I mean, aside from the obvious point that of course the practice as research is missing because that happened, as it were... what is... what is missing from this?

DF

From ...?

AP

From this particular interview, and if you were... if you were to look at somebody else's case study, what would you want... what would you really want to know?

DF

(long pause)

Well... that's a sort of... 'cause it goes back to the institutional life, doesn't it? And... I'd want to know how... how they've actually... have they had an enjoyable experience within that... as a research by practice... or has it all... have they had the space... the time space within their own institutions... I've had a very FREE existence for these projects which has been wonderful. Its... project work by its definition... by definition is time-consuming: you work weekends, you work nights and... so on... and... it is a total commitment in that sense and you get the feeling that, as time passes, as work programs are... geared and recor-.... and denotated... and created XXXX that... will this kind of freedom... go, and with it will it go the ambition of the practitioners in XXXX design... and elsewhere...? I mean, will... I painted an optimistic picture of cross-disciplinary but, you know, the tension within the institution is to get the most out of... the individual... academic... and as the... as... the onus goes on to time-tabling academics time down to the last... minute... one suspects that that will inTRUDE into free thought and speculation... and... will that have an adverse effect? So that's what the question I put back, in a way... so... that's everything to play for.

AP

Excellent. Thank you very much, David.