REWIND | Artists' Video in the 70's & 80's
Interview with Kate Meynell

Interview by Dr Jackie Hatfield, 1st June 2006

JH: Which of your works to you consider to be the most important and why?

KM: I can't come up with an answer really, because I think the stuff that's most important to me is always the stuff I'm working on currently, or I still want to fiddle with in some way. I don't think that I have a sense of what's been most important. Different things represent different eras of thought and practice. There's not a hierarchy in that.

JH: Would you say that there are key points during your career as an artist where you have achieved a certain set of conceptual criteria?

KM: I think it's more fluid than that.

JH: So you are saying that every work you've done culminates in some ideas that you have at that point, and so each work is important?

KM: Each piece of work is important to me and since it's a question about me rather than some exterior perception, yes, each piece of work is crucially important at the point at which I'm doing it. I always have this anxiety about managing to live long enough to complete what it is that I'm desperate to do. In that sense, each one is desperately important at the time in which I make it. Some things stay important but that's because the themes or threads that run through them are still being used.

JH: Would you say that there are works that are important to you but haven't necessarily been reviewed or seen as key to your process?

KM: Yes, definitely.

JH: Are there any of those works that are acknowledged by external viewers as being important at that point, in terms of review or critique?

KM: Well I think inevitably the things that got picked up for TV, were made more of, and I think disproportionately. That's because of the way that operates. Then things got picked up and were written about, particularly earlier stuff that Cate Elwes wrote about for me, which's been brilliant. I kept things there but there are other works that were made around the same time, which weren't written about and which, are basically lost. They are

invisible, except that I have a sense of them. But, that's fine. It's the same with any other kind of work that you do easily.

JH: But you are an artist that doesn't necessarily make objects.

KM: I do make objects. I make sculptural objects and I draw and I paint and I make books, like artist book-works. So video is one aspect of a more collage-ic approach to stuff. The work takes the form that it needs to take, to deal with what it is that I'm trying to address, rather than something else. I'm not medium specific.

JH: But you started with performance?

KM: I started with paint and collections of things, little collections of ephemeral stuff and then a bit of performance. Then video was useful because it was a more direct way of dealing with things. Pencil remained useful because it's very direct, whereas printmaking or filmmaking, which is or two stages remote wasn't so useful for me.

JH: That's an interesting point. Can you explain a bit about what you mean by that being one removed? How is video not one removed?

KM: Because you can see what you're doing and it's more like drawing or performing. It's direct. It's a very direct response. You know what it is that you've got and you can adjust it or go back and re-do it, or ignore it. But, if it's something that has to go through a whole set of other processes, you then have to delay that set of responses to a point. You loose the moment if you like, which is fine, but is just a different way of doing stuff. I've always preferred to do stuff, which relies on the moment and which is being produced rather more than the kind of post-production angle of things, although obviously that comes into it a bit.

JH: Can you talk about when you first started to use video as part of the process?

KM: That was at college because it was around. Everyone was using it. I was also involved with a group of people who were involved with LVA, so it sort of happened that way. I possibly would have used it anyway shortly after because I was using cheaper technology like tape-recorders and slide-projectors and that sort of stuff.

JH: So where you at college?

KM: I was at Byam Shaw to start with. I got involved with the performance group there called *Hump*. That was more French Theatre stuff really, than what I'd call Performance now. We did quite a lot of work then. We did use projections and recorded sounds as well as live-action and stuff like that. But, I don't think I was terribly involved in the recording side of it. There were sort of techy people who did that.

JH: It wasn't that part of it that you were interested in?

KM: No, I was doing performance and I was also the roadie, because I had a post office van, a modest role.

JH: So what was the first video piece that you made? Was it an amalgamation with performance and tape?

KM: The first video piece I made was at the Royal College, and it was when a slide-tape piece I had made had become sort of boring, and I wanted to remake it. That was a fairly obvious feminist era of work, and it still is excruciatingly boring. I was documenting people doing house work and the slide-tape version actually, in the end, I think probably was better because I used a lot of autobiographical material that took it outside of the domestic space. The domestic stuff that I was making there was just kind of like cringe-making. I wouldn't dream of looking at it again.

JH: You wouldn't even look at it?

KM: I don't think so. I wouldn't have the means to it because I don't have a black-and-white reel-to-reel player.

JH: So it was a half-inch or something?

KM: Yes

JH: Was it an exhibited piece?

KM: I submitted it for examination and humiliation! So that was my first piece of video.

JH: It's interesting to know that because the chronology of things is, to a certain extent, interesting. You can map a sense of what was happening at the time based on what other people were doing. I'm trying to contextualise the history, historically. That's the reason I asked that question.

KM: That was black-and-white Portapak with huge batteries that you couldn't carry properly and all that biz.

JH: Is that the reason you weren't interested in the technology as such? Having to deal with it?

KM: I wasn't disinterested in the technology. I found it slightly daunting. I wasn't disinterested in the technology. I was very interested in what it would do, but I wasn't particularly interested in having to deal with getting it to do it. There were all these hurdles you had to go through with the technicians if you didn't know what the right name for the cable was. You weren't given it, which was just stupid.

JH: Was it like that for all of you there?

KM: Yes. I got on quite well with the technicians but it was very boys-y in terms of the gear.

JH: It's interesting that you say that because so far the majority of the men that I've talked to, don't even bring that up as an issue. I think that's interesting that you said that because I'm sure that they experienced that as well, but they just don't articulate it in that way.

KM: Or maybe they learnt the names of everything rather than running away.

JH: Obviously this won't happen now, these cameras are small and easy to use.

KM: Yes, you don't really have to worry about it and you don't have to be terrified to plug it into your computer and do something with it either. I remember a particular thing where I was still working with the same group, *Hump*, and I think it was Women Live Festival or something that Tina Keane was doing down at the film Co-op and we pre-recorded the whole thing onto an old reel-to-reel tape recorder. I got it up to the Film Co-op and it had gone mono, so half of the sound had disappeared. It was a sort of major disaster because we were going on and I was terribly upset and they wouldn't explain to me what it was. I was supposed to know how the machine worked. I rang the Royal College and asked what was going on. I got frightfully upset ridiculously. I had to drive all the way back over to Kensington in order for the technician to show me that I hadn't pressed the mono/stereo button on the front, and then go all the way back. So that was three hours out when we were in the set-up point for a 7 o'clock performance. I'll never forget that and that. It all felt a bit like that, but that's maybe me being over-anxious about it.

JH: Do you think that there was a sense of obstruction for a gender issue to do with the technology? I always wondered that because there is a language involved with it. I just wonder whether from what you described and from what I've experienced as well, is that if it's a male technician and they are pretty ancient, and they've come from the BBC or wherever they come from, they are always awkward when it comes to women.

KM: No they weren't really like that. They were younger and hadn't come from that kind of background. I think it was more that I was brought up without knowing how to use a hammer or a screwdriver or anything, and the first time when I had to deal with it was when I went to art school. So, it was always rather difficult. It's not difficult for me now. I was okay with the hammer and the screwdriver but then when it had to move into something else, I just think I found it daunting. That's partly a gender thing, and partly a background thing, but I don't think it's something that was done to me by individuals. I think it was something more sort of generally, socially done to one.

JH: How did technological processes and methodologies change over the course of you being involved with video, from the point at which you started to make works using performance and obviously the live event and the recording, to when you started using editing?

KM: I used editing more earlier on than I do now, which is a bit odd or maybe it just took longer to do it than it does now. I went through a patch of only making little loops of things that I could crash edit and not edit. There was a certain patch where I didn't seem to be getting funding and that didn't seem like a good reason not to go making stuff. I didn't have equipment myself so I shifted into doing, not non-edited work, but quite simple work.

Then, more recently I think from that, has been to mostly make work that doesn't require a great deal of editing. It's more an image or a series of images.

JH: For a space?

KM: For a space that might go with some other objects or whatever event is going on.

JH: Would you say that some of your work was site related?

KM: Some of it's been very specifically site related. I don't think it is all site related. It is all site-modified. The *Attitudes* piece that I did was site-modified to do with how it is placed in a space. But, the *Water Work* series of works that I did with Alistair Skinner that started at Speckled Eye were all to do with the particular location and the history of that. So whether it was up the road at the castle, down the road at the new LUX centre or in the Hygiene Show at The School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. They were a series of works that got slightly modified but they were very much to do with the particular place, the way in which they got modified, the new material got added in, in different ways.

JH: Earlier on, when you started making work during the 80s, with using video technologies, would you say that it's become more plastic? As an artist who works across different media and place, would you say that it is more malleable now than it was before?

KM: No, because I remember doing a piece when I was a student. It was just a series of images that were edited mostly for the light, but also in order to contain sound in a space and making a huge tent construction. It was about light balancing and reflecting as well as the sound balancing and reflecting.

JH: So would you say you used the video technology in plastic way though?

KM: Yes, I think so. I haven't thought of it like that.

JH: I'm asking that question because the artists that we have as part of the project, represent a very wide and diverse group of artists. So I think it's important to articulate that, if that's the kind of practice that you do. It is what I understand your practice to be, that video is a component part of other things. It's not that you've used vide technology as a pure form. You've amalgamated it.

KM: It's always been like that. It's always been part of series of other things. Occasionally a single monitor tape will be derived from more complicated things, just because it's easier to get out.

JH: Do you use projection or would you say that you've mostly used monitors and the sculptural object of the monitor?

KM: It depends what it is. They have different properties so it depends what is wanted.

JH: Which pieces have you used with projection?

KM: I did one piece. The first big projection piece I did, was the final work for my MA, which in fact was a film-loop projected to provide light for something that had a lot of writing on it though glass and a lot of things stacked on it that were transparent. They made shadows and spaces in front and behind. It was a kind of diary piece. And then the piece I did at the Cafe Gallery last year had one series, which was a bank of monitors with multiple sources with Gary Stephens performing on it, and another was a big, huge projection. That was a very simple image loop, but I wanted it big so the way to have it big was to project it. There was quite a lot of ambient light in so I didn't want it in the dark drama of the cinema space. Mostly it's been on monitors, it's only if it needs to be scaled up, or somehow needs to go through something, that it's projected.

JH: You were part of the Video Wall Project weren't you? The scale of that was huge. It seemed to be very massive. Could you talk a little bit about that project and how you were involved and the piece that you did?

KM: Well I think I was involved because I was a friend of Steve (Littman)'s. I don't think I would probably have been involved otherwise, but I don't know. The piece was part of the series that came out of the *Medusa* stuff, which was single monitor tape, but that was a BFI commission and I think a lot of those single monitor things that I did at that stage, were to do with looking for funding to make work. So it was a little bit tail wagging, doggish, in terms of how it ends up as a form. But the Video Wall wasn't. It was using some of that material in a non-narrative way, although it's quite a narrative piece in the end. Then editing that on to three sources. It was just finding nice pictures really, because it was a big spectacle. There were good things and rather cringe-making things involved in that for me.

JH: Did you enjoy that process though of the scale of it?

KM: Well there were several things that happened. First of all they nearly pulled the plug on it because there was a bare-breasted woman in it. That was at the opening. Then they had to have a big discussion. It sounds bizarre now.

JH: That's completely ridiculous. It was 1989.

KM: Yes, there were lots of naked women in stone sculptures in Tate Liverpool but there was a pause there. Then all the technology crashed on the private view night and my very old granny had come all the way over from Suffolk to see it. I remember just being anxious all the way through it. So I did go back and have a look at it I think once and the spectacle was sort of fantastic and all the rest of it but my sense of it was more anxious than just pleasure of the image.

JH: Yes, I can imagine that because I think video always has that touch to it, because it's uncertain whether it all is going to work.

KM: There was stuff that had come from Germany that just wasn't quite compatible. I think Maria Vedder had brought stuff that had already been programmed, but separately and

differently. Then the whole lot kind of went out. Thankfully I wasn't in charge of having to make it run, or I think I would have run away.

JH: That is horrible if you are an artist and you are anxious. I know that feeling and it's awful if you are just worried about whether it's working on the night. I think anyone who's involved with new technologies has to same concerns.

KM: I don't think I worry about it so much now. My sense now is if it doesn't work, "oh well it's not working", because you've been to see enough of other people's work where it's not been working, so the thing is not to take it so personally.

JH: Do you have any particular ideological reasons why you started to use video?

KM: Do you mean in the sense that it was the great democratising?

JH: Well you may have that reason, but it could be other reasons. Some people don't have any reasons, they just use it because it's there.

KM: No I don't, I don't attach those kinds of political importance to materials. It is what is to hand.

JH: How has the technology evolved as a medium for your artistic production?

KM: It's obviously a lot easier now that it goes on to a computer at home and I'm rich enough to be able to afford to have my own computer and video camera, which is not a very big deal anymore, but it used to be very big deal. That is why there were all those organisations where you could share equipment.

JH: It was subsidised wasn't it though, so you still had to pay?

KM: It was subsidised but it was possible. Now you don't have to ask anyone. I don't have to ask anyone if I want to use something. I've got it.

JH: Has that made a massive change in the way that you produce your work?

KM: I think it has made a change in the way I can produce my work in that I can make it more casually. I think it means that I don't wait or apply for funding in order to make things. It also means that it just becomes an option in a range of materials that I might or might not use. So, in a way it's lost its importance from that point of view, rather delightfully. It's got the sort of lightness to it now that it didn't have before.

JH: Yes because when you first started using the technology the cameras were massive and the editing of it was tremendously expensive.

KM: The whole thing was hideous.

JH: Was it more expensive than film relatively?

KM: Well film stock wasn't cheap so the video stock was always cheaper, but I don't know. I didn't make that much film. I'd only made a couple of films so I'm not sure. I think it was. It was probably a bit cheaper but not massively so. It was just as complicated to do in terms of getting access to stuff.

JH: With film I think maybe the editing process was probably easier and cheaper but like you say, the cost of it was prohibited to most people, actually. In a way the video technology wasn't, but if you wanted to do anything fancy with the edit and you wanted to process, that was the expensive side of it if you didn't have your own technology. So when you made your works during that early period did you edit it at LVA? Where did you do that?

KM: The early work I edited at college and then I started editing at LVA.

JH: Was that fairly straightforward process to do? Was it easy to access things?

KM: Fairly, yes. There was a bit of debate about how much help you needed and whether that stopped it being your work or not, but early on I could cope with the machines, then later it got more complicated and I couldn't cope with the machines.

JH: Did funding stifle or enable you to achieve your art works?

KM: After I left college the first money I went for was video funding and I got it and I got it for a few years. So it was quite enabling but it also narrowed me into something.

JH: Where was that from? Was that from The Arts Council?

KM: Yes, and then from GLA (Greater London Authority) as well.

JH: Did they have a restriction on what proportion of the work was video? Why was it narrowing?

KM: No, it was just that that was what I applied for. That was the money I got so that was what I was making. It's only from my own point of view. That was what I was making because that's what I got funding for.

JH: So which pieces were those then that came out of that funding?

KM: The first one was called *The Sister's Story,* which was four people telling the same story from a slightly different angle. There were quite a few leading up into *Hanna's Song* and *A Book For A Performance,* I suppose are the ones that I would remember most from that era.

JH: And you had BFI funding for *Medusa*?

KM: Yes, that was later. That was in the late eighties.

JH: So we are talking early eighties to the late eighties?

KM: Yes, early to late eighties. There seem to be a sort of gap where I was able to get funding and then there are gaps when I was not able to, which I suppose is to do with who is on the committees or whether you are doing something that everybody thinks they want at that point. I don't know. It seems to go in patches whether you get stuff or don't get stuff. It's fair enough.

JH: I think it varies from artists to artist. Everybody has a different story to tell about that so but obviously during that eighties period, you did quite well out of funding.

KM: I did quite well. I think so. It was modest. I didn't tend to get huge amounts of money but I t was enough to make the things that I wanted to make, which was great.

JH: So that was production money. Did you get money to stage the works as well? How did that work?

KM: No. The works were staged if somebody else was staging it.

JH: So where did you screen the majority of the works? Would you say that you have a preference for a gallery? What is your preference for space and dissemination?

KM: I think probably privately, I would prefer the gallery space. I think of myself as making artwork, so that's the kind of suitable place for art. I don't have a strong idea about it being right in one place or another place. More than that, it's just where anybody would want to show it. If somebody wants to show it I'm happy to show it. I think there have been moments where I pushed really hard and I've instigated things and all the rest of it, but mostly I think it's enough of a job to be making things. So it has depended. If the only way of getting stuff out has been to find and organise that other end of screening or showing, then I have done that, but wherever possible I've hoped somebody else would do that.

JH: Did you have any funding for television pieces during that late 80s early 90s?

KM: Yes, just the two. *Medusa* was a TV piece, although I think they only showed it once very late at night. Then I did something for the *10 x 10* series that Steve Partridge produced.

JH: So which piece was that?

KM: *As She Opened Her Eyes She looked Over Her Shoulder And Saw Someone Passing the Other Side of the Doorway with a Strange Smile.*

JH: It's a long title

KM: Yes, there are no words in it. I mean there's a little caption at the front and at the back, but it's an outside of language verbally speaking piece.

JH: Is television a context that you like to be part of as an artist?

KM: I wouldn't have minded it but I couldn't bare the whole production stuff that went along with it. I couldn't bare the idea of having a huge crew and not being allowed to unhook the camera so that you could ran around with it because it had to go through somebody who was making sure that it was all being engineered correctly and all of that. I am also not used to having to explain to somebody else why I want to do something. If I want to look at something that way around I will look at it that way around, but that idea that you are not allowed to touch and do it gets back to that thing of the directness of the pencil. It becomes an indirect medium, which I found very, very hard. I also found it very hard to be extremely clear and decisive, so I don't think I made a good director in that sense. I didn't enjoy either of the occasions I did it at all and I would have no desire to go down that route.

JH: It sounds horrible. So you were basically removed from the process?

KM: I felt it. It is just because I've made things by myself in a very different way. I don't think I had a bad deal out of it or anything, I just think I realised that wasn't the way I like to work. It was great to have something on telly and everybody seeing it, except that my stuff didn't get onto telly in the way that everybody saw it.

JH: Did you see it when it was on?

KM: I didn't know when it was going to be screened. I wasn't told until after it had been screened. I didn't see it on telly at all. I just knew that it had happened. I don't know when they showed it.

JH: *Medusa* was funded by BFI and Channel 4. Was that a Midnight Underground one?

KM: I don't know. I don't know when they showed it. They weren't terribly pleased with it

JH: Is it quite a long piece?

KM: It's quite long. I think it's about 17 and half minutes long. It's not that long

JH: It's not that long actually because a lot of people did stuff that was far longer.

KM: I had sound problems with it that never got resolved.

JH: Was that a process, where you had to work with other people like technicians and you couldn't do the intuitive process yourself?

KM: No, I think I am to blame on that. I wanted to do it in a place near to home and there was a rumble in the building. The option was to go somewhere much further away but my daughter was small and I wasn't prepared to go further away. So I made a compromise.

JH: I'm sure you probably can't hear any rumbling really. Technically it's probably something they massively go over the top with, being incompetent.

KM: But there is this thing about the technical requirements of what was acceptable for TV, at least in those days there was. So, again this thing of not being able to unhook it if you wanted to run around the room with it or whatever, it just wasn't very sympathetic to my way of working, which might also include some things that got very obvious material qualities, not necessarily to do with high production values. What I would consider to be useful material, they might consider unusable material.

JH: How did you support your work financially?

KM: By having a job.

JH: You worked within the academy basically?

KM: Yes, I've never made money out of my work and I think I gave up warring about that a very, very long time ago. There was a little patch where I hoped I might, but it didn't happen. It's not going to happen. It doesn't matter.

JH: You were thinking that you wanted to basically sell work through the gallery system?

KM: I would have liked to have made enough money from my work to not have to had done something else, yes.

JH: But the teaching was something that you were happy to do?

KM: Yes, I think if you've got to have a job, it's about as OK a job as you can get. I very much like working with other artists in that kind of way. I think that's fine. The bit I don't like is the kind of admin institutional stuff, but I don't have to do very much of that so it's not terrible really. It's fine.

JH: And you are at Middlesex still?

KM: Yes

JH: And you do run the MA now?

KM: Yes

JH: Do you have a gallery? Do you have a private gallery?

KM: No, I have never had a gallery.

JH: Not that many artists do using video. Did you achieve your ambitions with dissemination for your work?

KM: I think that's a really hard one to answer because obviously the ego wants the work to go everywhere. On the other hand I'm quite happy that the work I've really wanted to get out

has got out. Sometimes it's as nice having work in modest spaces as it is in grander spaces, so I don't feel bad about it.

JH: Do you have any favourite places that you put work?

KM: I enjoyed putting the work at the Cafe Gallery last year very much. That was nice. It's good space and the people were pretty supportive and let me do what I wanted to.

JH: Do you think it was necessary to compromise because of lack of exhibition opportunity?

KM: If I'd been more successful, I would have had more exhibition opportunities and that would have been nice and then I probably would have made more work. But whether that's a good thing or not, I don't know.

JH: I suppose someone could answer that question by saying something like "Well I couldn't fiddle with monitors or because I used technology, it was difficult" or something like that.

KM: I can remember one really nice trip I made across to Poland, in Poznan to the artist centre there, quite a few years ago with a group of artists here. We arrived and they didn't have anything. We spent the British Council money we had on rewiring parts of the building. There was really nothing much to hand and I needed a light box, so I ended up by getting a sheet of tracing paper from an art student and putting it on top of a sheet of glass with a light bulb underneath. I drew on the walls a lot so there were lots of drawings on the walls, that was easy, that was all going to be painted out afterwards. I used salt to do drawings as well on the floor because salt was very easily available. I also used fish because it was very easily available. They had old Russian TV sets and the art school I think had a two machine editing possibility. So, I just shot some stuff and did some very approximate editing, which I played back on these old Russian TV sets. It was just what was to hand. It made quite interesting work. It was about being there at that point with that stuff available, so if it's salt that's fine, if it's old, Russian tellies, that's fine.

JH: But then other works, for example the *Vampire S Eat* piece that you did in Kettle's Yard that was a very defined piece in a way. It's a very considered piece. It seems very considered in terms of its sculptural qualities and the way you have set it out. So, obviously most of the works you exhibited were very controlled in terms of what you were proposing to put in the space and what you actually achieved in the space.

KM: Yes, but that's a different thing. That's about having a specific thing that you place in a context, or being asked to go and do something, which is open-ended and you just go with the flow.

JH: But the negotiations with galleries during that 80s and 90s period, did you find that they were very familiar with the technologies and that it was fairly straight forward to propose something that the sculptural?

KM: No I think they were anxious. I think they were anxious about it on the whole because there was all the stuff about sink starters and all that business, and everyone getting revved up.

JH: But how did you negotiate that though?

KM: Well I think there were three in Holland and they negotiated it.

JH: Were there any specific curators or facilitators who were important for the exhibition of your work or to the dissemination of your work?

KM: There have been people who have taken stuff off up at certain moments but I don't think there's anyone that followed through consistently. Charles Eshe took the stuff up for Kettle's Yard and Eddie Berg briefly, but you go in and out of whatever it is people want on their horizon. I think unless you have a particular gallery promoting your work, that's inevitable. So sometimes, obviously, I felt a bit miffed, but other times it seemed absolutely fine because when one person looses interest, somebody else will be interested. It was just a matter of being a bit dogged about it really.

JH: Do you think it was a difficult job to be an artist in the 80s and that period of intensive funding and being able to survive as an artist using the technologies at that time?

KM: I think the pressure for me was slightly different. I think there was an anxiety about the industry and whether you should try and become a part of that. People would want to have the ACTT membership or not and that was a closed shop. I wasn't really interested in that side of it. I think pressures were slightly different. I don't think it was a particularly big problem, because I don't think that I had ambitions in that way. My ambitions have mostly been for the work itself rather than something else. It would be glorious if somebody was terribly interested in it but it never really occurred to me that it would be like that.

JH: You talked a little bit about Cate Elwes writing about the work, can you talk a little bit more about that and what key issues she was interested in? Was there any other writing as well that was important?

KM: We have a shared history of interests as well as you know being mates so I suppose that was helpful from my point of view and she was around very much within that feminist network at that stage.

JH: Did she write about your work coming from that autobiographical angle?

KM: Yes

JH: Was that something that you were engaging with at that point would you say? That was something that was imbued in the work itself?

KM: Yes because the first one was political and I suppose I still feel it is, although I would not want to make it so overtly personalised anymore. There was a political agenda at the back end of that, that hasn't really gone away. That is an aspect of the work that's followed

through and probably why she was interested in writing about it as well. Then more recently Andrea Phillips has been writing a bit.

JH: What has she written about you work in? Has she published a book?

KM: She wrote an essay for the *SPIN* Show at The British Library and then she's just written a longer piece for the LUX site.

JH: Is she looking at your work as a whole or is she looking at key works?

KM: She's looking at the work as a whole yes.

JH: Would you say that there was a feminist agenda running through your work throughout your career or is that too strong a word to use?

KM: No it's not too strong a word to use. I'm not frightened of it.

JH: I have to be careful. Some people don't like it.

KM: There's a wider ethical agenda and I suppose the feminist approach is part of that.

JH: Would you say that there were any particular works of yours that lead contemporaneous philosophical or conceptual debates? Maybe that Cate Elwes during that period was writing and publishing key issues about your work?

KM: I think it's probably the other way round. I don't think my work's lead to anything. I think other debates that were current overlap. Obviously the feminisms of the 70s and 80s influenced me and then that agenda went into the work but I don't think that my work caused any great shifts or debates in and of itself. It was part of wider set of ideas that were going on at the time.

JH: But you were one of the first women to use video to make art works in this country. So your works obviously resonated through various different other places that you wouldn't necessarily be able to fixate on. You've obviously shown your works through the college or you taught other students and so on, so they must have resonated somehow.

KM: Yes I suppose I do feel that but I think it's in quite an understated way. There have been a couple of times where rows have developed out of the work.

JH: Is that right?

KM: The second of the water pieces that we did for the opening of the LUX, *Light Water Power* was essentially going to be a piece that was dealing with the opening at the opening of a new facility house. So it was about inputs and outputs and the facilities that were there and looking at the almost archaeological layerings of the site, and thinking about the utilities and that sort of thing. I think there were five sources, four of which were of a road being dug up till you got to the water mains and the water mains being fixed. Then one of which

was referencing other things around the area to do with waterpower, which was the logo of the borough at the beginning of the 20th century. There were a lot of rhythmic noises and images. It was all collaged together with lights being turned on and off and fax machines going on and off and taps and gas. I had told them that there was a homage to Kurt Kren in it: there was one three-second shot of a turd coming out of an arse. It caused no end of difficulty. They all wanted to put net curtains over the front of the building, they suggested that for the private view night. Then they switched them around and they wouldn't have it running or they had a bit on the floor which was supposed to be on the monitors at the back and vice versa. It was just unbelievable, extraordinary. I think Helen De Witt said she knew it was the beginning of the end when that happened. It doesn't sound a particularly dramatic thing, and later when I used a very similar shot in the next piece in the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, which was much more towards issues of clean water, we'd re-made it. That seemed to be a very useful thing to do given the venue. We interviewed a lot of scientists who were working on that globally there, so all those bioethical issues were very much more apparent. There was no problem at all. They were perfectly happy having the shit shot right in the middle of the stairway. So it's weird.

JH: It's crazy because you have actually delved into new areas of your work with the images you've used. Is that really one of the only times when you've come up against a problem with using images or would you say that it's happened quite a few times in the past?

KM: There was the piece that I did at Gasworks that then went to Austria. I showed it to Eddie Berg. It was a bit of St. Augustine text about time passing and time standing still and there was an image of a man masturbating, it was just that as a loop. I showed it to Eddie and Eddie said, "You don't expect us to be able to show things like that?" So that bombed as far as being something. Now, Sam Taylor Wood has just done something similar, but 10 years ago obviously it was considered to be awkward. But the Austrians felt very happy to take it.

JH: I just went to the Goethe Institute and saw a collection of works that were very extreme. It was people shitting on each other and eating it and all kinds of things. People were just sitting there watching it. Not that it is something that I'll rush to go and see, but the point is that there was no issue of taboo. The Goethe Institute had no problem with showing the stuff and people had no problem sitting there watching it. Yet LUX is a place where the history of that work culminates.

KM: It was also a shot that was highly contextualised, because it was to do with mapping. It came just after a diagram of the water closet or something and then something to do with the mains and sewage system in the area. It wasn't for any point of confrontation at all. It was just a factual un-euphemistic thing, if you like.

JH: How Victorian to say that you couldn't show it. Did you show it in the end?

KM: They half-screened it. It was never absolutely "no" but they didn't have it so that you could see it from the street, which is the way it was designed.

JH: Was there any particular critical writing that you would agree or disagree with?

KM: A lot of critical writing I think has been important in different ways at different times. I suppose early on it wouldn't be so much philosophical as perhaps someone like Mary Douglas, who was quite important to me or Angela Davis or Mary Daly. People like that were very important at a particular time when I was trying to think through what it was I wanted to make. Then later I suppose some of the French philosophies and psychoanalytic thoughts filtered through in a slightly modified way. Different things have been important in different ways and in different eras I suppose. Just because one is a part of a wider cultural context, I don't see my work as being made outside of that or even trail blazing within that. It's just the context and hopefully we all exist and make work within that context, in reference to it, modifying it in slight ways, maybe being critical of it or whatever. But it is definitely important to be engaged with it as part of a wider dialogue with other artists and thinkers and makers of things in different ways.

JH: How have you done that in your career? Have you done that through travelling or going to festivals? Would you say that you are part of the wider community of artists?

KM: Yes I think I would

JH: You've maintained dialogue with those artists in what way?

KM: Partly it's through making things or teaching, going to conferences, thinking about things, contributing very occasionally to things. I did something for the conference, *Digital Aesthetics* that Chris Meigh-Andrews did. At the moment I'm working. On and off over the years I've worked quite a lot with a woman called Susan Johanknecht. We do a lot of artist multiple book works together and sometimes they will have recordings in them. Sometimes they won't. Sometimes they are more hand made and sometimes not so much so. We are starting on a new project at the moment that will involve a conference and bringing in other artists to contribute in different ways. So, yes, in a tight sense, I see myself as part of a community of friends who are artists and ideas that are current and then in a wider way with students and exhibition.

JH: Can you talk about issues of specificity and whether you were a part of those arguments? Do you agree or disagree with them?

KM: I think that the conceptualist, structuralist approach that was used in work with David Hall or Peter Gidal was enormously influential and very, very important to me. Obviously I had no desire to use it in that particular way. Apart from anything else I think it was very difficult for my generation of women to use things without any kind of narrative content because we were wanting to place a position, a politic that we didn't trust to be contained within the material, by itself without some kind of focusing or flavouring to that. So something needed to be done about that. But I think it's also been very important for me to have had that kind of attitude towards the material and it's something that I refer to in work. In *The Island Bell* I refer to it quite a lot, very overtly. Even though I wouldn't say I would just want to work with a particular medium, when I pick up something like a pencil or a camera, what

I make is specific to that and I think of that attitude, is a result of those people who came before.

JH: Laura Mulvey must have been really important as well at that point with the debates that she had. Do you think that it was exclusive and that it wasn't part of the avant-garde phase? How did that work at the time? Because the text that she made everyone refers to.

KM: I wasn't aware of it till some time after which is slightly strange because she is my cousin. I might have seen her on a regular basis through that period but I wasn't aware of the writing until some time later.

JH: So that wasn't necessarily part of the avant-garde debates at that time?

KM: I think it would have been at the Film Co-op.

JH: But not necessarily LVA?

KM: I just didn't necessarily pick up on it.

JH: Did you collaborate with any other artists on any works and who were they if you did?

KM: It depends what you mean by collaborate. I've often worked with other people and I would always recognise the fact that other people have helped me make things so whether it's working with someone like Sylvia Hallett who did lot of music for me at one point. Although, I wouldn't say I worked. She did it for me but I didn't contribute to the music other than to say where I wanted it to fit and the atmosphere of it and all the rest of it. Then I suppose a lot of people have helped me actually physically make things whether that's editing stuff. There was James at LVA and Steve Littman obviously. And then more recently Alex Baker has been helping me do some editing, at odd points. Also in things like camera work, like having Sarah Turner help with some of the stuff that I shot at the British Museum because I knew I couldn't be doing everything. Working in a wider sense collaboratively, working with Hayley Newman or Gary Stephens in terms of forming some kind of performance work or with Susie Oddball who was the juggler in *Moonrise.* In that sense I was collaborating, but in a purer sense of collaborating where there's no single authorial voice, which I would say is, for me, more of what I would see as collaboration rather than that helping each other make each others work in a more general way. But, in the more specific sense with Alistair (Skinner) I collaborated absolutely a 100% in terms of making things at all stages: in front and behind the camera, editing, scripting, thinking about it, re-arranging things. Similarly with Susan (Johanknecht) with the books, there isn't one author in those things.

JH: The question is there because it's important that people be recognised that don't necessarily get talked about over the history. They may end up be footnotes but at least they are actually mentioned. It could be in a collaborative sense of 50% each or it could be that someone that helped on work, but I think talking about people is important.

KM: Yes, I think credit is very important where credit's due.

JH: Were you part of any community or collective organisation of artists?

KM: Well I was involved with LVA quite a bit.

JH: Why did you choose to go to LVA rather than the Co-op, was it just, purely the technology?

KM: Because I was making video, and also I knew more people who were involved with it. For a while we had a women's group attached to it although that overlapped into Co-op people as well. I think Nina Danino and Jean Mathee were occasionally in some of the groupings that took place.

JH: Did that last a long time?

KM: It didn't last, no. It didn't last very long. It came and went. And then after that, the Women's Media Resource project was something that briefly lived.

JH: Were there any collective goals of that organisation, for LVA?

KM: There were the straightforward, co-op goals. I don't mean as in the Film Co-op, I mean as in cooperative goals, but particularly the idea, which I still think is a terrific idea, of the making, debating and screening of work, being part of the whole process that artists are engaged with collectively.

JH: Do you think that there was a lot of debate going on collectively, verbally?

KM: Yes, I think there probably was. Council management meetings may have been at part practical but they were also to do with showing. There may have been power struggles but still within that, there'd be ideologies that would be expressed and fought over. Then there would be different people who would be put on different selection committees, so you'd screen work, you'd look at work, you'd think about it, you'd select it or you wouldn't be selected, and so on. So yes, I think there was quite a lot because you are very much engaged with all stages of that and of course it makes you talk about it more than just waiting for somebody to beam you up from outside.

JH: And when producing and exhibiting the works, did you feel that you were responding part of a larger international movement?

KM: I think there were differences. I always think that during that period, during the 70s and 80s, I spent a lot of time in New York as well. I think there were quite particular differences and I know that I thought that the work happening here was much more sophisticated in some respects: I wouldn't say in technological respects but in terms of the kind of engagement with ethical political ideological thought, and the way that was expressed through the material in very particular ways. I have no doubt other people would disagree with me and probably looking back I wouldn't see it as being such a difference, but at the time it felt to me that what was happening here was less superficial.

JH: Do you think that was to do with the community or the work itself? Are you saying that's palpable in the work?

KM: I think it's in the work yes or I thought it was in the work. I'm not sure I'd agree with that now, but I know I felt it very strongly at the time. I probably wouldn't feel it so strongly now. It maybe just that I was more familiar with the work here, so I felt it somehow had more strength because I understood it better through seeing it more.

JH: It's funny that you should say that because for me I see it as the other way around. It's really interesting that you say that. I've always been backwards and forwards to New York as well and spent a lot of time there. One of the reasons why I've been backwards and forwards so much is because I felt there were politics in the work for women, particularly that I couldn't find here in the UK, certainly in London. It's really interesting what you said because your perception of it is completely the opposite. I'm thinking about people like Martha Rosler. Who compares to her in the UK?

KM: Yes, but there were a lot of very interesting works happening here with Liz Rhodes. It was mostly filmmaking but also video making with Tina Keane and with Rose Finn-Kelsey. There seemed to be a group of people with some very strong things happening in a way. Yes, Martha Rosler obviously and *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, was important…

JH: Mary Lucier and Kit Fitzgerald, there were just so many women. It's a gender thing with them.

KM: Perhaps I became aware of that work slightly after I was aware of the work here, so it took a slightly different perspective.

JH: When you look in Electronic Arts Intermix book and you see how many women, there were compared with London really, but I understand what you are saying. It's a faire point. I have to think about that.

KM: I think it depends where you are and which way round you look at it. It isn't always looking across that way. We were always looking across that way for the wonderful technology, but I think there was another way in which one could look at it.

JH: I think if you see it as European more than British, then it has a different perspective, because then you have people like Birgit Hein and you've got Valie Export and you've got all the Viennese Actionists. If you see it from that perspective rather than the London-esque one, then yes I can agree with you on that, definitely. Actually that's one of the reasons why I didn't move to New York because I always thought it was more interesting in Europe, but for different reasons. My career is a different generation. I started making work in the 90s so I have a different perspective on it. I always thought it must have been more interesting in the 70s and 80s in London. Maybe it wasn't but it always looks more exciting retrospectively.

KM: I don't think you know that it's exciting, when it is exciting, until after it has stopped being exciting.

JH: What are your most current works or works in progress?

KM: Well at the moment I'm working on what will be a chapter rather than a video. I have shot some video for this series of pieces called *Cunning Chapters* that I'm doing with Susan Johanknecht. I'm basing it on the miracles and extraordinary events of Santa Chiara who is the patron saint of television. She was a contemporary of St Francis of Assisi and founded the Order of the Poor Clares, which I'm not interested in the slightest. What I am interested in is the fact that all the wonderful things she did are very ordinary. So her miracles were things like curing people of headaches or getting a stone out of someone's nose. They were really everyday miracles. Then you have to conclude that the thing that was extraordinary was her performance that isn't recorded in anyway. The way to do with the way information is lost and then regained and reformed and thought about. I'm using her as the motif to hang this thing on.

JH: Is it a video work?

KM: I think it's going to be a printed work rather than a video work but it may have some video in it. I'm certainly using video stills with it.

JH: And what ideas and other artists' work influenced you and inspired you?

KM: I've already mentioned the conceptualist materialist approach and I suppose the generational debates and all those people around. I'd also have to say a very wide group of people have been important to me working in different kinds of ways so if it was to do with water colours it might be anyone from Marlene Dumas to somebody doing botanical illustration. I don't know what is important. Heaps of things are important, incredibly important, but it would come from lots and lots of different places.

JH: To go back to the first question that I asked you about which of your works is considered to be most important, would you still say the same thing? Would you still say that every piece is important?

KM: If you are talking about being important to me personally, they represent different kinds of things so they are important in different ways. So if one is talking about installed works, or expanded works to do with performing I suppose that aspect of *It's Inside* where Gary Stephens was performing cell mutation was very important but I couldn't have done that if I hadn't already done the stuff for *Attitudes 1 to 8*. So you can work your way back from there in that kind of way. Some of the stuff is obviously more lost because it was less visible and I suppose I've not used it in the same way. I think *The Island Bell* is quite important to me still. Something like *Hannah's Song* is nice to look at still and I think is probably important in terms of what it represents of the time but it isn't what will matter anymore. I wouldn't want to say it's no longer important but it isn't important in that personal way, other than being a reminder of something that's precious to me. There aren't still things that are burning in there that I want to be doing, whereas there are still

issues contained in *The Island Bell* that I still wish to rethink. There is the piece with Gary Stephens that I still want to edit into a single screen piece in some way. So that's still important.

JH: It makes it clear to me that your work is a fluid process and that each piece is part of that fluid process. It is the same conceptual idea I suppose, as the way that you've used video for, which is this fluid thing. So you've approached the whole of your practice in that way basically.

KM: Yes I don't see it as being discrete things. It doesn't usually end up by looking like discrete things