

PARRY TEASDALE

Interviewed by Chris Hill (with comments by Deedee Halleck)

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Chris Hill: I'm interested in the history of the Videofreex, also things that influenced you, ideas that drove the group; also maybe a description of what you felt was happening in the late 60s and early 70s, as well as from the perspective of today, because it probably looks a little bit different now.

Parry Teasdale: As I look back on it, I'm just getting to this recognition that for me and for that whole period, the central issue was the war in Vietnam. It was the informing event for my early life. It spawned the technology and it created the necessary groundwork for an adversarial relationship within the society that defined sides so clearly that people could choose and choose righteously to be part of something. And without understanding the dynamics of the war in Vietnam and what that did to society I don't think you can understand video.

And just as the war petered out, the fervency of the movement in a delayed reaction became more diffuse because the clarity of the issues dissolved. At the same time the number of issues proliferated. At the same time you had the environmental movement, you had the political movement, you had health related issues, you had social related issues and all of those things and by 1978 you had a Democratic president. Before I was involved with anything having to do with video, I certainly was involved in just being a body in the anti-war marches and feeling very strongly about that and feeling very threatened about it as a young man with a 1-A draft classification. That's not the classification I ended up with because I was white and upper class and was able to deal with that situation in ways that weren't available to other people from other classes and other backgrounds. Still it was the central issue....It was so clear to me, the dichotomy of those two worlds—one world where people were being dragged off to their deaths and destruction was happening in a small Southeast Asian country, and the other world, life at home, where white middle class people had the luxury to experiment and to express their opinions and to do these very engaging and fun things...

That's the other thing about this period. There was a feeling that you could have fun and not feel guilty about it. Remember that feeling? Now we don't have it. Sex was part of it, drugs were part of it, but it was the overall concept that enjoyment was a privilege to be experienced and to pursue, that there wasn't a consequence to enjoyment. Enjoyment was, in and of itself, a good thing and that root word "joy" was something that you could share, and joy would change the world. It was a perhaps myopic view of people who were extraordinarily privileged to be able to think that way. But, by thinking that way we were able to shake certain notions free of how structured things had to be because joy isn't a structured thing. That gets into large philosophical issues and I don't feel confident to pursue them at great length.

At the same time there were very practical aspects in terms of how the video medium developed because it was part of the concept of enjoyment, as well as experimentation, as well as art, as well as politics—all those things. I do think that all during that period people were having fun no matter how serious they seemed to be. In fact the people that seemed to be the most serious didn't seem to be as much a part of what was going on. People kind of put that down.

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People who seemed to be serious about their art seemed pompous, structured, and formal, and we didn't want to deal with those people. Have a group, live together, be out there, go to body painting parties, go to be-ins, and do those things and have a good time, and that was what we did. I think the tapes reflect that because a lot of work that I can recall from that period was extremely self-indulgent, was not geared to a refined product and intentionally so....

In that context its not unusual that Videofreex started at the Woodstock Festival [1969]. I had been traveling around with some old surveillance equipment in a VW bus and I met David Cort who was there with some high school kids at the festival. Somebody actually told me about David because my equipment wasn't working well. I lugged it on over to his little booth that he had there and we went around and shot a lot of video tape at the Woodstock Festival. David meandered back to the city and I caught up with him there a few days later and we decided to edit the tapes. At that point editing was done with a razor and we actually developed the tape which is a strange thing to say.

CH: You developed it?

PT: You developed the tape in the sense that the control track pulses were actually little [grooves] that you could see, so you could see where to cut the tape. You would get this vertical wipe. It was very much like film or audio tape editing...

One of the people that David had met at Woodstock was a kid that was going to Queens College, Lou Brill, and he worked at the mail room at CBS. Lou had come across this executive at CBS named Don West and Don was actually the major domo to the president of CBS. Brill found Don West and he said, "I've got these people. You've got to see these people." And Don was at a point where he didn't want the 60s to pass him by; it was 1969—it was almost over. So Don went down to the loft one Saturday. David and the woman he lived with, Curtis Radcliff, had a loft in the Lower East Side. Don went down there, he saw the Woodstock tapes and it was the first time that he'd ever held a camera, in a career of television and radio. David gave him this little portable Sony camera. Don was full of ideas. Don persuaded CBS to give him a nest egg and a leave of absence, and he set up his own production company. He decided to produce the *Now* project show. It was going to be the hippest thing. It was going to replace *The Smothers Brothers*. Already there's a contradiction because CBS had gotten rid of *The Smothers Brothers* because they were too politically radical and here Don is down on the Lower East Side with a bunch of anti-war, drug-taking hippies planning a show for CBS. The reality connection was a little tenuous.

What happened then was that Don had a certain amount of money that he could draw from CBS and he would spend a lot of it on us... We went to Chicago to tape the *Days of Rage* (1969). We talked to Fred Hampton just before he was killed. Then we went to California and shot all sorts of alternative stuff that was going on there....Don was also putting money into some trial things, [for example] *Global Village* which was just starting up....We were able to buy a lot of equipment and we were exposed to some of the technology....So we had this technical capability...We started collecting people during this process and we

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started collecting a lot of skills. We did a lot of productions with many cameras as well as with portapak. And then we got a loft over on Prince St. in Soho....

So the outcome of it was that we produced the [*Subject to Change*] show on tape and live. It was viewed by three people: Bob Wood, who was the network vice president, Mike Dann, who was the programming president, and his right hand guy Freddy Silman. They came down to this loft in lower Manhattan and they wouldn't even sit with the hoi poloi, with the people watching the show....They watched it in the adjacent loft on a monitor. It was probably a little scary to them and they also hated the show. Mike Dann, who was responsible for the *Beverly Hillbillies* and *Hee Haw* came out and he said, "Well you people, this is an interesting experiment but you're five years away from being on network television." People weren't particularly thrilled by that, but he was right to the year because it was in 1974, I think, that the *Guru* tape, *Lord of the Universe* [by TVTV, a collective which included some members of the Videofreex], played on PBS as a network presentation. With the withdrawal of the CBS lollipop, we made a desperate effort to rescue the show but the quality wasn't anywhere near what they wanted and it was too radical, it was weird...

CH: So this was going to be live?

PT: It was live and taped [mixed]; there were live acts. There were no emcees, which was very confusing; there were no personalities to relate to.

CH: And how long had you been working on it?

PT: Well, probably since early September [1969] and it was December [1969], so a few months. And it wasn't even constant during that period. We were working on other things, trying to develop whatever we could.

CH: Do you still have that tape?

PT: It exists some place; whether it's retrievable or not I don't know. There was a guy named Buzzy Linhart who played and he was a pretty good musician. There were live music acts and there were tapes. One tape was Fred Hampton, and another tape was Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin talking about the trial [Chicago 7] in Chicago. One of the people we taped in Chicago was Tom Hayden and during the interview at some point it came up that our funding was coming from Don West at CBS, and Hayden stopped and said, "I want you to erase those tapes." And we said, "Wait, we're not CBS. We're just telling you that's where the money [comes from]. And he said, "No, they will take the tapes, and I don't want CBS to have my tapes." And indeed he was right. We were naive about it. We thought we had complete control. Well Don had all the tapes after the show... We stole the Fred Hampton tapes, not stole—we repossessed—the tapes because we felt those were ours. Hayden was right. They would have had tapes of Tom Hayden and...they probably would have asked the FBI if they wanted them. Anyway, the next thing that happened is that we were out on our own...

There wasn't any feeling among any of us that we couldn't make it. There wasn't any public funding for video itself. It was way too new. The Council

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[New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA)] did have a very modest film program and there were various other organizations that were starting to do funding for projects. Young Filmmakers [NYC], of course, had their thing all long. We had a lot of equipment; we had a video projector, which was a very strange thing to have then. And we had a lot of experience. We had the experience of having to present work to a critical audience and that was sobering, even though we dismissed it. We determined that we would stay together as a group. We would try to pursue whatever we could do to make a living in video. We branched out. We taped everything. We taped the Hells Angels; we taped theater groups. It didn't matter what it was, we would tape it.

Then, David [Cort], who had a lot of connections in the art world (he had been the director of the children's program at the Brooklyn Children's Museum), he knew a guy connected with NYSCA and maybe some other organization. There were various projects that we set up. One of them was taping artists. There was a whole series of tapes of artists working in their lofts in Manhattan... We were also running weekly shows with our projector, but they were donation only. Global Village was running shows and it seemed to be their primary thing.

Then for the Alternative Media Conference in 1970 at Goddard College, Davidson [Gigliotti] got really interested in inflatable technology so he built what amounted to an inflatable television set. It was a big, long inflatable. He called it the Big Blue Calzone. It had a rear projection screen on the front of it and the projector sat inside in this sort of amorphous blob. We projected our tapes on the screen so that people could sit outside and watch it. It was fun... We did things, programs with Phoenix House. I worked with the State Arts Council...

Meanwhile the various video groups were starting: People's Video Theater was one of the groups [Ken Marsh, Elliot Glass, Howie Gutstadt]; and John Reilly and Rudy Stern and Jackie Casson with Global Village; the Raindance group, people like [Michael] Shamberg. Ira [Schneider] was originally from Global Village and eventually moved to Raindance... There was a lot of petty bickering and back and forth, suspicion of who was getting what... Anyway, Raindance managed to engineer a major commitment of funds through the Jewish Museum in NYC. That made everybody extraordinarily jealous because they were getting it for something called the Center for New Television. Well the concept for new television was *not* to have a center, so it seemed inimical to the whole movement, if there was indeed a movement. So there was a summit meeting of the big video groups: John and Rudy from Global Village; the Raindance people, Ira and Michael, and maybe Megan, and Frank Gillette may have been part of it at that point; probably Kenny and Howie were there from People's Video Theater... Then there was another larger meeting with the funders with the Jewish Museum...

The other thing, in terms of video art was the Rose Art Gallery Show at Brandeis University curated by Russell Connor. I'm not certain but I think that was early 1970. It was a really major show in terms of who

was working. Nam June Paik and I'm sure Woody and Steina [Vasulka] were there. Stan Vanderbeek was there. Everybody who was involved in video in any way was there. We were there and we had a production system set up. We were doing a

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multi-camera production of a roundtable, and David [Cort] had been invited to participate...It was downstairs and they had this fountain in the center [of the floor], almost an indoor pond. David was working with the camera and all of a sudden fell off into the pond with the camera and that was a big event and it wasn't staged. Endless talk and the camera continued to work. It was amazing, a real testament to the technology, if not the skill...That was a happening within the museum.

There were other shows...One of the things that was always irksome to me was that we really didn't have an audience. We seemed to be playing for a very select group of people and there really wasn't an outlet. We had exhausted the possibility for broadcast in terms of commercial [broadcast]. Channel 13 [public broadcast TV] was just getting started. *Freetime*...it was a great show, but at that time it didn't seem like it. It seemed closed off and very corporate and we didn't want to have anything to do with it. Well, it was kind of hypocritical, I suppose. Again, you had to choose sides. They were big broadcast and we weren't, and they didn't want to use our tapes. There were a lot of technical problems with our tapes...The other thing that we felt from the beginning was that we needed a facility to edit out tapes, and we had invested in a 1-inch machine at that time, an IVC. Ampex had a very expensive machine and IVC was less expensive and we bought a machine that would allow us to do edits, just [assembly] cuts, although Chuck [Kennedy] modified it at some point to also do inserts. But basically it was just cuts. That set us head and shoulders above everybody else because no one else in the video movement had real editing equipment. That was 1970.

CH: So this was the first editing after you were cutting with a razor blade?

PT: Yes. Sony had a 1-inch machine that could do edits which we would use for the *Now* project show for Don West, but that was just rented, and we didn't feel that it was as good... Technically IVC was more advanced... So we built a whole editing suite around that on Prince Street, and we began to edit tapes in ways that no one else was able to do, and anyone else that wanted to edit tapes came to us. We were pretty open about it. We charged the people who could afford it and when we had free time we'd work with other people. A lot of people came to us, although there was a certain amount of pride. People didn't want to go and have our name appear on their tape. That was an issue. But we offered that service and we became relatively proficient in editing and developed the skills to do that. That set us apart as well.

The other thing that set us apart was that we had developed a system for using a multi-camera switcher with portable cameras. Rather than having big cameras on tripods, we just adapted the small cameras to a multi-camera system for live and tape. But we adapted it so you could continue the style of shooting that we all had developed in using single camera portapak systems, applied it to a multi-camera system. The apex of that, I think the best job we ever did, was one that was never recorded. We were asked in the early 1970s, 1973 I think, to do the video projections for the Newport Jazz Festival at Shea Stadium. The problem with a system like that when you don't have an intercom is that you basically have to rely upon the ability of the people who are shooting to get good shots constantly, and not just all of a sudden point the camera at the floor. And the person who's switching cannot go completely berserk and start

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pushing buttons. We were all guilty of the worst of that, but sometimes it really clicked...I think that the video production/presentation for that Newport Jazz Festival with people like Stevie Wonder and Roberta Flack was probably the best work we ever did..

One of the things I was always looking for were outlets. I actually had some limited success hooking people into a closed circuit system that wired all the apartments in a building. It was actually a community antenna system for West Beth, the artists' house...People were talking about cable, cable, cable, but there wasn't any cable. Shirley Clark came over to the loft one day to see the projector. I didn't know who this lady was. "All right I'll show you the projector, who cares, Shirley Clark," and then subsequently I saw the film *Cool World* and I realized who she was. I worked with her for a long time in the loft, but that's another story.

She was certainly someone who had a vision for video that was unique and certainly made a lasting impression on me in terms of freedom that she felt to abuse the technology in the service of connecting with people on some sort of level that was not structured. She managed to deconstruct the technology. I think that her brilliance lay in that.

CH: You were working in a similar way as Shirley in that you were doing these installations.

PT: We were working all over the place. Remember, you had nine adults and they all had, by that time, different approaches and different interests. Davidson was living with Phyllis Gershuny who was doing the magazine *Radical Software* and they were living in a plastic tent...There were certainly people taking drugs. There was certainly sex. But what we were based around was work. People got stoned as recreation. But the work was not a reflection of people being stoned. The work was a reflection of what people were trying to find in the technology that was available.

CH: So this notion of process, was this an idea that was important to you?

PT: Well, process was the most overused word in a video person's lexicon. Everyone talked about process—it's all process, which I think became an excuse for doing self-indulgent video....With Shirley Clark...the process was the result; it was the outcome. She would put people through these intense times where you just became exhausted, overnight, and in the end she would set up certain exercises. But Shirley intended the process to be the product whereas I think a lot of us working in video intended the process to lead to something. At least I was more directed in that sense. That had to do with my feeling that we needed an outlet, we needed an audience because you couldn't judge what you were doing. Artists like Shirley had dealt with audiences. Here was a woman who had made acclaimed films. She had moved beyond that and could legitimately make the claim to have shed that concern and could say, "Hey I am now working on something different. I know what that structure/product is and I'm not doing that now." Her life and her work reflected that and that's why it was profound, whereas the rest of us hadn't had that experience with this particular media so it wasn't as easy....

No one ever talked about a career in video. You need a career? That's what those people do who wear suits. We don't want that. We want something

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different. We want process and that process involved living arrangements because none of us were independently wealthy. Davidson had family money and we used that. I had a little bit of family money, but none of us was wealthy. We all had to find a way to make a living in video. We were paying ourselves \$5, \$10, \$15 a week if we could afford it. Carol [Vontobel] was teaching school and Nancy [Cain] was working for ASCAT monitoring radio stations and stuff like that. The women were really supporting the men at this time and also participating in the group.

During that period we'd made connections with Abbie Hoffman during the Chicago 7 trial. Abbie asked me if I would write a section of his book, *Steal This Book*, something on broadcasting. His idea was to set up a guerrilla transmitter: Could we block out the other New York stations and just have Abbie on and then have it be small enough so you could move it to some other place and not be caught? Well, it seemed possible at the time and so I did some research and based on what I knew about our technology I thought it was possible. So I wrote the section of the book...We showed [Abbie] a little experiment that went from one room to the next but it wasn't what he was looking for and he was very disappointed and he lost interest in it. We didn't know what to do with it...if we're going to do more we need to have a lot more equipment or whatever.

So he kind of walked away and we kind of walked away, and I tried to set up something at the May Day demonstration in Washington in 1971 where we could broadcast—set up monitors all over the place and transmit video of what was going on—because we were all down there taping as the May Day Collective. A lot of students from Antioch and a lot of other folks came, students mostly, from around the country, and some other video people. There was a big group of people all shooting video with different perspectives, although united by their desire to be involved in this

major action to try to bring attention to the war. Anyway it didn't work there either. And shortly after that Abbie went underground...

And we were broke. We couldn't afford to pay the rent on Prince Street...We had to get out of there and we decided that rather than split up we would try to find a place in the country. The reason we could do this is because the State Council (NYSCA) funds started becoming available. We had a major grant, \$40,000, which was just an unheard of amount of money. We got that through the Rochester Museum and Science Center because David, through his connections, understood that there was only going to be a certain amount of money for the city and there was a lot more money, percentage-wise, for stuff upstate. We looked all over and we finally found a place [in Lanesville, NY]...and moved into this big farmhouse [Maple Tree Farm].

Basically, over the period of the winter, I met a guy who knew about radio broadcasting and I told him we were interested in television and he said he could help us out. So Chuck and Joseph Paul and I rigged up the transmitter and we started something we called *Lanesville TV* in 1972. We were 8 adults, and all our equipment was up in this farm house in Lanesville, and we would go back and forth to the city a lot but were based there, and we didn't have any way of reaching out to the community. There wasn't any cable; there wasn't any broadcast in the area; so we set up our own transmitter. We couldn't get it

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licensed, we actually made an inquiry (I think Skip [Blumberg] wrote a letter to the federal government) but there wasn't any way to get a license so we just started transmitting.

CH: So it was pirate TV.

PT: It was pirate TV and it was the first. I did some research for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1979-80. There were people out west who set up their own transmitter to retransmit television stations, but that was different. They weren't doing their own programming. If they were, they were just asking for donations. We weren't asking for any donations because the State Council was supporting us. So we had an outlet all of a sudden. It was a small community, but we did have some impact in the sense that when we'd broadcast things, we'd get some response. There was always a live telephone line. People would come visit us all the time, and use our editing, or just come to be there, and they would play their tapes [on *Lanesville TV*], so there was a very eclectic mix of things.

CH: So how often did you broadcast?

PT: Once a week. It started out three times a week and quickly went back to once a week. It was Saturday night... We had these shows and then afterwards we'd all have dinner and people would drink or smoke and we'd watch tapes and talk way into the night about video. It was a think-tank if you will, or a mecca of people who came from all over the world, really, to be in Lanesville, and to find out what we were doing, and to exchange tapes with us. Hundreds and hundreds of people came there. They worked on all sorts of different projects, some of them collaboratively, some of them worked with us on our projects. Sometimes they left their tapes, sometimes they didn't, but we were able to help them.

I was not aware of any pirate activity in the United States at that time when we were doing ours. Subsequently, we heard about some students at Syracuse University broadcasting some pornographic films, and then there was a guy in Canada who was setting up very low power TV stations in communities all over northern Ontario. ..During this period we got funding from the Council and from the NEA because of *Lanesville TV* but we could never actually get it for *Lanesville TV* because it was pirate.

At the same time we were also subject to tremendous surveillance from the FBI. Not tremendous, that's not fair to say....They came up and tapped our phones, but the wonderful thing about the FBI was that they missed the forest for the trees in a sense. When I saw our files through the Freedom of Information Act, they said that we were considered very polite—that probably came from the postmaster—and that we were broadcasting on a local television station. They were looking for Abbie Hoffman and they were looking for fugitives in general...We were making overtures unsuccessfully to the North Vietnamese saying that we thought we can do a documentary over there, bring it back, promote understanding, that kind of thing.

Meanwhile, John Alpert [Downtown Community TV, New York] was going to Cuba and I'm sure they were following him around....The files have so much crossed out that we can't

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really tell what it is. At this point, I feel vindicated that we were investigated. I would have felt terrible if there hadn't been a file. We were totally up front about what we were doing. And really what would have happened is that the FBI could have come to us, or the FBI would have turned it over to the FCC and the FCC would have come to us and said shut it down. And then we would have had to make a decision. No one complained because they could complain directly to us. One day, the garbage woman from up the street said: "You're interfering with my reception of *All in the Family*," and so we turned off the transmitter. That was the way it worked. We were part of a community in sense. It was difficult because there wasn't much community spirit, but what community there was, we were part of it...

And I think we were part of, strangely enough, the artist tradition in the Catskills....Woodstock [nearby] had its own tradition. There was an artists' collective over the mountains from us...Other artists came to this area to paint...It was close to the metropolitan New York. There is a whole tradition in this area of oddball folks, politically radical people and artists coming to this area for recreation and to live....My feeling is that, and we didn't realize it at the time, but we were part of a tradition that came with utopian ideas. We did not set ourselves up as a utopian community. That was not the idea. The idea was to continue working with video and the only way we could do it was to work collectively. I think that's a very different premise from the religious or spiritual reasons for which some people start communities, and we didn't come with that kind of baggage. That was both a blessing because it allowed us to be very free in the way that we worked and to open up to the outside completely, and it was the thing that lead ultimately to the demise because there was no central core to hold it together, only the economic necessity. When the economic necessities changed then the forces holding the group together suffered, and we just drifted apart really. There was no cataclysmic split.

DH: You don't think it was the changing of the direction of the Arts Council not to fund collectives but to fund individual artists?

PT: No, because there was a lot of money coming in for individual art... I think they were trying to spread it out and we'd been around for a long time and that had something to do with it...Other places developed to work—Electronics Arts Intermix and all those other places that were available in the city—and the technology became more accessible. We were not unique anymore and our services were less essential. There weren't those compelling reasons to travel to Lanesville, except as a vacation or whatever. So fewer and fewer people stayed there until Bart [Friedman] and Nancy and Chuck were the only people there in this huge 17 bedroom house and what's the point. Even though the rent was not unreasonable, they wanted to move, and they decided to move to Woodstock and that happened in 1978 I guess.

Lanesville TV had stopped the year before in 1977 because nobody was interested in doing it and there weren't enough people. I would run a Saturday night, late afternoon, early evening and they were ad hoc things as they had always been, but there was less connection. What was I doing for the community? I didn't live there anymore. Bart and Nancy did, but there wasn't any real reason [to do *Lanesville TV*] unless a lot of people showed up. It was continuing a tradition but it was forcing it. That didn't end Media Bus [the

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Videofreex' not-for-profit organization] because Bart and Nancy carried on Media Bus in Woodstock and got involved with cable there. But it was a very different thing, and it became one of any number of groups doing experiments, or not even doing experiments, but doing programming on cable access in small towns...

CH: What was the relationship between the people in Videofreex and TVTV?

PT: TVTV was basically an outgrowth of Raindance and it was Michael Shenberg and people like Tom Weinberg and other folks. The origins of how it came about, I don't know, except I think that was the name

that they chose for covering the Republican National Convention in 1972. A lot of people went to work on that—Nancy, Bart, Skip and Chuck. I don't think David went down. I worked on the edits of both of those tapes [about 1972 Democratic and Republican Conventions]. I did not go down to Miami; Sarah had just been born, our first child, so I was not about to go. I felt a little uncomfortable about it. I felt it was too much Michael Shamburg. I think that was probably too harsh a judgment at that point. He grew in importance because that was what he wanted to do. I respect Michael, but it was too packaged for me at the time. It wasn't packaged at all when you look back at it. It was very chaotic. But that was how anarchistic we were or I was. Maybe it was a conflict of egos but I didn't get involved too much in TVTV things. In retrospect I kind of wish I had. It would have been fun to go to those conventions.

I was very much involved in 1976 when we did *5-day Bicycle Race* [a live cablecast reporting on the Democratic National Convention, held that summer in New York City], but that was what I liked. *5-day Bicycle Race* didn't have one person who did it. Tom Weinberg got a lot of the technical stuff together that we needed, but it was an open, collaborative effort—probably one of the best ad hoc collaborative efforts in documentary. It was really lively, fun, and there was clearly an audience out there and we were certainly noticed by the mainstream critics. I think that project was important, and part of the model for it was *Lanesville TV*. That takes nothing away from the originality of people who contributed to it, but we knew we could do that because we had the model for it already, and we knew how to apply it to something much larger.

DH: It grew out of having the guest people come up. In *Lanesville TV* the deck would be right on camera, and on the live show someone would come in and say, "I'm from Italy and here's my tape and I'm going to play it," and you'd see them actually load up the reel to reel tape. [In *5-day Bicycle Race*] we didn't have live feeds from the convention floor but individual producers ran the tapes to the studio and got to introduce the tape they shot, and to stop it where ever they wanted...

PT: Some of the tapes weren't hot and some of the tapes were. It was very spotty in some ways, but it was a very exciting process and that process ended up on the screen, had an audience, and offered a real alternative view. Letting people talk at greater length, letting alternative views air while an event was going...It was wonderful. One of the best tapes I remember from that was Nancy's tape of Jerry Brown, interviewing him in the car and following him around and getting in the car. It said so much about what was going on, and I remember how exciting it was to be on the floor of the convention...

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Remember the tape of Ron Kovic trying to get into the Rolling Stones party? Really very talented stuff about what was going on at that convention...

CH: What about your relationship to public access and the aspirations that people had for cable? Were you beginning to lose interest in this at the time when public access was getting developed, or were you needing to attend to your family when public access was getting started?

PT: I think personally, I had responsibilities as the person who was the bread winner of the family at that time, so I got a job...And then Michael Cousins who had been part of TVTV got a job with the FCC and he called me and he said—well, I can't think of anyone better to help study the possibility of low power television. The idea hadn't just come from Michael. There was pressure from the west to legalize low power broadcasting. He got involved in the rule-making. As an FCC attorney he was the head of the task force and he asked me to do a study. So I went in a few years from being a pirate broadcaster to being a consultant to the FCC to make all this pirate stuff legal, and I wrote a big report. And then I got involved with cable and cable programming, worked for cable companies...

CH: I have a copy of that book that you guys did at Cooperstown Museum, the workshop with video and museum people like David Ross?

PT: That was another David Cort and Alvin Schuler project. I participated in it but it was not my project. We gathered together a whole bunch of museum directors or curators or people who were involved with exhibits from across the state, and we got them all together in Cooperstown at the Fenimore House. We did a lot of those kinds of workshops where we introduced people to video because they didn't know what it

was. My contribution was to say— well let's not just leave this as a workshop, let's have it culminate in something. So I managed to hook up this system with the local access channel, and so these museum people produced the show. In the space of a week, they came and they learned about video—none of them had any experience—and went out and interviewed people, did little tapes. And then we went up and we advertised it in the paper and we produced this Saturday morning show. It was a complete thing that they did. It was one of the best in that sense because it was so thorough. In other words, you may use video in your museum just to have a display, but here's another way of looking at it. Again, to reach an audience and connect with people and not just leave it there as a passive element.

CH: That seems really important in terms of this whole model of education. There seems to be the controversy around media education and the need to know what production is, the need to have hands-on.

PT: The other element that we always included and we did in Cooperstown as well was a live phone line where people could call in, because, again, we believed in interactivity before that was a buzz word. We felt that it should be interactive, that there should be a response mechanism, that people should be encouraged to respond to what they see on television and that the people who are producing television should be responsive. That creates better television and makes people engage with what they're watching and it makes it a less passive experience.

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We hoped that it would improve the lot of the community in some way, if only through communication. The thinking process kind of ended at the virtues of response rather than taking it to the level of what does that do for anybody, but the passivity of television was so extreme that just breaking that cycle of information delivery or, as [Les] Brown puts it in that wonderful book, the business of television is delivering an audience to an advertiser. That always was a startling revelation to me. Basically the job of television should be to deliver information but also to connect people to their communities, to connect people to ideas, and to connect people to each other. That was something that could be used to the betterment of the community and of humanity.

CH: It seems like Harriet [in Nancy Cain's documentary *Harriet*] is an example of someone for whom there was some empowerment in being a part of *Lanesville TV*.

PT: Temporarily, yes...Really there was a wonderful time in there where she could see herself differently, and Nancy would take her to these shows where Harriet would be introduced and people would applaud her and really admire her, and that was something that she had never experienced before in her life, and probably subsequently never did...Again, seeing Harriet around occasionally, I don't know that it changed her outwardly.

DH: Didn't she get involved with school politics or something?

PT: She may have. Nancy would know. That may be true and that may have been a positive outcome, which may or may not have happened otherwise. She certainly was an extraordinary person. If she hadn't been, the tape wouldn't have been so successful; it wouldn't be so much fun to watch. I would say that she's a good example of *Lanesville TV* having an effect on the residents, although who knows what the effect of *Lanesville TV* was. Certainly it was very different television from anything anyone was used to watching in Lanesville.

DH: Talking about responses...I think we were one of first groups to use vote track on *Mock Turtle Soup* (election night cable show, 1976). The guy who was developing that technology donated it to the show and it had never been tested.

PT: During the *5-day Bicycle Race* we asked after the Ron Kovic tape where he was denied entrance into a party: "Does Rolling Stone represent your interests?" Something like 340 said yes and 212 said no. People picked up the phone just to do that. There was enough of an audience that cared about what we were saying to get the phone numbers and call in to register yes or no. And people at *Mock Turtle Soup*, which was the election night call-in, said: "Well we thought you should have covered such and such" and we said: "Well, we did, an hour ago" and they said: "Oh we missed it." It was interesting because the resulting tapes don't

reflect the dynamic of the show, because you have to excerpt certain things, and the flow of it doesn't come through, and that's OK. Maybe that's a reflection that the show didn't flow as well as it might have, but there were moments where those shows, all of them, just sang. They were clearly connecting with some people. And maybe regular television

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clearly connects with some people sometimes, but a hell of a lot of the time it doesn't.

CH: There has to be some value in modeling citizenship. It's active participation. When you're on the school board, obviously it's important because you're making decisions about your kids, but also there's a way in which you're talking to your neighbor, which I think has some kind of residual importance. And now there are so many configurations like malls where you don't talk to your neighbor. I don't know if that's something that you thought about at the time.

PT: Well, certainly there wasn't any place to shop in Lanesville...the closest supermarket was in Kingston. That's a 30 mile drive from Lanesville, each way. So people weren't locked in, they had to move around and they had to have a sense of what was going on in other places because there was nothing going on where they lived.

CH: What about this issue of technology? One of the things in the material written by people in Raindance is that people really believed that the world was going to change with this new technology, and you were one of the more educated people around technology of the group. Were you driven by any of that ideology?

PT: I'd like to think that I was cautious about it. I think we had a skepticism about the technology because, again, I started out talking about the war. Not only was the technology itself spawned by the war but you were constantly reminded of that by the bombings. The carpet bombings and the smart bombs were talked about on the news, and the technology could be used for good or bad. So I think if technology was going to change, it had to be in the hands of people who thought about change and who were concerned about change. I don't think that we felt that technology alone was going to make a significant change. We always called them "the tools" and explicit in that concept was someone using tools. We were assuming that we would put the tools in the hands of people who could do things that were different and that was the important goal, not the tools themselves. You needed good tools because if you didn't have good tools, the products you were going to produce weren't going to be as attractive to an audience, and you weren't going to have the facility to experiment and to do the fun things that you wanted to do, that would keep you interested. It wasn't technology as a force itself, because we had to depend upon foreign technology. The applications all came from Japan with the exception of our editing machine. We were beholden to foreign powers that would make decisions about the tools that were available to us.

In terms of the actual transmission technologies, we were kind of divorced from cable because we were in this remote area. We were skeptical about cable, first of all, because there was so much hype about it and we didn't see it developing. In Rochester there was a group working with cable, Portable Channel. We set that group up. It was our project to set up for the Flying People, and they kind of came out of the woodwork and took it over. Again, we were looking for people to do it.

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CH: One of the things that is really interesting about your project is that you really started out by representing yourselves and, in some ways, your

generation or a certain aspect of the hippie or alternative cultural aspect of this generation, on television through this whole fiasco with CBS. Were you at all interested in the reflection of your generation on television, or were you perhaps so opposed to television that this wasn't a key issue for you?

PT: Well, we knew that there wasn't an accurate representation of the generation on television, and I think we were naive at the beginning of the CBS project to think that there could be. The net result is that we

found that that avenue was closed, so we had to find new avenues to do it and that's what we did. We first of all started with our shows in the loft and moved on ultimately to broadcasting because that was the way that we could control the entire process and what we tried to do within that process—by having the live phone line, by going out and talking to people in the community, trying not to edit them in a way that we felt was unfaithful to what they had to say, and by letting them participate in the making of the shows. We were representing them more faithfully than television could. We felt we were an outlet to the degree they wanted one and could be encouraged to use one. We not only used it for ourselves but we extended the principles of representation to the people we were supposedly representing through our station, because it was everybody's station. You want to come use it? You can do it. You want to talk? We don't cut anybody off on the telephone. If you want to go on and on, you can go on and on.

In that sense of the representation issue, we embodied a different approach to it completely. We felt that that was the only valid way to do it. In that sense we were defining ourselves in terms of what we were not—not being manipulative and not being controlling in the same way as the networks. We had our own goals but we were willing to listen to other people's goals as well. The problem is that we weren't dealing always with an educated and interested audience...and people have lives to lead. It's not that they were an ignorant audience, it's just that they had other things to do. To the extent that they watched and participated, they had a chance to have an outlet, and we encouraged that constantly because we felt that that was an integral part of what we were doing.