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A BLIND DATE WITH THE PAST

Transforming television documentary practice into a research method

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Hands on history can involve many different kinds of hands, those of one-time professionals or skilled users, and those who are encountering an old technology for the first time. A physical encounter with an obsolete technology can transform our understanding of the machine and its potential. But once those technologies had skilled users, who developed complex group working practices around their equipment. The ADAPT project set out to film and analyse the skilled users of historic television equipment as they re-encountered and used it again for the first time in many years.¹ This chapter reflects on how this experimental media archaeology project was conducted. It discusses the methods we used and the lessons we learned, and in particular how I was able to adapt my skills as a television producer to the requirements of an academic research project.

The initial proposal for ADAPT envisaged the filming of a series of reconstructions of the process of working with particular technological arrays, in which veteran industry professionals were to be reunited with the technologies they used at particular points in their careers and filmed while they worked with them, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the machines and the prevailing ways of working with them. My role on the project was to act as the producer of these ‘reconstructions’, ‘reenactments’ or ‘simulations’. The project’s uncertainty about how to define this approach indicates how novel it was, and how much it was my responsibility to develop the method. The professionals were not asked to reenact the making of a particular programme, nor to reconstruct a specific historical moment. Nor were they asked to simulate their old working practices. Instead, they were asked to do for real in the present what they once did in the past. Their difficulty in recalling how a particular equipment function once worked would be invaluable research data, as were their own reflections on how they used to work, and their reflexive reenactment of working habits and workplace banter. The participants were offered a blind date with their past, enabled and recorded by the research team.

My role as the project's producer involved adapting contemporary television production practice to the requirements of this unpredictable hands on research. I came to the project after a substantial career in mainstream event-based factual television. I was a senior producer on the first series of *Big Brother* in 2000 for Channel 4. I then produced both the UK and US versions of *Supernanny*. Both depended on the unpredictable behaviours of large casts of human beings. Both necessitated the recruitment and management of huge teams, overseeing the construction of ambitious sets or houses. So did ADAPT. But the mission of these broadcast shows was always to deliver new and compelling content aimed at drawing large audiences. Academic research has different priorities, and its available resources will always be meagre in comparison with the television industry. This chapter reflects on the method we developed in ADAPT, which involved revising standard television working methods to capture skilled hands on work processes for research purposes.

The hands on approach was crucial as it offers far more than a traditional interview with veterans about their past work. Approaching the project as if it were a television production was useful in breaking down each element required into a sequence or scene. It was clear we needed real reactions at the point at which the veterans were 'reunited' with old kit; it was clear we needed to understand how the equipment worked; and it was clear we needed to see full crews or teams in action in order to see machines and their operators working together. As in television, these sequences would deliver a rich mix of emotional responses and insightful factual information. The sequences we sought to film fell naturally into four categories:

1. Reunion
2. Demonstration
3. Equipment-in-use, or a team performance of some part of the television production process
4. Group discussion and reflection.

Approaching all the filming in the same way throughout the life of the project meant that all filmed events had a consistency and that the resulting videos feel like a connected collection.

However, unlike *Big Brother* or any kind of television or digital production, there was no broadcaster and no commissioning platform, and therefore no specific identified audience. There was no intention of 'narrowing down' the project's output by, for example, editing it into one main piece of work for a defined audience. Research has different priorities. Everything is potentially useful evidence. In short, we were not producing a 60-minute documentary for BBC Two. Instead, the ADAPT material was to be made available for free to a wide range of viewers, from academics and students to film and television fanatics, collectors, technical experts and the wider public. For some, the whole event would be essential viewing; others would simply want a particular aspect or a general

overview. So our editing and presentation had to be radically different from that of linear broadcast TV. The solution was to produce 'long', 'medium' and 'short' packages for each particular filmed sequence. These equated to full-length real-time edits, a documentary length cut and bitesize social media friendly 'tasters'. For academics and educators, these cuts might constitute 'research data', 'seminar screening', and 'lecture clip'. While the pace and tone was similar throughout, this method of presentation at least meant the viewer could decide how much and for how long they wanted to spend looking at it. It also allowed the research team to present extracts at conferences and to contribute material to the *History of the BBC* website.

Initial challenges

The amount of research needing to be done by the producer in television's pre-production phase can easily be underestimated. While academics generally regard research as an ongoing and often never-ending process, the television producer requires all of her research to be completed in advance. An initial scoping study is required to decide on what particular areas of television production can be covered and why, whom to approach and cast, what technology to seek out, and how to begin to mount an event that can deliver useful filmed content.

As I began the research towards the ADAPT reenactments, the greatest challenge was in locating technology dating back to the 1960s and 1970s. Much of it is obsolete, and display models in museums were of no use as they have very rarely been maintained in working order. Yet the project's aim to recreate how television used to be made required technology in some kind of working order. To obtain working examples, we relied heavily on enthusiasts and collectors, and on finding a network of engineers with the time and expertise needed to bring the machinery back to life. Mounting events in venues that could offer the right conditions for veteran crews to be reunited with and again use the kit of their past, presented further challenges. Considerations included type and size of venue given the sizeable kit and army of people filming would potentially involve, ensuring sufficient light and power, ease of access for hefty equipment, and for some level of comfort to accommodate older participants.

The second challenge was to locate and cast retired television technicians and crew. This relied on mostly informal networks and was a long process, one that is usually undertaken in television by a casting team. To ensure an authentic representation of television production crews of the past, we needed to unite the right combination of men and women with the tools of the trade they once used. So, what do you find first: the working equipment, or the capable veteran? Clearly, we needed both: ideally full teams and full arrays of kit, as television was made by vast crews using interconnected machinery. It was a complicated jigsaw puzzle especially given the very limited original technology available. Our veteran participants also needed to be willing to 'act' as their former selves in the roles they once worked. They had to be physically fit enough to do a day's

work and to be able to form part of a crew alongside others. They needed to be clear and ideally dynamic speakers so as to engage the eventual viewers. They had to have at least some memory of their old working practices, along with an ability to explain arcane technical terms and workplace jargon. Balancing these expectations was delicate.

The most extensive casting operation lay behind the most ambitious of the ADAPT filmed events: the reenactment of a live sports outside broadcast with a 1969 ex-BBC Type 2 truck known as North 3. This was filmed in May 2016 over four days at a Welsh hotel. A 19-strong veteran team recorded a 1970s-style darts match using original first-generation colour television cameras and sound equipment. Detailed research was required to understand the full array of kit used in outside broadcasts in this period including variations both regionally and between broadcast companies. We were fortunate in finding a rare partially working Type 2 truck and a willing participant in its owner Steve Harris.² Steve and I either spoke or emailed daily over the following six months. Between us we created a network of mostly retired and highly capable engineers to help Steve continue his restoration work on the truck, wrestling the vast amount of 50-year old machinery back to life. Once this process was set in motion, I began to search for and cast 19 veteran crew needed to cover all key roles.

The casting process required an understanding of the hierarchies and delicate nature of teamwork. One of my attempts to cast a supervisor into a more junior role – effectively demoting him for the purposes of our reconstruction – led to a near revolt before any camera had rolled. I also had to dispatch some of the newly found skilled crew to assist Steve Harris further in the hugely ambitious mission of getting his old outside broadcast unit into a working state. Once reunited with the old equipment, they were no longer valuable on camera as participants in the reenactment, because one of our requirements was that participants should re-encounter the equipment for the first time at the beginning of the reconstruction, so that their

FIGURE 3.1 Ex-BBC Type 2 outside broadcast truck North 3, ‘on location’ outside Northop Hall hotel in Flintshire.

initial reactions could be captured on camera. So this vital technical restoration process depleted my potential cast and meant I had to find more participants.

Location research was also vital for this particular shoot. The location needed to be able to accommodate what might be a sizeable entourage (a full research project crew filming another crew) and be fit for purpose. We had access to the television studio at Royal Holloway's campus near London and had used this for other reenactment exercises. But here the equipment dictated the location. Steve Harris' base is more than 200 miles north of London in the town of Hawarden in Flintshire. The diesel engine of the Type 2 outside broadcast truck – originally installed in 1969 – was incapable of a 200-mile journey, and we needed access to Steve's extensive range of spare parts. So finding a location nearby was crucial. A local hotel whose success lay in weekend weddings was persuaded to allow the project to move in during the quieter mid-week period. They agreed to their function room being transformed into a sports venue, installed a substantial extra power circuit so we didn't blow the fuses, and made space on their driveway for the huge OB truck. When filming was underway, windows were propped open to accommodate hefty cabling. A café area was inhabited by the project's film crew, alongside a makeshift 'video village' from where I directed the fixed rig. The hotel provided bed and board for cast and crew, and traditional evening meals of beef bourguignon and sponge pudding added to the 1970s atmosphere. Given the ages of the crew and the demands of the long film days, providing such comforts was essential.

In television, there is typically a skilled production management team to help with logistical planning, event scheduling, health and safety, travel, hospitality and legal compliance. ADAPT's initial budget underestimated this work, just as it did the subsequent editing of the material. We have learned that filmed reconstructions need to map out such roles at the planning/bid stage. Logistical issues can be many and varied: we needed to work out who might be called in to a remote location

FIGURE 3.2 Screens set up in the 'video village' monitored output from multiple fixed cameras overlooking the ADAPT project reenactment event.

to safety test very old electrical equipment, and we had to determine what size van would fit a 1" videotape machine.

Furthermore, our experiences when planning this reenactment highlighted the importance of keeping notes throughout the production process. In television production, troubleshooting practical issues tends to take priority over the documentation of the research processes involved. Television research notes (which can include informal interviews, casting, technical and logistical information) are typically more casual as they serve mostly as *aide memoires* for how and what to capture during filming. As these are of little use after a broadcast, they can lack the accuracy essential to academic use. The use of an audio recorder for all conversations and interviews ahead of the filming is essential, alongside the use of standardized documents when making research notes, fact checking and amending all documents to ensure accuracy throughout. These techniques can help to ensure that, in the frantic work of producing a television event, useful research notes are created which will benefit the final outputs of the project.

Finding old equipment and retired crews

Casting for the reconstruction of technological processes involves finding both people and technologies. For all of the project's reenactments, it was critical to match up the right people with the right working machinery, as it was paramount to the project to provide the requisite array of interdependent working kit. There were many variants and different technical specifications depending on where and on what specific piece of kit the veteran crews worked, as well as real limits as to what equipment could be found or made to work. The sensible thing would have been to involve participants in the process of locating and engineering their old kit to be sure it was indeed the correct item. However, this process would have compromised one of the key aims of the project, which was to capture the very first moment when a veteran crew member is reunited with the equipment of their past.

In order to get around this casting problem, it became apparent that we needed to involve people who had specific knowledge of the technology of the day and could guide us behind the scenes. These came in the form of enthusiastic collectors and engineers. They would not take part in the reconstructions, but would assist us in the planning. It took considerable time to find collectors interested in the period of television equipment that we were seeking. These turned out to be amateur curators: individuals who had taken it upon themselves to keep the past alive or save obsolete artefacts from being junked by maintaining, re-using or displaying them. None we encountered were attached to any large organization or museum. All were found by word of mouth through a network of 'old boys'. Once found, they proved not just extraordinarily helpful but utterly invaluable to the project. Their knowledge extended beyond the technology, to the era in which the much-loved machine best shone. More critically, they had the engineering skills to revive the old technology. Finding and re-connecting networks of engineers and collectors was a long and time-consuming job. Some knew each

other from the past, and even so had to rummage through old address books in order to remake old connections. This was an unforeseen element of the project. It paid dividends, because the collectors, restorers and enthusiasts with whom we worked made possible the fitting together of a seemingly impossible jigsaw. This jigsaw consisted of old kit that could then work with other old kit via revived old connectors and old adaptors, old vision desks, and old sound desks reunited with rack-mounted circuits and miles of cabling. It took several months to reassemble such an array of complex machinery, and prepare it to be transported and filmed in full use.

While this work went on, we forged ahead with finding a crew of retired outside broadcast crew to work on our reconstruction. Retired professionals often have their own networks, especially when they worked within large organizations. In the UK television industry, numerous reunion groups (including TelOBians and VT Old boys) responded positively to the idea of the ADAPT mission and opened their doors to us. They helped spread the word and enabled us to start to cast interested and capable veterans to film. We also placed adverts in *Prospero*, the magazine for BBC pensioners, calling for participants. This widened the reach and brought in many recommendations of pioneers to consider, of colleagues some thought suitable and led to a number of volunteers coming forward. This approach led to reconstructions that tended to emphasize the role of the BBC.

Seeking out and drawing on the experiences of other research or filmed projects – like the Pebble Mill project and the British Entertainment History Project – helped spread the word in useful quarters too.³ These informal networks helped build strong, cohesive teams of participants. One former camera operator called another former camera operator, retired engineers called other retired engineers, and support grew in this way. However, when trying to research video tape editing and the changes brought about by non-linear and Avid, finding participants was more difficult as the all-encompassing ‘tape editing’ focus covered a much greater period of time than any other reenactment event. Editors, whose work is more solitary in nature, were not typically part of reunion groups and networks so were much harder to find.

In television production, the initial process of finding contacts and potential participants is followed by a process of casting. Casting involves initial conversations and meeting people to assess their willingness and suitability as individuals, but also as part of a group of people who will work together on the reconstruction and will offer complementary skills and accounts. Casting is required to construct a cohesive group rather than an assemblage of individuals who have nothing (or too much) in common. A comprehensive and updated database of all contacts is necessary during the casting phase. For ADAPT keeping data records was crucial especially as there was rarely a paper trail to the mostly older generation we were dealing with and who seemed to prefer a telephone chat to email or social media.

One problem with participants through informal social networks was that we received entirely male crew recommendations in the early days. We were aware

that most television crews of the past had at least one female member – often the PA (producer’s assistant) – but these proved elusive. They were not to be found at any of the reunion events we attended, and nor did they respond to our call for help in *Prospero*. So, it took a much longer trawl and numerous calls to key producers of the era to reach these more hidden but important members of past television technical teams. While staying true to the era and genre represented, it is important for research projects to consider gender and diversity of participants. For ADAPT, having one of the filmed events set in the 1980s and 1990s was key. In recreating how video tape editing was done in the 1980s and the changes through the 1990s when digital editing came in with Avid and Lightworks, there was a great opportunity to include pioneering women in editing and graphics roles such as Renee Edwards (one of the UK’s first Avid editors) and Nyree Kavanagh, who taught herself Quantel Paintbox, a graphics hardware package that revolutionized television post-production.

Casting

The participants in our filmed ‘simulations’, reenactments or reconstructions were asked to do something unusual: to participate in a blind date with their past, and to ‘play’ their former selves. The project had initially used the term ‘simulation’ to distinguish this activity from that of historic reconstructions. It soon became clear that television veterans were confused by the term. They seemed to think we were asking them to pretend to use old equipment, rather than actually operate. I started to use the terms ‘recreate’ and ‘reenact’. Both seemed to more accurately describe what we were doing behind the scenes in setting up the conditions of an ‘event’ for the veterans to respond to. These definitions also seemed to help potential participants understand that what we were expecting of them was some kind of recreating of their past. We were asking people still living to remember and recreate an element of their former lives. Getting them to act as their former selves was an unusual request, and one that does not seem to have been made before in this way. Conceptual artist Jeremy Deller, in his 2001 recreation *The Battle of Orgreave*, used 800 historical reenactors and 200 former miners to achieve his recreation of the infamous battles between police and miners during the Miners’ Strikes of 1984. It was a filmed event, the aim of which was to explore the complexities of that bitter struggle. Deller did not ask any of his participants to comment in any way on what they are doing or recalling or feeling during the filming or reenactment. Some, like art critic Alex Farquharson, suggested that what he had produced was more a ‘flashback’ than a ‘reenactment’, suggesting a general uneasiness of definition around this kind of work.⁴

The ambition of ADAPT was to capture, through hands on reenactments, how television was made as far back in time as possible. It soon became evident that the 1960s was about as far back as we could with this methodology. Technicians and professionals from this period were now in their seventies and eighties. Working with older retired participants brought with it a series of specific challenges.

We needed to ensure that they were mentally and physically capable of long and taxing film days. They had to be able to remember (at least in part) working methods and practices of 40 or more years ago. And they needed to be able to operate an array of complex and cumbersome equipment they had likely not seen for many decades. They were also expected to act in the role they held back in the 1960s and 1970s, even if that was a much more junior position than they had achieved by the time they retired.

To help ensure the safety and wellbeing of our participants, we recruited students to act as ‘shadows’ to the veteran crew. There were real health and safety concerns around older participants feeling able or determined to pick up and lift heavy machinery. Much of the equipment was exceptionally cumbersome and weighty, particularly old outside broadcast machinery. Students wore dark colours so as to be discreet and intervened whenever possible to take over this task. Students also watched out for participants’ welfare, looking for signs of fatigue or hunger. When necessary they suggested a break, or ensured that a chair was nearby. Most of our participants were very fit for their ages given their physical careers, but many also overestimated their capabilities. They were hard to stop once they took on what they frequently referred to as ‘dedication to the output’. During their careers, this meant ensuring that programmes went to air on time; they transferred this commitment to our project. As a result of their participation, students were able to learn from the pioneers themselves about how analogue television was made, while telling tales of smartphone filming and digital platforms in return. It seemed that both benefitted equally from their time together.

Working with a diverse team of retired professionals brought a number of challenges that we did not anticipate. Asking the veterans to ‘act’ as their former selves also meant that at times some took on a ‘presenter’ mode, addressing the camera while explaining their skill even though they were never asked to do that. Some of them interrupted each other mid-sentence, in an attempt to provide clearer

FIGURE 3.3 Vision supervisor Roger Neale and vision engineer John Coupe at the camera control desk inside ex-BBC outside broadcast truck North 3.

descriptions. And those acting in more junior assistant roles found it hard to resist taking over the tasks of those in roles more senior. Not all of our participants were fully cooperative with our interest in using obsolete, and often technically imperfect, technology. During our reenactment with 16mm film technology, one participant struggled to remember how a particular microphone worked and went to great lengths to point out how much he didn't like it and didn't want to use it given that he owned 'better', more recent, microphone, which he had brought along with him. He went so far as to switch out the old for his own piece of newer technology. No amount of explaining the purpose of the project could assuage his concern with providing the best quality sound he could.

Throughout our reenactments, there was no such thing as success or failure, either for the veteran crews or for the project. So, while the mission felt enormous, it was useful to remind ourselves that whatever happened when we brought veteran men and their old machines together, it was all of interest to the project. Old habits or processes forgotten were as interesting as all those remembered. Collective memory, while an important element, may not be reliable as factual truth. Frequently told anecdotes can have a way of elevating the more banal or humorous aspects of an event at the expense of what really took place. However, the premise of the project was always clear, and the structure created space for surprising outcomes.

Filming

ADAPT used the most modern digital technology to film the equipment and practices of the past. We used small, lightweight portable and fixed cameras to overcome our key challenges: how to capture entire teams working simultaneously; how to be unobtrusive but ensure the capturing of the entire experience; and how to comprehensively understand what they were doing given the highly technical nature of their work. As an academic research project, we wanted to involve students in our work as much as possible. In the first year or so, students were recruited to both film and edit, but this was not sustainable in the longer term. It was not appropriate to ask students, still training and developing their skills, to take on the critical responsibilities of filming, data-wrangling, and editing our larger reenactment exercises.

For our more complex activities, we employed the services of professional camera operators and sound recordists. Working alongside our trainee students, these crew members contributed a wide range of valuable ideas on how to best capture content. Their more extensive experience made it easier for us to obtain the exact types of shots we needed to capture the 'hands on' aspects of the reenactments. Breaking with documentary conventions, which tend to emphasize close-ups and talking heads, we needed loose mid-size and wide shots. These guaranteed that bodily movements, hands, and machine could be seen in context. In order to follow the spontaneous actions of the crew, we decided to use handheld cameras. The professional camera operators we worked with were also experts in the art

of moving with the camera, creating what television professionals often refer to as 'useable moves', whereby the movement of the body is used to create flow from a close up to a wide shot. This gentle body motion, stepping back and forth to change shot size rather than zooming in or out with the camera, allows all footage to be useable in the edit. However, it is a physically demanding 'dance' that can take professionals or even seasoned crew time to perfect.

Where the number of participants was low, and reenactments took place in small spaces, four cameras were sufficient to cover the action. Students operated cameras and sound for both of these events with the university supplying all sound and Sony broadcast-standard cameras. To ensure that nothing was missed, handheld cameras were supplemented with two locked-off wide angle overhead cameras. Miniature GoPros were initially used as fixed cameras, but their lack of timecode caused challenges in the editing process, and full-sized Sony cameras on tripods were used for later exercises. The advantage of the wide angled overhead cameras is that the entire 'experience' of the participants could be fully captured as these cameras were set to record continuously. They provided a real-time record of all activity, a useful perspective of where veterans and machinery interacted, and proved invaluable in the edit supplementing where the camerawork struggled or a vital action had been overlooked. This enables detailed academic analysis, for example, on how long it took a veteran crew to set up and light a documentary interview, and what all crew members were doing with what machine at the same time. Single camera coverage selects an aspect of this process for the viewer, where a wide overhead camera allows viewers to choose for themselves what they are interested in.

The reenactment of a 1970s-style live outside broadcast involving a crew of up to 20 presented far greater challenges. Outside broadcast crews of the analogue era comprised a team of anywhere from 20 to 60 or more technicians. It became clear it was not going to be possible to replicate it or achieve it with fewer than 20 veteran crew members. Key challenges then were around the sheer numbers of veteran crew to cover as they work to simultaneously achieve the broadcast of a live show. The confined space within which they achieve this also created difficulties. The vintage outside broadcast truck, which acts as the heart of the broadcast operation, is narrow and can typically house up to ten veteran crew. They work in the three tight longitudinal sections amidst racks of monitors and machinery, a spaghetti of cables and live feeds. There was simply no space for any of our project film crew to fit, and so we adopted the working practices of one of the most recent innovations in factual television: fixed rig production, the technique used to film contemporary fly-on-the-wall documentaries like *24 Hours in A&E*, *Hospital*, and the *Educating . . .* series.

Fixed rig shooting is the chosen method for all sorts of television series where the content of the show or the space dictates that cameras be installed and left unmanned as they record. They are small and discreet so can be fixed in a number of places offering a rich mix of angles and coverage, and they allow participants to go about their business undisturbed. A more naturalistic result can be achieved

FIGURE 3.4 Images of a live darts match displayed on preview monitors inside ex-BBC outside broadcast truck North 3, during an ADAPT project reenactment exercise.

as the subjects can feel free from a watchful eye and perhaps therefore, free from concern of being judged for any memory failure. All of these benefits come at a high price: this is an expensive way of filming, which requires a professional team to install the equipment and record from it, though costs can be reduced by opting for small fixed (non-zoom) cameras such as the Marshall CV502-MB model used for our outside broadcast reenactment.

A television production company – Lion Eyes – was contracted to install, maintain, and capture video feeds from our fixed rig camera. Led by Martin Riley, who acted as technical director, the Lion Eyes team rigged cameras in two large spaces. Cameras were installed in the outside broadcast vehicle, and in a large function room in the hotel used as a location to stage a live sports event for their filming. Our veteran crew needed to move freely between both spaces. Cameras were required to capture the crew as they rigged and installed cameras, lights, sound, set, and all the connected technology in the truck. A total of 14 fixed rig cameras, 20 radio microphones and four ambient microphones captured comprehensive audio and video of all crew in all spaces at all times as they worked simultaneously with their complex array of kit to rig, rehearse, and record an outside broadcast of the period. Such extensive coverage afforded the project the potential of watching and hearing each and every crew member at any given moment and to understand the communication and production processes involved throughout.

Editing

ADAPT's filmed reenactments generated huge amounts of data. The decision to keep all the evidence of the process contrasts with television production practice, which is to discard material that is not used for the final broadcast. Fixed rig productions, whose filming technology we used to document the reconstruction

of an outside broadcast, typically record the outputs of just a fraction of all the cameras that they use. They use a process of live selection of camera outputs, radically reducing the amount of data that they store for the later editing process. The research decision to record all 14 cameras at all times (using no live selection), generated 11 terabytes of footage – enough data to fill over 2,000 DVD-Rs. This had a significant impact on the edit in terms of amount of data, storage, and content management. RAID storage drives big enough to store this sizeable archive had to be found and purchased, as this proved beyond the university infrastructure at the time. Managing such a large volume of footage resulting from multiple camera sources was a complex and lengthy task. Logging the material was a major challenge in itself, and the footage had to be organized and edited before researchers could conveniently use it.

As with all productions, there was an array of challenges to face once editing began. Some were unique to the project, and many emerged from the fact that interruptions from the production crew were kept to a minimum, and the reenactment was allowed to flow naturally. In the edit, we needed to decipher multiple simultaneous audio tracks. We needed to deal with jargon and confusing technical terminology – the same piece of equipment often going by various different names. We need to consider how to condense a full day and a half of veteran crew rigging into a viewable form, while reflecting the multiplicity of different professional roles.

In total, our footage provided fresh and revealing material that is experiential and offers far more than the more typical interview with retired professionals. We see them re-live their past work, remembering and reflecting while doing so. They indulge once again in the professional culture that formed a huge part of their working careers, falling easily back into old habits and hierarchies – complete with bad jokes. This produced some vivid research data. These blind dates with the past demonstrate everyday working practices and habits that could not have been accessed in any other way. These professionals' reflections on the hands on recalled experience of their own pasts provides further data about changing (and unchanging) attitudes over lifetimes.

We edited our video material throughout the project, initially creating a temporary website and free YouTube channel while we were deliberating on the best short and long term repositories for the asset. We used YouTube and Vimeo to share filmed footage and guided interested parties from our website to our YouTube channel which housed a selection of clips. As the project evolved and grew in ambition and complexity the amount of archive material at stake increased. As the project concluded, we launched a comprehensive website and transferred all of our video material to Figshare, a long-term digital repository.⁵

Conclusion

ADAPT was a highly ambitious project. It aimed to unite two very different groups – a group of academic researchers and a group of retired television

professionals – around a common purpose. Our shared goal was the preservation of television history. We wanted to show, in depth and detail, how television used to be made. We sought to highlight the hands on expertise and hard work that went into making television in the days before digital video cameras and non-linear editing.

As this chapter has shown, uniting these two groups around a series of filmed reenactments also required the adaptation of one professional skill – documentary television production – into the context of academic research. As the project's digital producer, it fell to me to make this challenging translation. The benefit of many years of experience in coordinating and producing major documentary television series enabled me to unite a disparate group of veteran participants, collectors, and enthusiasts. But, when filming, I had to resist some of my professional instincts. It was tempting, for example, to 'over produce' the participants, by asking them to demonstrate technology in a certain way, or to recount on camera the stories they had told me during the casting process. But the project required that I leave them uninterrupted, so that they felt the freedom to experiment with the old kit, to explore how it works, and to engage and re-connect with each other. My priority, in short, was to allow their memories to be triggered through the hands on experience rather than from a lot of short sharp pokes from a producer.

Refashioning my documentary production skills to suit the constraints and demands of ADAPT was a complex process, but one that has helped the project to deliver an important result. Ultimately, the process of filming reenactments for ADAPT has created a new kind of research output. Our filmed encounters between operators and machines are not oral history interviews: they lack the structure and formality that tends to mark out such activities. Nor have we produced generically conventional documentaries. Instead, we have applied some of the techniques of fixed rig television filming in a new way. By assembling old equipment and retired crews, we have set up the conditions under which extensive observation of 'hands on history' experiments can take place. The resulting footage, made widely available in long form, can now be adapted and built upon by anyone who chooses to download it. Selections from our filmed reenactments have been featured on the BBC's *History of the BBC* minisite and have been watched and share thousands of times on YouTube.⁶ They have also been displayed at the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford as part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Being Human festival.

Aside from these publications and outputs, the project created one further important benefit. It has created new networks and invigorated existing ones. Uniquely, by uniting participants and researchers around reenactment exercises, we have been able to reconnect engineers and technical crews who had lost touch with each other. Information and technology is being shared between them as never before, to the benefit both of the individuals involved – and to the history of television. The dividends of this new methodology need not be limited to media history: our techniques are readily transferrable to almost any other aspect of technology or culture where a hands on approach might be beneficial.

Notes

- 1 ADAPT was a European Research Council funded project that investigated the history of British broadcasting technology. It ran from 2013 to 2018 and was based at Royal Holloway, University of London. The project received funding under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, grant agreement no. 323626.
- 2 For more information about Steve Harris's restoration and preservation work see <http://www.vintageradio.co.uk/htm/tvprojects2.htm>
- 3 See <http://www.pebblemill.org> and <https://historyproject.org.uk>
- 4 See Farquharson, A. (2001) Jeremy Deller: The Battle of Orgreave. *Frieze* (61). [online]. Available from: https://web.archive.org/web/20120429192405/https://frieze.com/issue/review/jeremy_deller.
- 5 The project's website can be accessed at www.adaptTVhistory.org.uk, and the Figshare repository at royalholloway.figshare.com/ADAPT.
- 6 See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/research/programming/bbccolour>