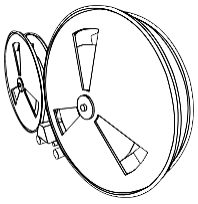

REWIND | Artists' Video in the 70s & 80s
Interview with David Cunningham

Interview by Maggie Warwick, 17th April 2008

MW: David, which of your works do you consider to be the most important and why?

DC: I'd guess *The Listening Room*, which was the big sound installation work, the work consisting of a microphone in a gallery and various speakers in the space, just amplifying the space and building up feedback around the standing waves of acoustic qualities of the space itself. The viewer walks through or experiences the space and is part of that situation. And it was something that I'd tried to work with, with sound for a long time and maybe it didn't quite happen until the (right) technology became available.

MW: And when and where was *the Listening Room* first staged?

DC: The first one was Chisenhale Gallery 1994 I think, I am not sure about the date, I think it was '94. That was the first formally exhibited one.

I actually started the first (experiment) as a result of doing a lecture at University of East London, which I think was called something else in those days. I turned up to do a lecture and all I needed was stereo playback for some stuff I had prepared on a little tape recorder. They managed mono playback as they only had one speaker that worked. And so with this in mind, when I came back to do a workshop with the students in Newham Leisure Centre of all places, I thought: "Nothing's gonna work and the most I can rely on is a microphone, a speaker and an amplifier, one speaker". I knew Newham Leisure Centre for various reasons and I knew that there was a huge echoey atrium in the middle, roofed in and all the surfaces were very reflective, like there are tiles on the floor level and the building surrounding the atrium is kind of metal and glass, and glass at the top, and a tree in the middle - it's enormously reflective, very echoey. If you stand 5 meters away from someone, the echo just clouds whatever they are saying to you. And I thought: "Well how do I exploit this, the sound of this space, with this kind of minimal technology?", and that was basically the birth of that piece. All I did was take along a noise gate out of my studio which controlled the feedback level, and I really thought I got something – a very basic idea here – it was something I'd always wanted to do to, use the sound of a space rather than impose sound into a space.

It's impossible to document. I've got little videos and recordings and bits on my website, but the actual experience of being in one of these situations is so completely different because it reacts to the participant in the moment, in real time, the spectator is – you know it is like that Duchamp thing – the work is created 50% by the spectator. As those pieces went on (because the formal work *The Listening Room* I've repeated about 3 or 4 times now in different spaces), and I've used the same technology to explore spaces in slightly different ways in other galleries, in other situations.

MW: And is it very different in every space?

DC: The principles are the same but the actual sound of it can vary quite a lot. Chisenhale had long standing notes, but there were certain points, quite a few points in the room where if you stood, you'd actually get a kind of bass pulse coming out caused by a human body or bodies, breaking up the low end reflections. Other spaces maybe were too small to have that very low element so different things happened, more high frequency modulation. I liked doing it in different places to explore the space and I wonder, because of my background in recording studios I am used to going into a room and hearing the room in a way which probably most people don't need to do. I remember going into the Ikon Gallery (Birmingham) about a year before I did the installations there, and I noticed that there seemed to be a harmonic relationship between the three galleries upstairs in the Ikon, like the smaller Gallery 4 where the gallery was 2/3 the size of, or half of the size of, Gallery 6 (which is the largest space). I built a Listening Room in each of those spaces and allowed them to kind of cross-modulate into Gallery 5 which connects them. I think it's something like, Gallery 4 is half of Gallery 6, Gallery 5 is 1/3 of the size of 6, or something like that – but you could actually hear that harmonic relationship existing before any of the equipment is put in, before the work was put in.

MW: Wow! So it's like architectural sound or sound sculpture in a sense, would you be happy with that description?

DC: Oh yeah, I do think of it as sculpture in a way because I think just calling something sound is a bit ghettoising, because the whole experience is spatial as well, and there is a sculptural element because it changes in a way that the sculpture will change according to the way the light changes on it, particularly if it's outside. I really like those Antony Gormley ones in water, where the water moves up and down against them, where the conditions of the environment actually are part of the work.

MW: Have you seen the ones at Crosby near Liverpool, the people in the sea?

DC: No I've only seen pictures

MW: Yeah it's stunning actually.

DC: They did it in Finland I think before them and Winchester.

I am a big Gormley fan. What I like about Antony Gormley is that he actually makes his mistakes in public and I think he acknowledges this. He's made things that haven't quite worked and you know (with) most people the work is maybe over-theorised, but with Gormley it's very much practice, and developing from the practice.

MW: And that kind of relates directly to some of your work as well, some of the early sound…

DC: That I make mistakes in public?

MW: …that you make mistakes in public yeah…

DC: I've got a background with music and playing live was something I avoided for many, many years as much as possible because I am actually a really, really terrible player and so worked on various ways of resolving my appalling playing technique. Mostly they are resolved by electronic means these days. I play into a laptop and it holds the notes that I play potentially infinitely, until it's switched off, therefore I don't have to play very fast. I can create a lot of stuff – be it harmony or just cycles of sound or whatever – by playing a note a minute almost. I am probably becoming the world's slowest guitarist.

MW: But some of the earlier work, *Grey Scale* that you sent me a copy of, that was all based on mistakes wasn't it, or a lot of it was?

DC: Yeah a lot of it was. I made *Grey Scale* when I was at Art School [Maidstone College of Art 1973-1977]. The available musicians to work with were not much more competent than I was so I set up a bunch of pieces, scores if you like which were basically just a few little fragments which the players repeat, but it's all governed by the rule of "If you make a mistake you incorporate the mistake". So they'd shift quite quickly, you've got a kind of cyclical structure, but the player makes a timing mistake so the whole – the timing between maybe 4 players will shift. One will start playing in something like a kind of 5 beat sequence rather than a 4 beat sequence, or something like that. Then there are melodic mistakes, harmonic mistakes – where people play wrong notes and have to try and incorporate that. It's an interesting process, because I've been thinking about evolution recently and not just Darwin and evolution, but the evolution of ideas and how it's not steady-state, it's spiky, and of course with these error processes on that record, the work, it would drift along fairly static for a bit, and then someone would make a mistake and then they'd try and cope with the mistake. In fact their correction or their wish to correct the mistake or inability to repeat the mistake would generate a whole series of mistakes which would also throw the other players if it was live, and then you end up with a quite a substantial change, a shift in the whole structure in a very, very tiny fragment of the overall time. It's an automatic kind of process, I mean once initiated it keeps generating new possibilities – though these would inevitably break down, just because of the sheer stamina, people would start off – if you are not a trained musician even just going "ding, ding, ding, ding, ding" on a piano is pretty tough to keep going for about 7 minutes or so.

MW: Yes but in theory it's kind of endless. I mean if the human beings and stamina weren't involved then that could keep going forever presumably, could it in theory?

DC: Yes and that's the other side of what I was doing with music, it was very much using machines to make music. I went to art school because I couldn't face doing any more exams and in those days art school was kind of pretty much a doddle in terms of academic stuff. You had to more or less be able to write a page of A4 every term and that was the written bit. They were pretty easy on us and a very different atmosphere to how it is in British art schools nowadays, and I just couldn't face the idea of 3 years at university doing Greek and Philosophy at Aberystwyth University – which is the only place that ever let me in. So the practice, the physical engagement was kind of interesting, but I had this huge drawback that I couldn't draw or had very little visual ability at all. Now, I went to Maidstone

and the Foundation Course there was quite extraordinary insofar as it was run by a terrific man called Evan Thomas who basically didn't teach us anything, he ran the courses in my year. Each year was kind of quite different in the way he structured it but roughly speaking it was a kind of group therapy, a gestalt therapy group for everyone involved.

MW: What year was that? Can you remember?

DC: That was 1973 / 74, and if you wanted to learn screen-printing or something you simply went off to the screen-printing bit or the photography bit or whatever. In my case down the corridor to David Hall's nascent audio-visual workshop, and so I spent a lot of time in there and I originally thought "Well the way to get round this inability to work visually is to use the tools and technology of graphic designers, rulers, all the things you are not supposed to use when you are drawing – rulers, compasses." The tools of the geometricist and Letraset, which was the kind of thing that was around then. I even tried etching. But the tape recorder was of course a brilliant solution to this because you could physically manipulate the thing, you'd make a loop and that's something that plays itself. Now, you make two loops and automatically they go round and something happens without any interference from the maker as it were. They have a dialogue, or a dialectic, or an interference and immediately something is happening, which first of all you couldn't predict, secondly you don't have to interfere with and the work sort of evolves in front of you all, be it within sort of very, very limited parameters but you know, hey, I was only a foundation student!

MW: And did you play with video as well at Maidstone?

DC: I tried to avoid video cause it was a bit grim. I mean Fine Art at Maidstone was amazing (because I went on to do a BA there), we had the first video machines in any fine art course in Britain as far as I can tell.

MW: That was a reel-to-reel was it?

DC: It was reel-to-reel machines, Shibaden, and I think Sony later. They were grey on grey rather than black on white, the cameras the size of a large monitor, and the whole thing was very immobile, and you couldn't edit. I played with it a bit but I was really not very happy with this very crude technology and didn't quite know what I was doing with.It was much more inflexible than a tape recorder. I think I managed to astonish all the video people at Maidstone by getting a video tape to play backwards because I'd just rewound it the wrong way round on a tape recorder and then put it back on the video machine upside down and the only problem with this was that the image came up on the monitor upside down, quite literally and you lost the soundtrack, you got the pulse track instead, the 50Hz pulse.

MW: It sounds great!

DC: A wonderful accomplishment but quite pointless. At some point on the course I think someone, David Hall or Tony Sinden, or whoever, got bothered by the fact that out of all the students I wasn't doing anything visual at all and forced me to make a video and I think

I recorded something like one of my error pieces by overdubbing myself but I overdubbed it on video. I just layered, superimposed and I remember David who was always a very, very generous critic saying "Well you know that's something that you never see in broadcast television except on *Top of the Pops*". But it was a very thin idea I think, so it was something that I left to people who were much more involved in the medium and looking at the medium. To a great extent I was surrounded by people like that. There was David Hall and Steve Partridge at the same time and other people who were making interesting commentaries on it like Michael Upton in the Painting Department who I remember - it's actually on a Steve Partridge work, a piece called *Scrutiny* which I believe has never been finished formally.

MW: Um, I haven't seem that

DC: It's Michael [Upton] looking at a video camera and a monitor and they are actually sitting in the Painting Department doing this, and Michael looks very closely at the camera and then at the monitor and says, "It makes small things big" which is something that, it's very intrinsic to that kind of live medium and it's something that people sort of ignored in a way, with the possible exception of Clive Richardson who dealt with that in that video where the camera is zooming in on the rabbit on a monitor. There was a lot of thinking about that kind of work but I guess you know where possible I was kind of straying towards the work with sound and the work with process. Video just didn't seem to be quite so amenable to the more systems based work that I was working with at that time. So I tried to kind of get away from it as much as possible although of course I collaborated with people.

MW: That course gave you the freedom to do that to a large extent even though some people got a bit annoyed that you weren't producing visual images?

DC: I think they just sort of regarded it… "David's done his token video, that's fine, let him get back to his tape recorder with his screwdriver or whatever and making that horrible noise"

MW: So who were your influences and who were you influenced by, what kind of, you mentioned systems, kind of formula that you were interested in? Were you influenced by other work, and other people at that time?

DC: I was influenced by a lot of stuff which really isn't relevant in a way, like Joseph Beuys or Gilbert and George, which has no bearing on my work for the most part I think, and Yoko Ono, and I really liked kind of the activities, the suggestions, the implications of all that work. Beuys I never understood but I just liked it.

MW: There's certain elements of chance in some of that work maybe.

DC: I suppose so yes.

MW: The kind of unfinished almost, maybe in some of it, not all of it but perhaps not Gilbert and George but Beuys and Yoko Ono, there is a kind of ongoing unfinishedness maybe to some of their work.

DC: I am thinking maybe in many ways Gilbert and George is the most unfinished of the whole lot of them. They are the big unfinished sculpture themselves.

MW: That's true, that's very true

DC: So conceptually conceptually it all links.
That's the mainstream visual art side I suppose and then there are the influences from the music side, particularly Steve Reich and Cage. And I mean Reich had that same process that I was talking about earlier, with just running multiple tape loops of – in his case of the same material at the same time – how he evolved his phase technique. Well he'd been doing that in the 1960s. I didn't actually managed to hear it until much, much later, but I was aware of the technique and that's kind of why I was playing with that technique. I simply stole it, and of course, I listened to pop music because I was you know 19 or 20 or whatever, and I'd always loved records that really sounded like records.

MW: What do you mean by that?

DC: Well as opposed to documentation of a performance, you know, an impossible sound like primarily Phil Spector, the Ronettes and the Crystals and all those girl groups and things. (I was going to say Donna Summer doing *I Feel Love* but that actually is right out of the chronology, that's 1977, same time as punk). Reggae records, records that took place in impossible soundscapes – you know, echoes the size of the Albert Hall on these strange backwards rock groups which was how I heard reggae at that time. That's the pop thing and there would be people like Brian Eno of course, doing the same sort of thing in a much more advanced sort of arty way. He would have a relationship to the Velvet Underground, so yes there is a whole kind of musical pedigree of stuff like that within pop music. I suppose the pop music that was drawing on art ideas in a way, I can't so much say that of Phil Spector, but you certainly could of a lot of the other people.

MW: You were kind of using sampling techniques, but the word 'sampling' hadn't really been coined at that that stage I guess?

DC: Well I think it's more the other way around that the idea of the sampler has taken over from the previous vocabulary of just slicing up tape, which is a way of thinking about sound as chunks of time, and in another way, going back to the area of pop music – all these singles that were just 2 or 3 minutes of a slice of time were quite fascinating objects in a way that I don't really perceive pop music to be most of the time these days. And I am trying to think of a good example: Hawkwind's *Silver Machine,* because it starts with a fade in and it ends with a fade out, that you have no idea what happened, it implies something happened before and it implies something happened after, but the actual record itself is this quite bizarre, quite minimalist riff. I don't know why I am quite so delighted by that record but I still am.

MW: So let's go back to Maidstone and you were at Maidstone and experimenting with sound and you went on to do your BA there but you did work with video artists, and produced sound for pieces that they did. Did you do that at Maidstone or was that later on?

DC: No I did at the time. I suppose the first person I collaborated with at Maidstone would have been Steve Partridge - the work was *Interlace* where Steve had a process of overlaying rolling screens of, I think it was a television interview, but as far as I can remember the piece, his original tape was mute and he suggested that I do some kind of soundtrack and I did something with a collection of tape recorders and delays and things, which based on an interview I'd just borrowed off Radio 4, off whatever it is at 10 o'clock on Radio 4, the radio equivalent of *Newsnight*. I remember it was 2 people, someone interviewing someone about the situation in Portugal, which was itself a kind of political interlace, it was the various factions, this was probably just before Portugal went communist for a brief period, and there were all sorts of factions within factions trying to blame various things on each other and then saying "Oh well it was actually… it was all a double bluff and this other faction did this". So it was a terribly complicated rotating discussion argument. Before I started treating it I went through the tape and edited out the word Portugal every time it appeared so it was just less defined, though I think you can still identify it because can hear the word "Spinolista" and things like that in it. Then I started processing it and just gave it to Steve and he stuck it on the tape and it seemed to work very well, I think. Maybe other people got wind of this or something but I was situated in this early version of David Hall's Time-based Media Department which was then called Audio Visual I think, and so there were people working with film which is a medium which naturally doesn't have a soundtrack, so you post produce sound or sound is existing as mag tracks and things like that, or it tends to get stuck on afterwards in some way or other. There were people working with video, (primarily just Steve really), and there was another factor at work at Maidstone at that time which was a much, much closer interrelationship of staff and students than you get these days. First of all student-to-staff ratios were much higher in the sense of more teachers to fewer students, and there was a lot of basically just hanging around in the pub anyway. I remember more of talking to people like David Hall and Tony Sinden and so on in the pub than formal tutorials. There was also really a culture where I certainly felt as a student, that I was being treated as an equal and I think we all felt that as students. That there really wasn't this huge differentiation between staff and students that maybe I perceive nowadays in some institutions.

MW: Yes it was probably quite unique then I think.

DC: Yes, after the events at Hornsey in '68 and '69 a lot of people who were sacked from Hornsey suddenly found jobs at Maidstone and a lot of that kind of thinking and ideology kind of persisted. So there was a sort of inbuilt radicalism and sit-ins and stuff like that, strikes… it was quite a militant place, I mean I remember I went back to teach there 10 years later and the woman on reception is called Jean, her first day at work she remembers being unceremoniously dumped out of her position in the office by me because we had a student sit-in and I was on the union committee and I was put in charge of the switchboard because it was assumed I knew about cables and stuff like that. My only contribution to that was to cut off a lot of messages of support we were getting from trade unions and things, because I couldn't work the phones. So Jean's first words to me on my return to Maidstone after 10 years were, "Oh no, not you again"

MW: Who were the other students, who were your contemporaries at that time?

DC: The ones that survive I suppose still active and making stuff would be Jane Rigby and Rob Gawthrop, Steve Partridge, Paul Richards was around but I think he'd actually left, he was doing the odd bit of teaching, I have probably left out people, Anna Sherbany, yeah well anyway those were the ones I kind of primarily worked with. Also there were painters and (people) I worked with a bit as well but less.

MW: But you've continued to work with Steve haven't you, quite a lot? You've produced a lot of work with him?

DC: Yes

MW: Yeah there was one called Soundscapes I think?

DC: *Soundtapes*

MW: *Soundtapes*, sorry. That's quite an early one 70's I think. I saw that just yesterday or the other day and I was quite amazed by the fast editing of the railway lines, in particular there is a section with railway lines which has very, very fast editing almost kind of coming into a flicker, you did the sound for that. It's a very dynamic piece I think.

DC: This is a great chicken and egg work. I don't know which came first or if even there was a first as it were, because certainly I know that the sound was produced independent of the video and I don't know if Steve made the video to the sound. I don't think he made the video to the sound but what's rather strange about it is that the way I made the sound is I'd have a collection of recorded source material on a tape recorder just playing, and then I'd set up with some other tape recorders some sort of delay system, and then start injecting fragments of the stuff I had playing back into this delay system using just the faders on a mixing desk. So I am playing faders like that, very fast and as far as I know Steve's video approach was that he was working with early U-Matic machines (as far as I know because it's colour, I am guessing here), and there was something about them, editing was still cranky in those days so what Steve was doing was rather than edit I think he was 'bodging'. He'd have maybe 2 tapes playing, probably of similar material, and he was doing it on a vision mixer somehow in some way that probably wasn't meant to be done with that technology. Which had this kind of completely resonant relationship with how I made the soundtracks – but I think we did this completely unconsciously of knowing what each other was doing.

MW: Yes that's quite extraordinary.

DC: Yes well, what do they call it in evolution – a convergent evolution – how different things end up having the same shaped parts as it were, for the same function. I think I only found out about Steve's actual technique he used to make those images much later because I am sure I didn't know at the time.

MW: So the way you work with Steve, you don't kind of work together. I mean you said that you sent him some sound and it's up to him what he does with it at all you don't collaborate on a piece, you kind of just exchange information?

DC: We are very, very bad at collaborating in that sort of sitting down in the same room at the same time, we did try that once and it's simply because most of the time I've known Steve he lived a long way from where I lived, so we communicate by phone or you know I am sometimes up in Dundee or wherever he was at the time. But most of the time I was at Maidstone he was already living in London cause he was a couple of years ahead of me at Art School.

So we just simply evolved this way of distance working, of giving each other tapes or whatever and whenever we'd see each other, and really not talking about it much. If we did talk, we talk about other things I suppose, mostly gossip I think, and so at some point we did formally try and sit down and work together and try to produce something and we ended up I think with was the idea of switching off a television set and the little white dot you used to get on the screen when you did that. That was the sum total of an evening's work. So that's something that just really doesn't sort of happen terribly well.

MW: And, I mean you collaborate with a lot of other artists…

DC: Before we move on to that I suppose just to finish off with the working relationship with Steve, it's because we are friends and so on you know I'd make up a cassette say of stuff, make suggestions of pieces or work, something I was working on. I remember one cassette I gave him, I'd put these tape pieces on, pieces I was thinking about like "this would work with Steve's work" on one side of the cassette, on the other side of the cassette I'd done, I'd put the kind of out-takes and bits from a French science fiction film that I'd done the music for. Steve, I think, listening in the car just turned the cassette over and chose the out-takes from the French science fiction film rather than the kind of more avant-garde kind of stuff on the other side. What he was choosing it for was the early versions of *Sentences*, which is work that he'd had knocking around in various forms for a while but not as video, and it was something that I was kind of encouraging because it was work I'd remembered for many years and very much liked in terms of his overall stuff, and I also liked the idea of being involved with it because I though it was a good idea. So when he completed *Sentences,* the music rather than being something a bit avant-garde, was actually this kind of quite sort of middle of the road sort of film music stuff, almost muzak, and that actually was very good in terms of the way it situates the work, it takes it out of this kind of hard core sort of structuralist thing and brings it into a sort of an age of beyond video and the gallery, but much more to do with looking at it like television, which is how people look at it anyway. Very few people watch that stuff in galleries and I personally think it's the wrong place for it. I think, going back to the very first question "work that I am proud of", I am actually quite proud of that because it is certainly much better than that French science fiction film.

MW: Yeah good use of the sound. So were there any copyright issues on that or you just ignored them?

DC: No because it was outtakes

MW: Oh yeah of course

DC: I had in fact, unusually high budgets because I'd paid all the musicians proper union rates for feature film usage so I could do what I liked with it.

MW: Brilliant. So shall we go back to Maidstone I guess, let's retract.

DC: Collaborations with others?

MW: Well no let's leave that for a minute but, I mean I think most of your work is collaborations or certainly a lot of it is collaborations…

DC: Because this bit of fine art, the time-based, the media of video in those days certainly and film, and maybe not so much sound, but certainly music are collaborative media. It generally takes more than one person to operate all that stuff, and deal with all lugging around those bits of technology, and trying to plug it in or whatever. They are naturally collaborative, and you still see this in art schools, that more collaboration happens with those media, well there isn't a history of it in painting.

MW: No not at all.

DC: I suppose that is contradicted by the idea of the painter and the assistant but that doesn't seem to happen so much these days.

MW: I was going to go back and talk about *The Flying Lizards*. So how were they formed?

DC: Well I like to say that they sort of never really existed, the idea of a band that wasn't a band you know in the same way as a lot of those 60's pop groups were simply inventions of a record producer or something. You know *The Flying Lizards* was a structure for me to work with available musicians and for the most part the common factor is me in collaboration with various people. The first two singles involved people directly coming from the Maidstone Art School environment, Michael Upton, the painter and Deborah Evans who provided the voice. She was a student, mostly working with etching and textiles and things at that time. Really my thinking was that when I could get studio time, I'd spend all day just you know making plinky-plunk music or tape loop music or whatever, the sort of… let's call it "not pop music", but knowing that this stuff shared a vocabulary, a technical vocabulary certainly and maybe sometimes a conceptual vocabulary with aspects of pop music. I was kind of interested in applying this to the college band who I did some demo tapes for and, and also sort of just decided "Oh well let's try and make a pop record in the evenings". So the very first record, which is a version of *Summertime Blues*, the Eddie Cochrane song - that came out of that kind of thinking - do it in the evenings in case it's a waste of time. And quite by chance, because I left art school in 1977 and there was a sort of sea-change in the music world at that point – suddenly a piece of what would otherwise be classed as complete nonsense became I suppose ironic and post-modern and these factors got recognised just at that strange point in time, because the punk thing had changed perceptions and expectations.

MW: So who discovered you? I mean how were you discovered, in inverted commas, if that's the right word?

DC: Hard to say. I mean I'd been knocking about, sending tapes to record companies for quite a while. The only people that ever seemed to bother to listen to them were Virgin Records who were terribly, terribly friendly in those days, very nice people but I'd given up sending them stuff. I was working with a band called *This Heat* who were quite an extraordinary, 'quite extreme rock band' - is to kind of not really describe their possibilities – and I'd vaguely fallen into the position of doing their admin or managing them or something, or co-managing them and I was in the offices of *Sounds*, which was a music magazine in those days, one of the better ones, and Dave Fudger who was I think Assistant Editor or something said, "Have you got a tape of *This Heat*?" because they were very, very kind of mean about their tapes and very protective as opposed to everyone else who wanted to be heard. *This Heat* were "Hum I don't know, you can't have our demo tape it's too good for you. You wouldn't understand it", I don't know what the attitude was really, but they seemed kind of… this demo tape was hard to get, kind of legendary really.

MW: It was excellent stuff actually, I listened to the CD you gave me and I really liked it.

DC: Yes they were quite an extraordinary band.

MW: Yes they are extraordinary.

DC: Well of course I didn't have a tape but I did have a little cassette of *The Flying Lizards* doing *Summertime Blues* in my pocket so I gave him that and I said, "You might like this instead" and he really liked it. He then, within a few months of this, got a job at Virgin Publishing, played it to Virgin A&R and they knew me from my previous efforts that I'd sent in which they'd carefully, patiently listened to and then shown me the door. So they dragged me in and, or I went willingly, and got offered a fairly minimal record deal for one single, which I then just re-wrote it to make it two singles for the same money, simply because I thought, "Well I've made this one. I'd like the chance to make another one". The second one was *Money* which was a hit, completely unexpectedly and after that I had some sort of proper career in pop music. I suppose what you need is a hit rather than association with a bunch of weirdos, which I'd previously had. So I had a job of sorts albeit, freelance and well that was how that came about.

MW: Was Steve Beresford part of *The Flying Lizards* from the beginning or did he join later?

DC: Well nobody in a sense joined. People would be available, take part, get a royalty on the record and go off and pursue an independent and often very brilliant career. So my connection with Steve was, going back to when I was a student at Maidstone I used to drift up to London and go and see various people – the free-jazz lot and the experimental composing lot. I was very impressed with Steve Beresford because it was funny, and the previous generation of free music people had been, with the exception of Derek Bailey, quite strict, really defining this new territory. And there was Steve with toy instruments and music hall jokes, and what struck me is, the most interesting bit maybe, was that he wasn't afraid to incorporate fragments of 'proper' music into improvised music. And as a BA

student I cobbled together just about enough money to make a record which was part of my Degree Show [*Grey Scale].* I knew that one could actually make records, this was just a little bit before the whole Rough Trade independent record label thing, but I had help from Evan Parker and Derek Bailey who had their Incus label doing free jazz stuff. I thought, "Well you know it would be kind of interesting to try and make a record with Steve Beresford". We worked over a period of some years from I think 1976 onwards whilst I was still a student up to maybe 1979 when it finally got released. We recorded a lot of Steve playing in various different situations including him having a bath which eventually gave the record its title, *The Bath of Surprise*, (which is a medieval torture). So I knew him [Beresford] from that free-jazz background. I was running the Student Union events – the disco and the putting on of bands at Maidstone for a year so I put him on. And [all this through an ongoing] horrible argument that we were constantly having with the mafia of caretakers who ran the place we used as a venue. The caretakers ran the bar basically, they got the licence, if we applied for a licence they would arrange so we didn't get it, and so I was trying to take them on basically because I'd inherited the Student's Union, where the previous person seemed to have run off with all the money and left us with a huge debt. So I was putting on really cheap acts basically, which was great cause Ian Dury was really cheap in those days and he was only 10 quid more than the *Sex Pistols* who sadly I could never book, because the committee had heard that this funny band that nobody had ever heard of, couldn't play their instruments so: "You can't have them, you can't have any more of those avant-gardies David". But I managed to get Steve down and we put him on in the staff canteen and discovered at the last minute we hadn't got a licence but we'd got the beer, so it was Steve Beresford with free beer. Very unusually for one of these free music events it was packed solid and I can't remember much about it really, except that Steve put on a record of train noises shunting in a goods yard and accompanied that on the piano and everyone loved that - all I can remember apart from that is that he missed his train.

Actually I think the subsequent association with Steve and *The Flying Lizards* came about when we had to do bits of television and stuff [for *Money*]. We did a miming tour of Europe, where we did *Top Den Poppen* and the various equivalents of *Top of the Pops* in various countries. Julian Marshall, who'd played the piano on *Money* was busy being a worldwide success with Marshall Hain on tour. I got Steve because I knew he was a nice person to be with and played the piano like a mad person. That led to him playing the piano on subsequent records and an association for a number of years. I mean it was really interesting bringing some of the ideas of pop music record production which was something I was very interested in, and practicing I suppose –bringing that to the free-jazz side of things. You know that's a music where its recorded history was very much one of documentation, just simply two mics and the players, and the space, there is an Evan Parker/ Paul Lytton record, I think which is called something like [*Collective Calls (urban) (two microphones)*,by *Incus 5*]. Steve wasn't adverse to trying things and dressing it up, overdubbing it even, and close micing, just basically using the gamut of the recording studio even though we didn't actually really have a recording studio available but I had over the years built up something like 18 or 19 tape recorders in various states of disrepair, by the time I left art school so I could pretty much cope with recording things. It's really how I drifted into working with a lot of people. Like *This Heat* who just asked me to record them rehearsing initially, and various other bands.

MW: And were *This Heat* students at Maidstone as well, or were they independent of Maidstone?

DC: No, I could be wrong, but I don't think any of them had anything to do with the art schools. That's fairly unusual in music at that time anyway.

MW: Especially that kind of music.

DC: I simply heard them on the radio. They did a John Peel session a long time before they made any records. I happened to hear it and I thought, "This is the most extraordinary thing that I've heard on the radio for many years", and somehow I got in touch with them not knowing why or what it would lead to or anything. I also had come across Peter Jenner who was [their] manager, formally manager of the Pink Floyd in their Syd Barrett days and Ian Dury's manager, although Dury wasn't well known at that time – and various other people whose work I liked. And Jenner got me into his office probably around the time I was leaving Maidstone with the view of making me kind of A&R or talent scout or something, working in some way for his management and publishing company. Because the theory was Peter was maybe 40 or something and I was 20 something so I had young ears and knew what was happening on the street, (nothing was possibly further from the truth) and Peter's ears were very astute as he went on to prove since then. So he asked me "What's the most interesting thing you've heard in the last year?" and I said, "*This Heat*." And he said, "That's extraordinary" because it was the most interesting thing he'd heard in the last year and nobody else knew about them. So we started somehow, cobbling together some sort of way for This Heat to make a record and get them some money and work, and get them some gigs and that's how that relationship developed.

MW: And you ended up playing with them yourself?

DC: No I never played with them

MW: Oh I thought you did!

DC: No I played with Charles Hayward the drummer a bit, off and on over the years. I've had Charles with his drum kit in this room about 10 years ago and we keep in touch. But no, *This Heat* was very much a kind of a unit. They did work with other people but I wasn't really the sort of musician that they'd choose to work with because you had to be able to play an instrument.

MW: But did you manage to get them a record deal.

DC: No, no we failed dramatically.

MW: Oh what a shame

DC: But because I'd started as a student making my own record, when I got some cash from *The Flying Lizards* I was able to put out the Steve Beresford record. I'd also put out a Tony

Sinden record because we'd made some fairly decent recordings of the video documentation of some of his performance pieces, the *Functional Action* series. So I had a sort of record label which hardly ever sold any records (at least not in commercial terms). We cobbled together some sort of arrangement with Peter Jenner's company Blackhill where they'd help me press them up. By that time the Rough Trade-sort of independent record circuit was set up. We sold initially I think about 12,000 *This Heat* albums which was very decent by anyone's figures I thought. And yes it did come out and it's still in catalogue, which is much more interesting.

MW: Yes fantastic. So let's go back to *The Flying Lizards* and Steve Beresford. David Toop was associated with *The Flying Lizards* as well wasn't he?

DC: David actually taught at Maidstone. David Hall's audio-visual area was structured in such a way that when it really got going as a part of Fine Art, as a proper department he always made sure that there was someone who could deal with video, someone who could deal with sound and someone who could deal with film. So the core group was David Hall, Tony Sinden and Paul Gillieron, Paul is an acoustician and musician and left at some point while I was still a student. I don't know if it was to replace him or to complement him but David Hall had met David Toop through Studio International magazine and got him in for a bit to do the odd day a week or a day a month or something. When David Toop got us making improvised music I believe the ensuing racket got him sacked and replaced by Gavin Bryars who made much quieter music. We tended to make our noise right next to David Hall's office. So Gavin Bryars was brought in to deal with the sound/music aspect and Gavin was great, but he didn't really like the two main people, Robert Cubitt and myself, who were working with something you could vaguely call music. We refused point blank to work with scores, certainly proper scores of quarter notes, and eighth notes and all that stuff and I am still pretty musically illiterate when it comes to reading and writing music, I've got basic violin and that's about it. I am not very good on sharps and flats or rests as I discovered when I started writing for strings. And Gavin got fed up with this basically and gave the job to his then neighbour who was Michael Nyman, hence that association. Though I already knew Michael from going up to London as a student and reviewing concerts for *Musics* magazine. I don't know how I'd fallen into *Musics* magazine - that was a music magazine concentrating on improvised music but encompassing a lot of other areas, related stuff, environmental sound and some composed music. Toop and Beresford were very heavily involved in the production of that alongside Paul Burwell and Annabel Nicolson and Evan Parker and Derek Bailey. I used to do the odd review for *Musics,* of composed music mostly, because most of the others weren't particularly bothered by that kind of stuff. There had been historically a bit of a split between the improvisers and the experimentalists, the composers. I knew that each liked the other and I hoped that just by putting them in the same context I could somehow kind of bring this back in some way, because I like both. And I used to bring these reviews in as my written work for the General Studies bit at Maidstone, to get through as the written component of my degree occasionally. Everyone seemed to like this and I quite liked killing two birds with one stone and getting into concerts for free.

So I guess I sort of had got to know these people because you did in those days. You'd go to a concert and there's three people on stage and if you are lucky, six in the audience

and… actually it was better than that but I have been to some that were like that. You'd always tend to have a drink afterwards, I mean it was a bit like, the same was true of performance art, you all end up in the pub after Butler's Wharf or something like that cause that's how I got to know people like David Critchley on the kind of the other side of the connections, you know the art side. I've forgotten what the question was… Toop?

MW: Yes I was asking you about David Toop and how he [got involved with] *The Flying Lizards* and how they evolved really?

DC: It was basically just that I knew this incredible pool of musicians and I wasn't really aware that I was doing something that was parallel to other people in New York at the same time, Peter Gordon with his Love of Life Orchestra and Arthur Russell – drawing on just basically players, good players who are around, or not even good players, you know I worked with Viv Albertine of *The Slits* and Viv is an appalling guitar player but she is also a brilliant guitar player. *The Slits* owed me a favour for something or other that I'd helped on, she played on my record and I am eternally grateful. It was simply that there was all this talent around, there still is actually - I could go out of the door and… well actually it'd be easier to get on the e-mail, or on the phone – but round up a quite a brilliant bunch of musicians within about 24 hours. Mind you, I'd have to pay them.

MW: So did you get paid for *The Flying Lizards*?

DC: Oh Yes, *Money* being a hit, that effectively paid for me to do what I liked for 2 or 3 years. I could coast and I very much put that time into other projects which didn't look viable because I knew I could take a chance on these things. Hence the first album I recorded with Michael Nyman's band and in fact the second album I recorded with Michael Nyman's band because the first got very limited distribution and the distributor went bust. Here we are into Thatcher in the 80s and the doubling of VAT, which caused all the independent record companies to collapse in a chain of bankruptcies with of course, the musicians losing out at the end, because we never got paid for our sales at that point. But we persisted and the second Nyman record was *The Draughtsman's Contract* so everything went up a scale there, and that was something ongoing, viable and strong and original, I thought at that time. I still do.

So it's very much a case of one thing leading to the other. I used the time also to kind of go back to working with tape loops and stuff and produced a lot of stuff in a very short period at the end of 1980, some of which led into the Steve Partridge soundtracks and others which, in a different form led into bits on other records I did. And also led into work with dancers because I worked with Ian Spink and a few other dancers, but primarily Ian Spink, who was fantastically responsive to whatever I would try and throw at him.

MW: Did you enjoy that collaboration working with dancers?

DC: I was completely baffled by their ability to count, to count music, which from the way I'd constructed it didn't have a time signature. These tape pieces that I was making, they could stop in the middle, stop the tape in the middle and know where they were. I couldn't do that and I'd made the thing. Though I'd made it using automatic processes in an

improvised sort of way with the technology, so it wasn't formally constructed. A lot of the work I'd made because you could do this with the technology at the time (something that would be fantastically difficult with digital) was that I'd work with backwards tapes up to the point of the finished work, then I'd turn the tape around and see what I'd done. I was always anticipating "Well I am getting towards the end", pressing buttons and miming the physical action that was maybe involved and thinking, "How do I start this piece cause it's getting towards the end of it", knowing that the start will maybe eventually become the end of it.

MW: And that was working with Nagras and reel-to-reel and tangible tape or…?

DC: No, no. I could never afford a Nagra. They cost about 2,000-3,000 quid, I used, I had a collection of Revoxes and TEAC machines. Well actually once I'd got *The Flying Lizards* money in the bank I had an 8 track reel-to-reel, proper one which is sitting over in the corner behind me, sadly sort of on its last legs now.

MW: And where did you work? Where did you have a studio?

DC: Extraordinarily enough I had an ACME studio, not quite sure how that came about, but ACME had a studio block in Brixton. They knew me I think, simply because I used to go to the gallery a lot and Jonathan Harvey had got me to curate a week of sounds, sound work I suppose, sound and performance (that was actually later than I got the studio). It was an old meat pie factory in Brixton. There were two large refrigerated areas, one was large and one was kind of smallish and they offered the small one to Paul Burwell. Paul likes working outside and is claustrophobic at the best of times and just couldn't face this cell with no windows and wasn't really interested. He suggested me, or he offered it to me, or somehow it came round through Paul, so I got this place which was absolutely perfect for me because its walls were incredibly thick, walls with cork lining and pretty much soundproofed so I wasn't getting bothered by things or other people in theory. It was simply a base, having left art school and moved to London I was often in some vague state of homelessness or sleeping on a camp bed in a store room or something like that, so having a base for all these collection of tape recorders was very useful, incredibly useful. So I had this shed in Brixton for about 16 years. ACME were also interested in encouraging something else to happen in the space and (for) the other fridge we discussed the feasibility of making it a recording studio, accessible to artists but the sort of funding structures that were in place to make this operable, which was not so much equipment, it was more the idea of "Well you can get all this equipment and who's gonna work it?" It's like the same question that LUX never asked, 20 something years later when they built Hoxton Square - who can maintain the stuff, who can operate the stuff? ACME did actually realistically address that and decided it was not immediately feasible. And so *This Heat* got the space, and they used it and other people used, it as a kind of rehearsal come recording space. It did become a sort of de facto sound art space, sorry I don't like the term, and a lot came out of that as well.

MW: How were you getting money to live and produce work at that time? Did you apply for grants or were you still living off the money from *The Flying Lizards?* How did you finance? With teaching?

DC: No I didn't teach much around that time, just the odd day here and there, London College of Printing, I can't remember where else. Well initially I had *The Flying Lizards* income and the odd bits and bobs from other records cause I was producing bands – Palais Schaumburg in Germany, I never got paid for *This Heat* actually for various reasons. I was doing other records and getting paid for that and there was the Nyman stuff after a while, started bringing in a sort of income I suppose. I never applied for grants because I just couldn't face the idea of describing what I was doing before I'd done it which I suppose is the problem everyone still has to this day with the grant structures. Though I've read some wonderful grant applications that are so beautifully written that… I read one, watched the artist do a 3 year fellowship, and at the end of it I still didn't really understand what she said she was doing in the grant thing and what she actually did. I understood none of this, though I did like the work.

MW: Yes it's an ongoing problem.

DC: I won't name the artist kind of just in case she is doing another application at the moment.

MW: But you went on to teach, you said you went back to Maidstone to teach there, didn't you at one point? So was that later on?

DC: Just the odd day though, nothing really continuous much until 1987, 10 years after I'd left they needed cover for someone at Maidstone specifically to do with sound replacing Robert Cubitt (who I'd been a contemporary of at Maidstone) he'd got too successful doing something else and I did a day a week, or what turned into a day a week. So I went back and it was quite buzzy and I enjoyed it very much though it was the end of Fine Art there. I oversaw the awkward transition into the media bit. I was there for 9 years and, you know the last 7 or so after Fine Art disappeared it was pretty much a battle to kind of keep the Fine Art ethos going throughout the department as the rest of the college dumbed down into kind of design. I've got nothing against like designers and I'm not trying to be rude about designers but there is a kind of design mentality which just follows rather than leads and certainly at the time I was at Maidstone that seemed to be very much the problem, you know it didn't seem kind of sharp. Illustration was producing the odd hot person, but they were generally hated by the staff, which was a bit unfortunate. So it was a matter just trying to keep something going, poking the corpse, sometimes it felt like. Actually that is a terrible thing to say of course because you know your predecessor in REWIND Jackie Hatfield [Rewind Research Fellow] was a student there, and Jackie was brilliant, making trouble basically all the time and in the role of an artist really, asking for not so much the impossible but what people, well I certainly felt should be possible, taking liberties wherever possible and making some very, very good work and working like a maniac as well. She wrote two theses as a BA because her first one, I think I was her co-tutor, but the other tutor had said "Oh this is, this is so much speculation that you will never get away with it". Jackie simply went away and wrote a different thesis and the first one eventually became her MA I think, fantastically industrious.

MW: You mentioned the Slade as being something that you are still involved with and enjoy now?

DC: Well I did a bit of teaching at the Slade around then which tailed off actually, somebody else got my job by going in on the right day simply to borrow a projector, I think. Slade has always been a bit loose and old-fashioned which is these days is a good thing, so that things get rotated and so on. I am currently external examiner there and I am amazed at the standard of enthusiasm and the work that's going on. Compared to other places it really is head and shoulders above them. So I enjoy that very much indeed, it's only frustrating that as the external examiner you really can't quite engage with the students in the kind of conversation that you'd like to have. You just have to ask them quite distant questions and then go and hide and just look at the work and keep out of the way really.

MW: So let's talk about the kind of changes in technology, you mentioned that a little bit back about how the way in which you produced work would be very difficult to do now using digital. Can you talk a bit about how the changes in technology have influenced the way you work or changed the way you work and if that's how you see that?

DC: I was talking to Katy Acquaye who is an artist in Birmingham just the other day, about how she didn't want the machines that she was working with to lead the work and I was thinking "Well that's almost the opposite of my position, I'm quite happy to let the machines do the work". I've always had this position of if you come across a machine, what does it really do, what's its fundamental unique quality, this video machine or this black box or in a recording studio this tape recorder? I think the work I've done with analogue tape recorders was very much exploring that, the intrinsic qualities of the medium in a way.

MW: Which was in some ways similar to what was happening in structural film for instance maybe.

DC: I was very aware of that as I was surrounded by structural filmmakers, even though they didn't necessarily all approve of the word structuralism, that was a pub argument and the classic Hall – Sinden dichotomy. But that's an approach which is kind of difficult with digital and I referred to it earlier, that thing of what's possible with analogue tape which would be fantastically difficult to do digitally. Most of the time what you can do digitally is much, much easier than doing it with analogue and maybe it's just a kind of a few arcane techniques I've developed. I remember once phoning up the helpline to Steinberg who made Cubase or maybe the predecessor of Cubase and saying "Well it won't do this, the programme won't do this" and they were: "Well why on earth would you want it to do that?" That seems to be my kind of position with a lot of audio software in particular. I mean digital as a medium, it won't do things like if you want to slow something down, we can't do it gradually, it has to go in sort of blocks, there are ways round it but that's a kind of fairly cranky thing to do. I suppose maybe they don't bother because DJs do that sort of thing all the time, just letting records "Wrhuuu" like that. So those technologies all have their idiosyncrasies and I very much simply follow what the technology seems to suggest in terms of possibilities. I'm not particularly bothered about imitating something I could do in the analogue world on digital. For a long time I've had access to both anyway so if I could separate the art vocabulary from the industrial vocabulary more in anything maybe commercial that I've been doing, having access to the analogue stuff has been very useful, because I can simply work with it in parallel. But all that equipment is dying now, quite

literally the motors are blowing out and bits ageing. Just falling off the machines and they are really getting beyond the point of where they require daily maintenance to keep the reels going round. So I move more and more into the digital area, but I am very comfortable with it.

MW: Is there anything within the digital technology that you found particularly exciting in the way you talked about [analogue]. Were there any kind of similarities?

DC: I've got a few little tricks but like kind of scratching along the ProTools file (for instance). I'd play something on a guitar, decide that this isn't going to work but then I remember on something or other. I just recorded it on a hard disk so I just sort of ran the edit head, as it were, along the file and recorded that on a DAT machine so I'm not actually playing back the ProTools system but I am using the cursor on top of it and just picking up guitar notes and flinging them into something else, taking them out of time, out of context and then laying that back into what I thought I was doing in the first place. Then seeing that come out as something quite different. Though not synchronized, but that doesn't matter in this case. Working with sound and video the very obvious thing is that it's much, much easier to work with sync than it ever was in the analogue days. It was so difficult, well it was impossible before time-code, after time-code it was still a lot of messing about, waiting for things to sync up and all that, and nowadays it's kind of just very, very instant. But I've done very little work with, for instance, Steve Partridge or anyone, I've done none with him where I've worked to picture and it's maybe something I will deal with in the future or as it arises. Well I have done a bit but nothing particularly out of the ordinary.

MW: Let's talk about exhibition, travelling and distribution of the work. How, going back to kind of the 80's, was… *The Flying Lizards* were picked up by Virgin and you toured internationally?

DC: Miming

MW: Miming, yes.

DC: Well we couldn't…

MW: Yes miming, but what of the other work that you were doing then, how does that get?

DC: Well it… it…

MW: Did you travel quite a bit then?

DC: Not particularly no, as I didn't perform much. The 'not pop' work had its outlet through collaboration with video and the various outlets for video and dance and other media, theatre and film, being like proper film, feature films and stuff like that as well as artist films.

MW: You worked with Ken McMullen as well didn't you on some of his films?

DC: Yes. I met Ken at the Serpentine Gallery at some point in the 70's. They were doing some sort of work-in-progress with filmmakers and I remember it being upstairs at the Serpentine, I could be wrong but that's what I remember. It was Ken in one space and Tony Sinden in another. I'd gone along to see Tony, drifting into Ken's and was fascinated by these strange bits of film he was showing. No way is he a conventional filmmaker but he was much more conventional in terms of narrative than Tony Sinden. I like the fact that here is someone working with something that looks like narrative from my perspective but deals with it quite differently, very slowly, for instance allowing a shot to last as long as it takes rather than cutting something. Also, Ken was working with borrowed footage or stolen footage I think, stuff he'd swiped out of the edit bins at CBS News when he was working as an editor I think, strange materials. We were just talking about it the other day in fact and Stuart Brisley had taught me at Maidstone, Stuart taught in Painting of all places but that was the spirit of the place. Stuart was so supportive and enthusiastic and generally nice that we got on very well and he had been working on a film called *Being and Doing* with Ken, a film dealing with performance art in various ways. This had taken years and years to shoot and develop the thesis around what the film was supposed to be dealing with. At some point, because I seemed to be a person who they both knew, and who dealt with sound, that they asked me to make a soundtrack for it which I enjoyed and that was the first, I felt it was like the first 'proper' film I got to work on. Ken went on to do *Ghost Dance* which was very low budget. People think it was Film Four but it wasn't actually. It was the kind of documentary late night, Monday night bit, so the budget was actually less than an edition of *The Comic Strip*, even though it's an hour-and-a-half-long movie. That also involved Stuart Brisley, as well as many others, and it started off as a film about cargo cults or a script about cargo cults originally. I remember Ken talking about it and with that at the back of my mind when he asked me to work on it, it just so happened that I'd been rung up by a couple of drummers whose work I knew and with a view to doing something together. We formed a band; myself, Michael Giles and Jamie Muir. Which was me doing whatever I did and the other two mostly playing percussion, the roles could shift quite a lot. Jamie's background was in fact Edinburgh Art School and jazz, free-jazz, rock music and being a Buddhist monk for 8 years and he's gone back to painting now as far as I am aware. Mike was a pretty much straight-ahead jazz and rock music drummer with impeccable technique. There was something about this combination as Jamie I knew, had this relationship to African music in particular and two drummers working together suggests that kind of non-western structures. I introduced them to Ken and as a trio, our first and pretty much only project was Ken's film Ghost Dance. We did another thing for Channel 4 afterwards but we really didn't last as a trio because we realised we couldn't really perform live - Jamie used so much equipment you'd have to drag his whole flat on stage to make it work. He had huge sheets of metal and things made out of glass and so many drums you wouldn't believe it. Whereas Mike was quite portable and straightforward. But of course if you put me on the stage I couldn't play the same thing twice so we thought we would be a media band and we got a second project, something to do with a different Ken… [Ken Campbell], but that was an ITV project. ITV went on strike and the project was cancelled – technician's strike as happened in those days, so that was the end of that. Eventually Michael and Jamie couldn't agree about a lot of things so we stopped working as a trio and that was the end of that little adventure. Later I did bits and bobs with Ken McMullen on my own or with whatever was around.

MW: So did you do quite a bit of work for Channel 4 and television?

DC: Yes. I suppose and that's maybe going back to your question about funding and how did everything pay for itself and so on. There was quite a bunch of work for our generation roughly speaking in the early days of Channel 4 and I was in the thick of it in some ways of doing theme tune bits, or incidental music for actual programmes as well as film soundtracks. The other side of it was the Nyman - Greenaway funding. Film Four paying for not much but a bit, of Greenaway's stuff, they certainly did *Draughtsman's Contract* but after that they didn't seem to pick up on Greenaway in the way one might have thought that they would have, which was curious.

MW: Because that was very successful?

DC: Yes. It made them pots of money and it was weird that they didn't really follow it up in anything like the same level with Greenaway's other films. Greenaway was, after *Draughtsman*, really really having trouble funding what became *A Zed & Two Noughts*, which was quite bizarre. But that's the British film industry.

MW: You were commissioned by, Anna Ridley who commissioned some pieces for…

DC: For Channel 4?

MW: Yes it was for Channel 4. What's the name of the programme?

DC: The working title was *Dadarama*, which I think everyone hated. It somehow stuck which was very unfortunate. I unilaterally call my contribution to it *5 Closedowns* because we ended up having a choice of slots and nobody wanted early afternoon, especially Sunday afternoon. The graveyard shift was always infinitely preferable. And of course remember that television used to shut down about midnight, 12.30 in those days, at least Channel 4 did, unbelievable now and of course you only had 4 channels. I got 4 million viewers at one point simply because my piece was on after the UK television premiere of *Mean Streets* and a lot of people had forgotten to turn the television off. Anna commissioned a whole bunch of people. I don't need to go through the whole list, it's documented, on REWIND somewhere.

MW: Yes, just talk about your pieces.

DC: I came up with something I'd been thinking about which was ambient television. Television which was a background where ostensibly nothing happened and the idea of that if you looked at it for a long time you could get interested in some detail or it would just be a kind of wash, a wallpaper or something like that. The idea comes from music very much and something I'd never been able to accomplish visually, the idea that something had these two presences. In fact I think it was something I couldn't really do very well in music, that something that was very much a sort of ambient background thing, but if you examined it very closely there was something very, very interesting going on. I couldn't figure out how to make a piece of music with those two parallel levels of interest for the listener. It is something that happens, for instance, in Steve Reich's music I think, you can let it wash

over you or you can focus quite intimately on the function, the structure and the detail. I just simply pointed the camera at reflections on water, a sort of natural complexity Something I learnt, I came across with the American composer Alvin Lucier, who also deals with room reflections in ways that quite parallel to the way I deal with it. Whereas Cage talks about indeterminacy, Lucier talks about, and I always forget this, I have to look it up, his precise term, because his own term for this is so amazingly good.

MW: I know that Stuart Marshall was a big admirer of Alvin Lucier.

DC: And that's something I never knew when I was a student, as Stuart taught at Maidstone. Alvin calls it 'non-intentionality'. Stuart at Maidstone never mentioned his background with music and sound. Well he had plenty of other things he was able to talk about and he was so wonderfully supportive, but there was this whole other side which I only found out about probably a bit later. Alvin thought he was the best student he had ever had, he said something along those lines to me maybe 15 years later, after Stewart had died. But back to wherever I was, 'non-intentionality'. This idea of natural complexity which is something that goes back to the installation works I've talked about like *The Listening Room* and the acoustic work. The work is functioning at a human scale, the spectator is…those sound installations - I could build them really big and they'd be most impressive but they would be too big for the spectator's body to interfere with the resonant frequencies and the standing waves, (because I've nearly made that mistake a few times and it is something I am very aware of, that the scale of the work, the volume in terms of amplitude is also an important factor). I like to keep them reasonably quiet. You work around the human I think, and if you look at our basic senses and the way that we tend to interpret what we see and hear, then making the work in such a way that it responds, or hopefully, the viewer will respond to the structure of the work. I guess I am talking about using some form of naturally occurring structure, and most naturally occurring structures are naturally recurring structures within the work, because in a sense, it gets beyond any difficulty with recognising the structure and it becomes a situation where the viewer is at ease with something that would otherwise perhaps be difficult. Therefore other aspects of the work open up.

MW: That's interesting… interesting concept.

DC: I particularly like the work, and I felt really privileged to be in Sydney in the 1998 Biennale. I reckon there were 100 artists or so in that show. Well, first of all I really liked I think about 96 of them, that's extraordinary, I go around galleries in London and I think "What a load of bollocks" but that Sydney show was something else.

Curated by Jonathan Watkins and I just really like Jonathan's curating anyway but this was something quite extraordinary. It might be no coincidence that Jonathan had a daughter who was maybe around 6 then because I had a sense that all the work in that exhibition, with maybe the exception of a small percentage of it – all the work could be appreciated by a 6 year old. Which is not to say that it didn't function for a grown up as well on maybe a completely different level, and I like those kind of ideas of parallel levels of understanding or parallel levels of enjoyment. That's also something I was quite aware of, I am talking about, I suppose now, about some factor in common with the installation work, the more

recent installation work and going right back to that 1984 video work that Anna Ridley produced.

MW: I notice you say the word, when you are talking about audiences, being part of the work and influencing the work in some way, you talk about interfering but not interacting, so that word, interactivity, I know that you don't like that particularly so…?

DC: Oh because most interactivity is very superficial.

You know most of the time when you come across it in everyday use, it's like the Thatcher idea of choice. We've got a choice but between what? It's to starve and not to starve, it's just simply the abuse of the term I think, in most situations because it's very much a commercial thing now. After the kind of 'click-on-this' culture of the Internet. Also it has overtones of just joining in - community singing.

MW: Can we talk about some of your other work? We talked about *Sentences* which is something that you said you are particularly pleased with, the collaboration with Steve Partridge, but a lot of your work including *this moment* uses language and, well symbols and language and sound, it seems to be a kind of recurring fascination so can you talk a bit about that?

DC: I can try and talk about it because I don't know why I am interested in this. It's maybe just a sort of innate ability or something to do with the lack of ability. I went to the sort of school in Ireland where, I think this is a very Irish thing, you did Latin and Greek.

Well I mean nearly everyone did Latin in the early years of the first, second and third form I think. I quite liked this weird stuff with the verb at the end and I was quite good at that. I wasn't that good at a lot of other things, especially mathematics. When Greek came up as an option I went for that because I found it fascinating that over two thousand years ago all these people could actually do all these things that seemed to have been forgotten about in the middle ages and so on. The idea of civilisation, which is very classical. I suppose one thing about Greek is that it's a different alphabet and this always puts off people as they think it's completely incomprehensible because it looks different. But it takes a few days to pick up on that and then you are away because it's actually a lot easier than Latin, which was useful for somebody who wasn't particularly gifted like me. I thought these different alphabets are interesting so I picked up a bit of Russian just because I thought well it's nearly like the Greek alphabet. I can do things like write Manchester in Russian but I don't actually know much in the way of proper words in Russian, I've never been there. There is a kind of thing of at some point being Irish maybe you had to read James Joyce and I struggled through *Finnegan's Wake*, reading it on trains because my theory was, (and I think I got this out of Anthony Burgess' summary of it) that the rhythm would be the thing that would get you through it. He's right there cause I got all the way through it and enjoyed parts of it. I became very aware that there are all these other languages going on. Then 1977 I left art school, Tony Sinden was shooting a film in Malta through various arrangements of having a friend, who had a girlfriend, whose dad's house we could all stay in. So we variously made our ways to Malta and I hitched out there, made Tony take my tape recorder on the plane with him, and I got out there [on a] very low budget with my

friend Susie Baker who was co-hitching. Susie doesn't speak a word of any foreign language. I'd got O level French and Latin – not that that was much use. I thought of learning German on the fly to get through Germany and to be able to buy food and things and tell her which lavatory was the ladies one and then straight into Italy, where the Latin somehow seemed a bit more relevant - then later as a musician you find yourself in a strange city where you can't speak the language and the only option is to learn it or work with it somehow - not learn it, I can't really speak anything terribly well. I worked with German bands in the early 80s and so I kind of learnt studio German and bar German and apparently have an OK Hamburg accent, and later, 10 years later probably to the day, I produced Ute Lemper when she was working with Michael Nyman so that was sung in German and that's given me very, very odd German vocabulary based on the poetry of Paul Celan, and of course I was a big fan of Berlolt Brecht. So my German vocabulary is quite mad, very, very eccentric. 1991 coming out of Narita Airport, on the airport bus, it gets to the top of the hill and you can just see Tokyo Bay spread out and this amazing city and I suddenly thought, from what I knew of Japanese, I was amazed, with my classical background, I was amazed these guys had built all this without grammar because I'd been told Japanese didn't have grammar. It does, it just manages to get away without a lot of what we in the Indo-European language group call grammar – but it does of course, have grammar. I got interested in how that language worked as well. I think it's the idea that there are different ways of thinking, how we kind of understand what's put in front of us basically, and then we go back a bit in time and look at [1991] *this moment*, which is the piece using the phonetic alphabet to describe, visually define the cut up sounds of a repeating tape loop, just a voice saying "this moment" but it's been interspersed with gaps rather than anything else. That was an attempt to parallel sound and vision. I am not quite sure what I was doing you know.

MW: Well it works very well, it's very successful

DC: Yes. It works, and there is no other way you could do it visually apart from using the phonetic alphabet, though it's quite bizarre because a lot of the stuff I was using – when the edit thing would make a click, I'd faithfully transcribe that so I was using some quite obscure sounds which only, only, a linguist would only ever use to describe Xhosa, the Southern African language that involves all these click sounds because they wouldn't occur anywhere naturally in Europe or in fact, most of the rest of the world. So from a linguistic point of view I think you'd have to be a specialist. In fact I believe that there are two mistakes in it but I am not sure which ones they are.

MW: Well that's a recurring theme, mistakes. What was that piece made for, or how was it commissioned, was it commissioned?

DC: *This moment* was a one minute piece. There were a bunch of them commissioned by the Arts Council and BBC2, *The Late Show* and I think when this came up I applied for one, which is a very unusual act on my part, to apply for anything –because there was something about the sort of whole funding mechanism thing that puts me off the idea of having to predicate the idea before making the work. Though with this one I think I'd sort of roughed it out. You know in principle it's pretty low budget, it's probably the only thing I've ever done where you could story-board it as such – so I could do that and make a kind of

fairly convincing application. So I actually got a commission to do one. I had a nightmare with someone at Arts Council Film who because I'd done the story-board based on the phrase "sixty seconds", I was still hunting around. I told them I wouldn't go with that, I was hunting around for another couple of words to use because "sixty seconds" has got too many s's in it, and it was less likely to be an interesting input material for the process. I got a lot of flack for changing it from 'sixty seconds' to '*this moment*', which I thought was complete nonsense but it went through reasonably smoothly and it got broadcast and of course the thing is repeated. Those things never get repeated until centuries later. Again like the Anna Ridley series bizarrely, I was round at someone's house, we'd had a few drinks and it was three in the morning and someone who I didn't know very well, who was in the room was flicking through channels on the satellite television and they said to me "David what do you do?", I was looking at the television and I said, "That". It was so strange that for some reason Channel 4 just picked one of those pieces that I'd made for Anna in 1984 and repeated it.

MW: How extraordinary

DC: Completely out of the blue, it's the only one that's ever been repeated out of my lot and I still have no idea why. I assume they had a gap in the schedule that was a funny length, and this was in the archives, they had the rights and it wouldn't cost them anything to just fill that gap with this bit of video art, or television as I prefer to call it.

MW: Can you talk about why you prefer the term television to video art?

DC: I think my attitude to it is that as soon as video art emerged from the 70s into the era of colour and editing a lot of it became like bad television – kind of amateur television. Some of it even YouTube would put it to shame and I think, I really didn't think this stuff deserved space in a gallery. Work which was confined to a monitor and sitting in a gallery, well why isn't it just on television, there is plenty of bad television. I really couldn't see the differentiation really between that stuff and television. I fairly strongly felt that if I was going to work with this medium it shouldn't be in galleries – that television, which is kind of a mass access format, is infinitely preferable. I liked the idea with, coming from the work that Anna had produced that, you had this potential audience of 4 million on Channel 4 late at night, even though half of them might have been asleep. I mentioned that I think maybe it doesn't really matter if you are half asleep when you are watching it with that particular work, because of it working on multiple levels I hope. Another reason I work with live sound in galleries is because I have an equal dislike of recorded sound in galleries. Galleries are acoustically horrible places for playback. Things generally sound awful in there, just echoey and incoherent so for the most part sound playback in galleries is a self defeating activity in many ways, and more of a gesture than anything else. I mean it's not all terrible work but a lot of it is a bit rubbishy I think and when there are other outlets, broadcast, radio, internet stuff and an entire music industry devoted to the commodification of recorded sound. Now that the whole Internet thing is open, well pretty much anyone can do it and certainly most people who are interested do seem to be doing it that way now.

MW: Are you involved in collaboration on the Internet?

DC: I played guitar on a German pop record only two weeks ago without having ever met anyone else in the band. But I am pretty limited on that front except it has its advantages like, I've made, but not released, a CD with a Japanese collaborator. [*One Hundred*, David Cunningham and Yasuaki Shimizu, Staubgold 91, 2009] We were in the same room at the same time when we recorded it but I edited here and we cross-checked the results by just sending things back and forth. I'm maybe the sort of musician who prefers to be in the same space as whoever I am working with generally cause the one fires off from the other in terms of music as such, formal music I think. When I say formal I mean pretty much improvised, but formal in terms of pre-internet structures maybe.

MW: So when you talk about pre-internet structures does that mean that, kind of, playing on the Internet imposes restrictions on what's possible? Or it's a different way of playing I guess, different way of interacting?

DC: Oh yes there are a lot of, between musicians, cues which are visual, head movements, hand movements, expressions. Some drummers I've worked with have got the most extraordinary animated faces and can give you an entire essay through a grimace and follow it up by some extraordinary eyebrow movement. Drummers could I am sure, conduct orchestras just with their eyebrows, some of them are scary. That sort of inter-musician contact is I think vital. From my point of view music is about knowing as much as when to shut up as when to play, and so watching your collaborators or whatever is an interesting cue when you are just working off the cuff, vital.

MW: So can we talk about some of the work that you've done more recently? You've collaborated with a lot of artists, well contemporary artists, younger artists and done quite a lot of work with them so can we talk a little bit about that and how that came about? You've worked with Sam Taylor-Wood and Gillian Wearing and lots of other people.

DC: Yes. Because I moved house in 1993 I fell amongst YBAs because they all had studios around here in those days and if they didn't, they congregated around here anyway. Through various connections I ended up being drafted into sorting out problems, technical problems that people have with work. So I worked with Gillian Wearing quite a bit helping, sorting things out, doing things extremely low budget when Gillian had zero budget, you know before she was at all well known or anything. I really liked doing that of course, it puts you in a situation you'd never otherwise be in. Something like *Drunk* [1997] which isn't an insuperable technical problem but it was physically strenuous being in a concrete room with all those drunk people for 5 or 6 days and I think a straight Union sound recordist on that film would have possibly had some problems with the atmosphere. It was a bit scary, there were knifes pulled and people falling over and weird things happening but it worked. It was such an extraordinary time shooting it and how else would I ever kind of get to have that experience? The same is true with a lot of Gillian's work and some of it more technically difficult than others. The idea of adapting someone's voice to someone else's lip movement and those series of pieces with grown-ups and children [2 into 1] and so on. That's more of a curious technical challenge. I mean it's not a collaboration, I am basically just a problem solver. And because he is not really a YBA, working with Martin Creed, he is a bit post YBA who I went to see a band in a pub and Martin's band were the support band, I remember thinking "This is fantastic" and then a week later I was at Maureen

Paley's Gallery to look at some opening and ran into Ceal Floyer whose friend Lesley had acquired a new boyfriend and this was a Scottish bloke, or bloke with Scottish accent. We all went to the pub and the bloke with the Scottish accent started asking me some very strange questions about tape recorders. After a while I realised the only person who could possibly be asking me these kind of questions about sound and tape recorders must be that bloke out of that band that I'd seen the previous week and that's how Martin and I got to know each other really. Because I had access to distribution and so on I thought, "Well the obvious thing with a band is to record it and make a record" By that time '97 or so… '96, a CD. So we managed to make a CD with a fantastically low budget and a lot of help from unexpected quarters like Jools Holland of all people. We used Jools' studio practically for nothing and he was most supportive. Martin goes on making music with his band and I go trying to record them in whatever situations, trying to make them sound like a band. Since he has diverged into string quartets and things like that, it's almost like a kind of full circle for me, a bit like working with Nyman again cause Martin's approach to string writing [is] strangely a bit like Michael's approach to string writing, in that neither of them obey most of the rules… well they only choose some of the rules to obey. Again there was, with me and Martin's music in particular there was an attraction of that he's executed a lot of ideas which I had as a student which I could never figure out how to execute.

MW: Ah fantastic

DC: I had a lot of ideas about pop music as an art student but I knew I didn't have the technical or musical ability to do it, or the conceptual ability to sort of think "Well actually just work with a chord and do this with a chord on instruments" rather than my approach which was actually a bit more structuralist and trying to examine the actual components of the instrument rather than just deal with the noise it made.

MW: Right

DC: Martin takes objects as givens in a situation, whereas I was maybe being a bit too analytical to allow anything to work functionally with a similar sort of idea set. So I am really pleased to see those kind of ideas being made manifest much better than I could ever have managed it.

MW: And being a part of it as well, being involved in it?

DC: Yes being kind of in amongst it. There are other little things like, well a sense of humour I suppose, because when we did Martin's *Sick Film* out of the whole cast and crew it was only Martin and I that seemed to find the idea of people throwing up was actually really funny and we laughed at this, whereas other people on the film crew were kind of going green and running for the door and things like that. Maybe we are sick…

So… with people like Sam Taylor-Wood for instance, Sam got me in just basically to kind of clean up stuff that was originally a wax cylinder recording that she wanted to use on the video with the film with Kylie Minogue, which is called *Misfit*. The soundtrack is the last castrato I think, a wax cylinder recording of a castrato which I de-noised very heavily, really enhanced it, doing all the things that archivists should never do, like adding echo and eq-

ing it like mad to really kind of clean it up and make it sparkle this 100 year old sound, or however old it was. After that on the *Five Revolutionary Seconds* series that she'd bring in these dreadful tape recording sheet make of the entire photo shoot and get me to try and get rid of some of the noise and stuff and edit them into the CD loops that play alongside the installations of the photographs. That developed after I'd whinge about the quality of the recordings and after about the third or fourth, I started going on to the photo shoots and just recording them myself with little microphones all around the place. That's a situation you otherwise would not be in, although I took great care to try and not be in the photographs. I am behind the sofa on one of them.

MW: And what are you working on at the moment? Are you working on something?

DC: Right. Now another idea, which I am beginning to think is impossible. I am doing an installation, it's actually another *Listening Room* piece, an acoustic installation in Lausanne, Switzerland in September. They want a publication and all I can think of is a continuous book and I have no idea how to make a continuous book, the shape is wrong and currently I am sort of really, really struggling with this.

MW: As in a book to be read?

DC: Like I said it's the wrong shape, it's physically impossible, so how do you imply, or how do you deal with it? I have no idea. I have explored various possibilities of shuffling boxes of cards and things but that's not really the solution and I am a bit stuck on that one.

MW: Maybe a book that can be read from back to front as well as front to back so you continually go back and forth. That's just off the top of my head

DC: Something along those lines yeah

I was looking at Noel Forster's scrolls in a current exhibition at Chelsea, an aspect of his work I was never aware of but the thing that struck me, was that it was exactly like John Lathan's work, whether a parallel contemporary or much later I don't know, but both Lathan and Forster are working with scrolls which is giving me a clue to the sort of possible shapes of these things.

MW: Is there anything that we haven't touched on? Or anything that you know you would like to add or talk about?

DC: There is a question which I can answer in a peripheral roundabout way, which is - "did you work with technicians or other artists on the technical process?" I can't really answer that as a question but the idea of the technical process makes me think of another kind of very central position which is a Marxist position which probably relates to something of the structuralist bit in my art school background, which is 'controlling the means of production'. Something I was quite aware of particularly when dealing with the music industry, the idea of owning one's own copyrights at a basic level. I went into CBS Studios one day to do the disk cutting for a record, something of mine that was coming [out] on Virgin and the cutting engineer Tim Young pointed out to me that he was going to teach me how to do disk

cutting, the old lathe cutting into the vinyl and basically what's called mastering these days as they don't use disks anymore. Tim's reasoning was "Well you wrote the music, you performed it, you engineered it, you produced it [so] I'm going to teach you how to do the last stage of the audio process – the mastering". Which was actually invaluable knowledge because I knew little things about it, there are just little technical things and that, it made me a better record producer in some ways. That I knew what you couldn't do on vinyl. As soon as CDs came in, all those things that you couldn't do on vinyl I started doing them but I think the average listener would never ever be aware of this kind of thing.

MW: What kind of things?

DC: Oh out of phase things. There is one piece of music I've got where there is an element that's out of phase. If you listen in mono it completely disappears, if you listen on a surround system it comes out of the back and so on, that sort of play with out of phase material you couldn't do on vinyl because it would make the record jump. Also extreme stereo divides. I recorded a John Peel session, I am not allowed to say I produced it cause it was the BBC and you are not allowed to say that, but I worked on a Peel session with a band called The Mo-dettes and they had one song about the Kray Twins which was very sort of Brechtian in feel, so I made it like one of those 1940's recordings with Lotte Lenya and (Kurt) Weill conducting or whoever and, so the stereo is really sort of very extreme that the voice maybe in the middle or one side of the stereo and the drums on the other side of the stereo, that kind of separation that you used to get on those early recordings. Well of course everyone always heard them in mono until the 1960's, but I'd heard them in the 60's and thought of them as that way around. Of course, as you could do that in radio, you still couldn't, really do that very convincingly on vinyl, little things like that. But the idea of having control of the means of production is of course a big problem between artists and television as such. It explains why people are showing things on monitors in galleries but I don't think it's the whole story. I mean the whole development of video is in many ways behind sound simply because the technology is a bit more complex. But both are as democratic as they can probably get at the moment in terms of access. You know compared to the sort of technology that I was dealing with in the 1970's, it's so kind of extraordinarily different now.

MW: In terms of accessibility?

DC: Accessibility and costs, it's a very, very important factor and this little laptop here can do things that I would have needed a studio, which would in today's equivalent terms cost about 2000 quid a day to do it in terms of just sound alone, never mind the stuff you can do with video editing.

Those of us of a certain age can remember what video editing used to cost in the West End and if you were dealing with broadcast and you know that sort of thing, in music terms and because of The *Flying Lizards* stuff and because it was often in the early days anyway quite crudely recorded that, I am supposed to be one of the initiators of stuff that, well they do call it - bedroom recording, bedsit recording - which was never quite me but it did lead into the whole rave thing in 1988. There was a jump and whilst I certainly wasn't making music like that, a lot of the approach and attitude to recording technology I think is shared

and I have even been told that the Chicago people, some of the original beat-box people - I can never remember which movement is which in that particular area of drum machine driven music - that they referred back to my earlier stuff as a point of reference of rhythmic driven records, and things like that, and also a kind of crudity in the production. I am not sure how true that is as a story but I heard it from David Toop who was equally surprised to hear it. So I mean one thing that's driven, or sustained what I do is the fact that I've always, thanks to ACME to some extent, and my own ability to work cheaply and resource myself is that I've always had a studio base and it's something that is actually less important now because it is all digital and reasonably portable but certainly in the analogue time that kind of, that ability to just experiment for days was quite important, vital. To progress those ideas which were initially unpromising ideas, stuff that you did and do a lot of stuff like I suppose most people which is simply disastrous work that never surfaces.

MW: Do you prefer performing live because you do still perform live quite frequently don't you?

DC: I go through phases of it and I do it if I get asked, I especially do it if I get paid because I think if I wasn't based in London I'd probably do it a lot more, it's very difficult getting paid to play music in London I think. God knows how bands survive.

MW: Because there is so much competition?

DC: No it's because of the lack of venues and viable venues and to some extent it used to be a problem of the licensing laws as well. [It] probably comes down to property prices to some extent, you know in redevelopment the first thing that goes is the music venue, we just lost The Spitz down the road and the Marquee Club in Wardour Street twenty years ago, and all this is redevelopment. The Astoria on Charing Cross Road, which is I must admit, a place I've always detested is about to disappear into the Crossrail route and London generally has actually not really had the range of small venues or smallish venues that other cities have, certainly other European cities. It may also reflect a lack of maybe subsidy or something like that or the way subsidy functions. I have a very little idea about how that bit of the world works but generally if I am playing in London, which is quite rare, I am playing for free, if I am playing in another country I am getting paid so that's really one practical reason that it's driven that way. Another thing to do with playing live is that I am really a fairly appalling instrumentalist, I am not particularly good so I work with very slow guitar playing and a lot of processing, building up things in real time with delays on a laptop and well before the technology was viable on a laptop, I used to drag around some very large bags of digital delays and things to do this and mixers and things and before that I actually dragged around analogue tape recorders to do it with. I took to performing more since about 2002/3 simply because I became portable, so it became more viable. I can just basically sling everything over one shoulder and pick up the rest of it in a bag and go anywhere and just plug into a PA system or whatever as opposed to immense amounts of equipment which I couldn't carry.

MW: And you did just recently do a live mix to some films showing at the NFT?

DC: Last year yes. David Curtis put together a collection of films that were shown at the Film Society in Bloomsbury in the 1930s and some of this stuff - the silent film, were originally

soundtracked live by Jack Ellit who was a collaborator of Len Lye. Ellit created soundtracks out of recorded materials in some way and there is very little information. We were basically working on guesswork so it was a sort of a primitive form of DJ-ing and looking at sort of some of the material, some of the actual soundtracks he'd made, I'd guess he was gluing together bits of optical film or something like that some of the time. David Curtis gave me a selection and I simply went through my archives and having guessed at what speed the films would playing at. I don't like DJing and I don't like that DJ culture much but it was the only sort of practical way to do it. It was basically make a CD for each film and wing it as the films were being shown because we had very little idea about the synch. Without a run through you couldn't tell which, even which version of the print you might get, never mind what it looked like at 16 frames a second as opposed to 25 - the ones I'd seen on DVD would be running at 25 I think. So it was kind of a rare venture into a sort of DJ world but probably won't happen often. I'd quite like to do something like that live but it's technically quite difficult still. Of course other people somehow seem to think nothing of just doing it all pre-recorded and I don't know if I've really got hoisted by my own petard of dodgy principles or whatever and I can't manage that.

MW: I think we've covered almost everything. If you had to sum up your kind of, it's probably very, quite difficult to do but some kind of ethos for your work as it's very diverse but you know there is a very strong ethos there really.

DC: Yeah and at some point I attempted to write down principles - the principles certainly of the installations but then I looked at them and they seem to extend further. There was one to do with installations which was purely practical which was "Always leave doors open or have them opened for you" and that was actually to do with the way if a door was closed the acoustics of the space would be quite different in some of the installation works, so I'd make sure that the doors were jammed open or while people were in the space that the doors should be open. But then again of course there is a vague metaphor I suppose it suggests something else and there is an ethos of - I mentioned control of the means of production and things like that and there is a structuralist reference going through things, of paring down and looking at basic elements, and how they combine but also including the spectator in that, including the idea of, in making a record trying to see the whole process from a note played in front of a microphone to the listener hearing it on a radio or a loudspeaker or wherever. Trying to think through the whole process like that. I mean at some point I even tried to involve the record sleeve as part of that project but it's not something that has ever really been successful as such. I suppose that going back to Maidstone, that Maidstone sort of hard line structuralism, which was of all those thoughts imbued by David Hall without him saying a word, he just used to sit in his office and the waves would kind of come out because it was quite extraordinary back then in the mid 70's how people's work, myself, Rob Gawthrop, Steve Partridge and so on, we were fluctuating around this kind of real common call of ideas - ideas which I think are still pretty vital and inform all that work. See, I tried to do a conclusion there