Interview with David Larcher, May 25th 2010, Stanhope Gardens

Before meeting David Larcher at his home in South Kensington I visited the rocks and minerals gallery at the Natural History Museum - a collection that chimes with the aesthetics of Larcher's work, especially the *videøvoid* pieces (1993/1996) and *Ich Tank* (1997). The geometry of the video image in these works are put under extreme pressure so that it's twisted, contorted and sent off in different directions, revealing and reflecting several sides of the raster plane, including its reverse. Reading Deleuze, against the grain, the idea of the 'crystal image' and its circuitry, calls to mind the darting electronic lines and the multifaceted, multi-plane imagery in Larcher's videos. The manipulation of the video signal in these pieces is electronic and virtual, but it renders sculptural images with a startling impression of depth. In contrast, the chemical-physical processes associated with his earlier films, *Mare's Tail* (1969) and *Monkey's Birthday* (1975), and the reworking of the footage in these pieces, makes for superimposed and stratified seems of imagery.

The circuitous stories and seeming digressions, in the interview below, reflect the aesthetics of his films and videos: the periods in which he made his work overlap for example; and the footage intended for one project often appears in another. The trials and tribulations of journeys here and there, and back again, are all a factor in the aesthetics of the work, and part of its impetus. On the one hand Larcher's films and videos make for a visionary cinema, rooted in his biographical and personal circumstances. At the same time, his work has also always exercised the medium, pushing it to near breaking point. *Ich Tank* is Larcher's most introverted work – the psychology of the maker (transposed to that of a goldfish) is the ostensible subject of the work - but it is also his most expansive (and witty) work, in its exploration and reinvention of the electronic image, which revels in the 'video void'.

When I got to Larcher's flat, which used to be his grandmother's, for our allotted appointment, I could see, through the window of the front room, that he was painting his back door. After several attempts to raise his awareness of my presence, by ringing on the doorbell and tapping on the window, Larcher opened the front door, in shorts, bare-chested and tanned, with wild hair. With a gentleness that belied his appearance, he invited me in and explained that he'd only be in London for a short while before setting off, either to Cyprus, France, or Mauritius, and in the short time he had there were a few jobs that he needed to get done: one was painting the back door; another was fixing the Mercedes van, which he'd had since the '70s; and another was replacing the gas stove. 'Do you fancy a coffee?' he asked. 'You don't know anything about gas stoves do you? I've had a go at fixing this one, and I think it's ok.....'

Showing me around his flat - including a new back room, which he'd knocked into and recently claimed, unbeknown to his landlord - Larcher pointed out a photograph in the hall, which showed a mass of stacked boxes of tapes in a garage in France. These boxes, together with numerous hard drives, piled under a desk, comprised material that he's been working on for years. 'It's going to be called, if I ever make it, *$text*. S - divided subject, you know, Lacanian, it stands for whatever you want it to stand for – le sujet barré. It's part of the *Videøvoid* series that I had planned to make, which would have included a number of pieces, each half an hour: *Pretext*, *Text*,

Subtext, *Context*, *Cortex*, *Sextet*, which has become *$text*, and the trailer.' Following our conversation, I wondered what alignment and combination of technologies, circumstances and deadlines would need to arise in order for *$text* to materialise.

Larcher's approach to filmmaking, in the processing, developing and printing of his material was homespun and hands on. Coming to video at a later stage in his career, and hence later than artists such as Woody and Steina Vasulka or Nam June Paik, who often had a hand in devising circuitry, Larcher's work was pioneering in terms of his exercising post-production technologies. He belongs to a generation of artists whose work was fuelled by the continual and rapid development of high-end video technology, which consistently rendered it a new medium. He has combined and integrated various generations of video technology, overlapping and reworking footage in various post-production facilities, across a period which saw the language of two-machine 'linear' editing transformed by the capacity of ever-enhanced 'vision-mixers' (an apt phrase considering Larcher's aesthetics) digital effects and digital tape storage. As Larcher suggests, in the interview below, three-dimensional imagery might well be the new thing, or rather the newly reinvented thing. (High-definition hasn't especially added anything new, subsequent to the digitisation of video). The twisting planes in *Videøvoid* and *Ich Tank* prefigure three-dimensional imagery proper, but it is the tension between the virtual space, in these videos, and the two-dimensional flat screen, which makes for compelling and confounding imagery, rather than a series of effects.

SP: Didn't you study Anthropology before you started making films?

DL: Anthropology was a complete eye-opener for me when I was at Cambridge, because basically I went there when I was, what, 18, and I originally wanted to study Law and Chinese. I was at Downside, a Catholic Benedictine Public School, for years because my parents had split up. My grandfather paid for my education. My mother came back here, to London (from Mauritius) and she wanted me to go to Eton. My grandfather said, 'No he's Catholic. He has to go to a Catholic public school'. So I was sent to Downside. Meanwhile my mother worked at the War Office. She was personal secretary to the Head of MI5, a guy called Percy Sillitoe. This is actually when I was at pre-prep school. I came back here in '49/50. I was at the Lycée Français for a while, and then I went to pre-prep school, boarding school, did the whole thing, and in the meantime my parents got back together. In fact, she had a boyfriend who was an amazing guy, ex-head of Winchester, an Old Wykehamist, and he was amazing because he showed me things like the first page of Caxton. So he was quite cultured in that sense, which my family wasn't. And she was going to marry him, and he said she ought to make sure she got rid of my old man, but what happened, apparently - I only found this out the other day – is that my father started to have an affair with one of my mother's friends. And she was so furious, she pulled him back. Typical! The result was that they ended up having another child, so I've got a sister who's fifteen years younger than me.

So my father and mother went back to Mauritius, and I started to go back to Mauritius when I was fifteen or so, during the holidays. Where was I? Oh Anthropology. So what happened, is I went back to Mauritius after having got into Cambridge, but my father said, 'No, no you shouldn't do Law, you should do Economics'. So I started

there with Economics, which was Annan and Samuelson; I went to Lord Annan's lectures, which were ... (sigh) and one day coming out of a lecture, and I was really not happy, I saw this place – The Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology – and I hardly knew what these words meant. Anthropology certainly wasn't big in my lexicon. But I went in and it completely blew my mind. And so I went back to my tutor and said right I've decided to change. I wanted to study Anthropology and Archaeology, because I'd always wanted to be a geologist actually. And everything changed. And life is like that. I mean here I am fixing stoves and auto 'boxes.

SP: You went to the Royal College of Art after Cambridge didn't you?

DL: Well in those days, 'cause I'd just left Cambridge, I went back to Mauritius, where my father said, 'Well, mate, you can't sit around doing nothing. I've got you a job. You're going to be an accountant.' And I did that for a while, but I got fed up with that, and got given a chance to go to St. Brandon, which is an amazing island that was completely wild in those days. There was a boat there once a month, and fishermen went on a contract of six months. The guys who were just starting television in Mauritius - this is '64 - funny guys, gave me a Bolex, and so that's how I shot some stuff. And I got admitted to the Royal College because they were doing this film and tv diploma, which I did with a guy called Simon Hartog. Someone did it the year before, we did it that year, and then it was stopped.

SP: You went there with a view to becoming a filmmaker?

DL: Since I was at Cambridge I really wanted to do film.

SP: How did you get to have an interest in film?

DL: When I was in Cambridge it was all the nouvelle vague, *Last Year in Marienbad* by Renais; Chris Marker, all that lot. I didn't like Godard, much. And then Flaherty, stuff like that. I remember seeing *Hiroshima Mon Amour* just as it came out, which must have been 1960 or 59.

SP: What about avant-garde films, by the likes of Stan Brakhage for example, were they influential?

DL: That was much later, I saw Brakhage's films when P. Adams Sitney brought all the American movies over, but I can't remember when that was.[i] I also went and saw Harry Smith's *Heaven and Earth Magic*, twice - god knows why, and Brakhage's *Art of Vision,* which went on all night. I'd seen some of Kenneth Anger's films earlier, because he showed the re-cut of *Pleasure Dome* just after he'd got it back. Because right here, on the corner of the street – I lived near the park in those days, and my grandmother was here – 101 Cromwell Road was a kind of funny house that a friend of mine at Cambridge had rented the ground floor of, which he then passed on to other people, lots of artists, and Anger showed the print that he'd just had done of *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* and that must have been '67/68 I guess, maybe earlier. The Floyd lived upstairs when they still had Barrett with them. But the place got demolished, then there was this Forum hotel, and now it's a Hilton. There was quite a buzz around here. I also went to the States, New York, around '66/67.

SP: And you saw things there?

DL: Well yes. The Warhol discos, and stuff like that.

SP: What about other underground films?

DL: Umm .... Emschwiller. A few others. There was an amazing group called USCO. They did huge light shows, with twenty screens hanging in the air. USCO - the company of us – a media collective in the ’60s. I often wonder what happened to them. They were great. They showed an early piece by Ed Emschwiller’s, was it *Relativity*, early Emschwiller?

SP: The only one I know is *Sunstone*.

DL: Oh that’s the very early 3D computer piece, which took him like 5 years. It’s an amazing piece. No, before that he did a dark black and white piece, and that must have been made in 1965 or earlier. [I suspect the film referred to here is *Thanatopsis* (1962)]**.** There was also an article in Time magazine - and that must have been in ’63/64 – the Ford Foundation had given money to around eight filmmakers. There were descriptions of what they did, and I remember reading that article and thinking, hmm, now that’s what I should be doing - getting money from the Ford Foundation.

I was also quite influenced by all those Americans like La Monte Young. For instance, the first eight minutes of *Mare’s Tail* is black, and you have a sine wave going from inaudible to inaudible above, and then crosses over, and then it suddenly becomes pixels on the screen and stuff. It was also John Cage. In fact you hear him on the soundtrack; I’d sampled ... well there weren’t samplers in those days ... I was just dropping the gramophone needle onto the record etc. And I’d spent a long time reading. It starts off with a text from the Zohar on the origins of light. So I was very ... something had replaced my Catholic ... my times as a ... (sigh).... Anyway, if you’re thinking La Monte Young in ’68/69 it’s quite far out. And Philip Glass was a friend of mine. He did a little bit of the sound for the film I made in ’64/65. He was studying with Boulanger in Paris - he was a friend of Simon (Hartog) the other guy who was doing this one year diploma at the Royal College - and I was looking for someone. And I was using the I Ching.

SP: To structure the film?

DL: To structure the sound actually, and parts of the film, but then one always starts with a structure and then get lost of course. It’s good to have something to start with, but it’s like a seed.

SP: What about your contemporaries, fellow filmmakers in London?

DL: I was close friends with Gary Woods, and Roger Hammond. But that was much later, ’74 I suppose, when we more or less parked the trucks outside the Co-op, when it was the dairy. Because there was a yard outside, and that was the Prince of Wales Crescent. And it was quite hardcore living out there. In fact one of my sons was born in the yard: when I rang up and said that we’re expecting a baby and it’s due any minute, the nurse on the end of the line said ‘Oh no, no ... you have to bring them in to hospital’. ‘No, no we don’t want to come into the hospital,’ I said ‘we want to have it here’. And we were in the truck, which was in the yard at the back of the dairy, below the Co-op, which was on the second floor. And I said ‘Well, could you remind – do I cut the umbilical cord before or after the knot?’ And they said there’ll be someone there in half an hour! And what happened, Gabriel, who was secretary for the Co-op at that time, stood outside waiting, because you had to go through the

entrance, and this place where there were people like Annabel Nicolson who had a studio, a lot of people had studios there who I barely knew. And so this midwife was taken through all these places, and came out the back and up the steps. And it wasn't until the next day, when she came back, that she realised that she had delivered a baby in a truck. But anyway, when we got there, I needed somewhere to work, and I was living in trucks, so we just put them in the crescent. There was an African drumming centre, there was a lot of stuff going on there, and the whole crescent was squatted. Hoppy (John Hopkins) was on the corner.

SP: Were there people that you discussed filmmaking or aesthetics with there?

DL: Not really. No. It was more a pragmatic solution to having somewhere to process the stuff. So the truck's outside the Co-op's on the second floor. There's a processing machine. There are printers. And the guy who was supporting me, Alan Power, gave me money to get things fixed. He would give us twenty quid a week and pay the lab bills. That's how we worked. That's how the production was done. And so, in a way, I think people like Malcolm (Le Grice) and Peter (Gidal) felt as if they'd been squatted somehow. The friends that I then made, people like Stuart Pound, who came and printed there and Kevin Pither, but I didn't really discuss cinema. I never really have.

SP: What about the reception of your films? How were they received?

DL: At that point, '74, I'd only made *Mare's Tail*. After I'd made *Mare's Tail* it showed at the Arts Lab – that's how I met David Curtis – and I remember whatshisname coming in one day when it was screening and saying 'It's very uncompromising.' Oh yeah, well. The film had a sort of ... it wasn't successful ... but it had a funny sort of audience. It made an impression on people. Meanwhile, I'd been living in trucks in Scotland, the Hebrides, Wales, blah, blah, blah, pretty much starving really. I really don't know how we did it. And the film was then shown at the BFI in '72, at the first, I think, festival of underground film in Britain.[ii] Werner Nekes liked it and invited me over, to Hamburg, to show it and he organised some screenings there, in Germany.

When Alan, who'd financed *Mare's Tail*, saw that it had got around - it had also shown in the States a bit - he said I'm keen to do another. And I said I want to do one in the truck. And so Anthony (Moore) came and I picked up various other people. And we started shooting stuff for it. In June '73, I think, we brought some other trucks. That old truck that I've still got, the old Mercedes, was 700 Deutchmarks, which even then was peanuts. And then we took off, and Alan came with us in his Land Rover. There was me, Elizabeth, and the kid, Tin Can, and number two was conceived en route. And that's when we came back. Nine months later two was born, in February '74, outside the Co-op. I picked up some guy who was actually Klaus Kinski's wife's boyfriend, so we took Nastassja Kinski, who was I think thirteen or twelve. Daggi (Dagmar Krausse) and Peter Blegvad, who were the Slapp Happy group with Anthony. And Jonathan Langran who had been at the Co-op – who made *Gloucester Road Groove*, which is here, a 100ft roll shot one night, and I'm in it - and he was with his old lady. So there was a group. We had four trucks.

SP: And how did that work? You travelled together, but did you make it together, or collaboratively, in any sense?

DL: There was a mixture of stuff. There are some sequences with people in a circle with the camera running, throwing it from person to person. And I jut used the bits where you see the light. Yeah, it didn't really work, at that point. There was a lot of: 'Oh, gosh, what are we going to shoot now? We'd better shoot that.' And a lot of things got thrown away. It was a funny troupe.

SP: And what about the processing of the footage?

DL: I think all that, the actual travelling, only lasted three months or something. I went on. We were in Turkey. Everyone said they'd had enough, and Alan didn't want to pay for people anyway. Which is what I wanted to get back to - his involvement. We said I'm going on anyway. But by then - he'd brought an Eclair, which was big news - I ended up with one clockwork Bolex and went on, with some film. But when we got to Afghanistan, just the day we got to the border, they introduced visas. And we didn't have money for the visas, so we didn't know what to do at this point. So we drove back – and thereby lies another long tale – to some friends up in the Anti-Taurus mountains. And I realised I had to come back. All that film was sitting around. I had to do something with it. I had a responsibility to Alan who had spent all that money, so I went back with him and processed some, leaving Elizabeth in the two trucks in Turkey, and then I went back. And then we came back from Iran – at that point it was '73, and that was when they had this very big oil business – no one could move anywhere, there was no diesel anywhere. So we brought these big plastic drums, filled the back of the truck, we couldn't take them both, so left one. It was an amazing trip back. I was three days and three nights driving, non-stop. And when we got back we put the trucks outside the co-op and I suppose that would have been January '74. So that's when I started to process stuff and use the printers.

At this point Alan thought we were making *Star Wars* - that was his fantasy. And at this time he'd bought the Gate Cinema in Notting Hill, which was some derelict fleapit. He did it up, changed the seats blah blah blah. And he's put the Gate Cinema on because he'd met these guys called the Stones (David and Barbara), who were (Robert) Kramer's crew, the American filmmaker. And he's bought a house for them in Portobello Road, where they lived etc etc. And they had talked him into buying the rights to Fassbinder's *Fear Eats the Soul*, which we all loathed. It was like an episode of *Coronation Street*. And he lost a lot of money; they ripped him off, more or less. Which meant that he felt too exposed, so he cut our twenty quid a week, with the result that I was only going to put the material I'd shot, since he gave me the money, into the film. There are also some reclaimed bits of *Mare's Tail* that get into it, at the opening. But the main interest for me, had been to work on the material that I had shot between making *Mare's Tail* and starting *Monkey's Birthday*. The rest of it was like some sort of vehicle that this other stuff would be inside. But that ended up, or became, *E ETC*. I was keeping that until last, because I knew that that was the best bit. I was waiting until I'd got enough, more or less, out of the travel stuff, when Alan said there was no more money.

So the way that stuff got put together, having got oneself in a situation where you've taken money to do something, and of course it's always escalating, and eventually you've gotta produce. So it becomes what's there. So it had a very strange form of course. All of my things have a very strange form.

SP: But what was your approach? I mean, when you were look through all of your material, which you've shot while travelling or whatever, besides there being a certain pressure to produce something, what was it that you wanted to get out of it? Or what is it that you were thinking about as you were processing and printing the material, or cutting it together?

DL: I didn't really cut. I don't cut. I'm really not an editor.

SP: Or put things in sequence then?

DL: Yes, well that's how it happens. Really what I tend to do is ... I get something until it's a sequence. That's how, for example something like *Ich Tank* has the shape that it does. Because basically I worked with Patrick (Zanoli) on various sequences. That's another long story that's similar, because I started it in Berlin in 1983, and it was just a silly idea about the Berlin Wall and being contained, and the corniness of the goldfish metaphor. I took a goldfish around, showing him the wall, stuff like that, driving him around. So I shot a lot of stuff on U-Matic at that point, which I showed, at that point, as an installation. By the time I got to make *Ich Tank*, which was cut together in a night – there's a whole load of stuff that isn't in it of course – but I was thinking, right, this works, this works and this works... Now, when something works, it means it touches you or it affects you in some sense. Not necessarily just intellectually. You've worked on a piece ... and it's just sufficient to pack it, to put it there and say that it's done. You work on something until it looks good, but I wouldn't really say that, in fact I'd stop myself saying that. It's how you get something to have meaning, some kind of existential input, that sort of reassures you of why you're here, that's why I've been wasting all my time today. And when you've got a certain number of little bits ... it's like modular in a sense.

SP: You mentioned cutting *Ich Tank* together in a night, but watching it you can't see the joins. It's layered, and layered, and one thing moves into another. So when you say you cut it together in a night, what was it that you put together?

DL: Ok, so it started in '83, and now it's '97. And there was all this stuff. There was an hour of stuff on High Band U-Matic and there was ... oh I can't remember. Basically, I had the notion that cinema had stopped being narrative and had become.... In *Expanded Cinema* Gene Youngblood said that cinema had become a collision of codes rather than a collision of images. Although I haven't learnt a programming language, and I never will, there was something exciting about that idea. Because in those days it was very difficult to manipulate images. Nowadays you have an array of pixels do anything you want to each pixel and put it back together. Whereas when, for instance, I made *Granny's Is* they'd only just brought out the very first D1, which was the first digital tape made by Sony. Video has always been on the cusp of some kind of technicity. And there was also the Charisma. That was the digital effects machine that the BBC used for football games or whatever, but for me it was quite magical. And I started to understand that actually it is just software, writing software to affect this or that point of the image. And I wanted to try to use some of this technology. That's why I switched to video, because in film it was highly complex. It was also something to do with how you can affect the image, and how that represents what we go through internally and emotionally. That's why there's a relationship, a tenuous relationship, with psychoanalytical ideas; one acts as a mirror of the other, so you have compression or whatever. So, what had happened is that I had wanted to go on

with this idea of the manipulation of the frame. And I'd seen Charisma and D1, and the first Thompson digital mixer, when they were exposed here, at the French Institute for some reason, back in something like '87/88, when these things had just come out. And I'd just made *E ETC*, which, if you look at it, is completely 2D. It's kind of film, with a few other elements. But this was really the new generation happening, in the late eighties.

SP: And what was it that the later technology allowed you to do exactly, mix multiple sources?

DL: Basically, when it's digital, you can mix as many as you want. But in *Videøvoid* I started with nothing. I went into the studio with nothing. But I had some old bits of U-Matic tape and I liked the way the drop-outs worked. So I took one drop-out and manipulated that drop-out, and printed it. For instance, there was one bit of drop-out that looked like an arrow. I isolated the drop out and printed it to tape. You see, before it was digital you couldn't do that; it all had to be done in one pass because you'd lose generations. Three generations and you've had it. In *Videøvoid* there are something like seventy generations. And basically when you were doing something like that you'd get into the studio for 7:30 in the morning and work through until 7 in the evening when it was time for supper. And there's no rendering time, it all happens live, in generations. It's a completely different way of thinking. Now it's all rendering time.

SP: *E ETC* is a transitional piece, from film to video. Can you say a little bit more about that?

DL: Yeah. That was funded by Channel 4. That had a long and complex gestation, from 84-86. There was a point where Rod Stoneman, the producer, said, 'Listen David, if you don't finish today, I'm going to broadcast the A-Roll'. And so that's how that got done. It ended up with only two rolls instead of three. And also only half the stuff. A lot of stuff I couldn't put in, because, like a banana coming out of someone's arse, it was quite extreme. And of course you can't put that sort of thing on tv.

SP: When you say two rolls – there are only ever two layers of imagery?

DL: Yes, but then I had already done a lot before, because I had joined LVA in 1984. I already had the Channel 4 funding when I was in Berlin, and I was working on a Steenbeck there on things, but I was starting to understand video, using U-matic. What happened was, someone said the Gulbenkian are - because they think video is where it's at these days - offering two fellowships in video art. And you get hands-on at a video studio in Carlisle. And you spend two weeks there. And I got the Gulbenkian video fellowship in about 1980. Anyway, I tried to understand, but I couldn't follow it at all. It was completely gobbledegook.

SP: Which aspect?

DL: Well, that the image is an electronic signal, and this is your colour burst and that's your synch burst. And the guy's drawing it out for me. And you're thinking in terms of silver halide or layers of dye, but here's this guy explaining to you that the image is made up of colour burst and synch. It was totally... After a week I hadn't understood anything. And that's why *Granny's Is* is so nice. Whenever I got the

chance I rented the U-matics from LVA, for the weekend, because you got two whole days. And I'd bring it here, for three whole years, every weekend. And at Christmases I'd have it for longer because it was the holidays. So I had Granny, and I was learning video in, what '82, 83, 84, and the whole piece is like three Christmases collapsed into one. ....

Granny's Is was shot here. It was all shot in this room, except she goes out for a walk in the park at one point. I went and did a course to learn how to use an Ultimatte, because I thought that was a good idea, and then I rented a Betacam for the night, and I got it for the weekend, and an Ultimatte too. And the Ultimatte was as big as that chair, and I only half understood it. I had my son and when we went to pick it up. I had this old beetle with a roof rack – and it was hugely expensive, it cost a hundred grand or something, and we went along and lifted it onto the roof rack. And they said 'You're taking it like that?' And the roof rack only had three fixtures. Anyway we got it back, but it was really heavy and we only just managed to get it down. And I tried to connect it, but I was completely flummoxed. I couldn't work out anything - synching terminations all this stuff. One of the guys who'd been on the course with me, I called him up, and luckily he said he could help me wire it up. And we got it all working, with all the blue screen and everything. And we shot for two days in the room, but playing back the original U-Matic tapes, which had been shot over a much longer period, so that they were mixed in live, which was quite magical. In those days I was lost completely lost, and how I got anything was a complete mystery; serendipity of the nth degree.

The first version only has half the stuff in it. So I got given three more nights of editing in normal analogue Betacam. Three nights to start again, or to remix it. The first version was only 40 minutes, and the longer version ended up being 78 mins. Anyway, that went out and it won various prizes. And when it went to Montbeliard, they liked it, and by then I'd got the money from the Arts Council to carry on with what I'd made of *Ich Tank Durchblick* - which means *view through the aquarium of the I* - which is what it was called then. The budget was twenty grand and I had budgeted five grand for the post-production, because that is really what I was trying to do.

Before that, I had also been given a grant to do *Videøvoid*, which was based on the idea that you can make something out of nothing, using those techniques. And so I called up the guys in France and I said I've got five thousand, which would have only given me two nights of editing, but I asked whether I could have longer than that – say two weeks. So I went along there and misbehaved extremely badly ... and did some stuff with Patrick, who liked it, and said I could have a month. And then I came back here, and went out again with all of the rushes that I'd shot in Berlin, seven years previously, but in fact I didn't like that footage and then got into making *Videøvoid* and started from scratch basically, with Patrick working out how to restructure images through generations, as opposed to mixing.

SP: What do you mean by generations in this context?

DL: Well go back to that arrow: if you want to put another arrow into the image, you have to put it into a digital effects unit, separate out the line, then take the other tape, which has already got it on, put it in the place you want it, and then record it. Then you wind back the tape and put in that part of the arrow again, in front of the previous

one. And so on. And you couldn't do that before it was digital, because after the third generation the first one has fallen apart.

SP: So you're still working in generations, but there's no degradation?

DL: Exactly. *Videøvoid: The Trailer* and *Videøvoid:Text* were both made like that.

SP: So it's also linear editing I guess. That's key isn't it? You start at the beginning and have to do one thing after another?

DL: No, no, because it's made in bits. The guy who ran CICV (Centre International Création Vidéo) Pierre (Bongiovanni), said he wanted me to come and make another piece, to finish, so once I'd made *Trailer*, I went down there two or three more times, for a month, and put *Text* together, and that had no budget - that was just them, their support, and the time on the machines. When *Text* was shown here, people kept ringing - and by then I was working on *Ich Tank* – saying they'd like to do an interview. 'Now, I'm in the studio I can't talk, call me after supper'. It was a girl. And she called after supper, but somehow I managed to put it off until the next day. But the next day it was her boyfriend who called, asking if she could ring tomorrow, so eventually the next day she called, and she was late, and I was quite drunk - wine for supper and what have you; it was silver service all the way down the line. Anyway, she said 'amazing piece of work' blah blah blah, and then she asked 'but how did you make it?' And I said, 'Now that is such an absolutely stupid question'. And she flipped of course, and said she's never been so insulted in her life and hung up the phone. But the point is, to say how it was made is, really like ... well, you'd still be here tomorrow. There are so many ... how it got started ... how this bit got to that, how this bit fits to that ... It's like a weird puzzle. There's so much labour in it, so much time working out how this little bit would fit in there. Now it's all done completely differently, in one piece of software, where it's also a huge amount of time, but now it all uses templates.

When Flame came out, or Flint/Flame, which *Ich Tank* is more or less an homage to, it was very exciting. And I remember when Patrick went off to Pinewood Studios, in something like '92/93, which is when Flame first came out, he said it was amazing – you could take your picture and have someone walk around it – it was a completely other way of thinking about image space. My interest was to do with keeping at the cusp of how the image ... what an image is.

SP: It's difficult to imagine how one could go beyond something like *Ich Tank*, in terms of the layering, compositing and modelling of the image.

DL: Well, I guess it'll be 3D. They're all going on about that. But I don't know. Now, if you look at what I thought was on the edge twenty years ago, now it looks completely banal. But then of course, you've got something else going through it, which is something like your lifeblood, the question of why you're doing it in the first place.

SP: It's obvious in some way to see why you moved from film to video, in terms of the capability and capacity for processing imagery. But at the same time it's as if video imaging, or digital imaging, as you've talked about it is a completely different principle.

DL: Completely different. And not many filmmakers - I mean those who touched film, I don't mean directors - moved to video. I knew about video of course, what with *Off/On* by Scott Bartlett back in '67?. And we all thought it was going to happen real fast. But it didn't happen real fast. It happened real slow. And that thing of Emshwiller's, you know, *Sunstone*... It took him something like four years to do two minutes. I remember when we saw it first and it was kind of exciting. And that was the beginning of what we see now.

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[i] David Cutris and Simon Hartog organised Sitney's tour of UK Universities and the NFT in April 1968

[ii] This isn't the earliest showing of *Mare's Tale*. It premiered at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1969 and then opened at the Robert Street Arts Lab in early November of that year.