

HEAR SEE HEAR

AN INTERVIEW WITH PHILIP DADSON

BY MARTIN RUMSBY

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Images courtesy of Philip Dadson

A founding member of Alternative Cinema and SeeHear Films, Auckland, and the music ensemble From Scratch, Philip Dadson is a pioneer of Intermedia art in New Zealand. Dadson's early films and videos include: *Earthworks* (1971); *Breath* (1976); *Outside-In* (1978); *Triad 1* (1979) and *Triad IV* (1981). *Triad IV* was later recontextualized in a larger four-part sound installation titled *Conundrum Quartet* (1999).

Dadson also collaborated with filmmaker Gregor Nicholas on two award-winning films, *Drum/Sing* and *Pacific 321 Zero*. Dadson's later videos include *Uncharted Crossings* (1989); *Resonance* (1994); *An Archaeology of Stones* (1995); and the impressively choreographed multi-screen video wall, *Footstep Hocket* (1990). While on a Fulbright Scholarship to the United States in 1991 Dadson made *Soundstories Number One (Meetings with 14 Experimental Instrument Builders)*. Other works incorporating sound and video include: *An Archaeology of Stones* (1995); *Global Hockets* (1998); *Mangrove* (2000); *Conference of Drums* (2000) and *Three Short Films* (2003).

In 2003 and 2004, Dadson worked on a video installation series titled *Polar Pulses*, based on experiences in Antarctica. It comprises five video/sound works: *Echo Logo*; *Aerial Farm*; *Stonemap*; *Flutter and Chthonian Pulse*. Dadson's CD releases include: *Pacific 321 Zero: Parts One & Two*; *Drum/Sing*, *Gung Ho*; *Songs for Heroes*; *Eyedrum*; *Fax to Paris*; *Global Hockets*; and his latest solo release, *Sound Tracks*.

Martin Rumsby: You were born in Napier?

Philip Dadson: Born and bred. I have little reason to go back these days but I still have vivid memories of childhood there.

MR: Where did your interest in art come from?

PD: I drew a lot as a kid and my father had really good skill with a pen. When he was in World War II, serving in the Pacific, he was kind of the platoon artist. He did cartoony sketches of all his mates doing everyday things – bathing, cooking, and having haircuts and stuff like that. I think I probably inherited a bit of that. Also, at about age 12, I really wanted to start learning music and requested a piano. And my parents got me one.

MR: What sort of music were you interested in at the time?

PD: I had an aunty who taught me boogie woogie and then later I inherited a room on the back of the garage after my older brother went to sea and I got switched on to jazz. Kerry left behind an old record player and a Hank Jones Trio LP. From then on that was where my interest was focused. I joined the World Record Club, purchased *Kind of Blue* (Miles Davis) and my first classical LP, Stavinsky's *Rite of Spring*. I never really got into rock and roll as a kid. Also my father was Mr Bones in the Napier Frivolity Musicals, a kind of local Black and White Minstrel show and I grew up surrounded by the swing style music of shows and pantomimes.

MR: Did you listen to the radio too?

PD: Yes. I used to build little crystal radios and loved dialing through short wave on the old valve radio. Radio was such an experience then. You listened to it as a family. *The Goon Show* was a big feature of the week, and *Randy Stone and the Night Beat*, later at night, in bed with the crystal radio. The other thing was nature, the influence of nature and the environment.

MR: Like the sea?

PD: The sea. Very strong. I lived about three quarters of a mile from the beach. On stormy nights you could hear the pounding of the waves and the sound of the surf on shingle. Napier foreshore is a shingle beach, and often the scene of dramatic seas, with a strong undertow. I remember really powerful electrical storms. And earthquakes, of course. Both my parents went through the Napier earthquake. You grew up,

as a kid, being constantly reminded of it, with safety exercises at school, diving under tables and doorways for shelter.

MR: Did you study art at high school?

PD: Yes, I did, but outside the art room I can't say I did so well at school. It didn't interest me and I couldn't wait to leave. My family wanted me to get a job in the government, which I did. I worked in the Customs Department for a year as a trainee.

MR: In Napier?

PD: Yes. It was like being in an environment much like the British TV series *The Office*, with exactly the same sort of distinctive characters. I decided after a year that I wanted to go to art school.

MR: Had you done Prelim?

PD: I did Prelim by night school and worked in a timber yard by day. It wasn't until I left school that I realised it was art that I wanted to focus on. Plus there was an added excitement from mixing with the local beat crowd, some of whom had links with Auckland, such as Barry Lett. So Elam was definitely in the sights.

MR: What was it like coming to Auckland in the mid 1960s?

PD: After Napier, very exciting. Later I bought an Ariel 650 motorcycle I used to ride to and from Napier during the holiday breaks.

MR: What did you study at Elam?

PD: I started out doing the standards – painting, drawing, and design. Printmaking captivated me, probably because it was so repetitive and rhythmic. I loved the repetition of preparing plates, etc. But then my father was killed in a car accident, and out of something tragic something exciting and unexpected happened... My mother wanted to go to England to visit my brother and connect with her family roots, so I took time out from Elam to accompany her, after which we went our separate ways. Hamish Keith helped me get a job at a print place in London, a printing atelier, Editions Aleto, which looked after people like David Hockney, Colin Self and Claes Oldenberg. I worked there part-time for a pittance, but it was a great opportunity to experience an aspect of the British art scene first hand.

MR: Is that when you encountered the original Scratch Orchestra?

PD: I was looking out for something that



See Hear Films (1974): Philip Dadson (L) and Geoff Steven (R)

would help me unify my interests in visual art, music and sound. I discovered a course in experimental music making at the London Working Men's and Women's College. It was a Friday night class for a couple of hours and it happened to be run by Cornelius Cardew. Things opened up for me from that point. Prior to this, I had been thoroughly hooked on listening to players such as Bill Evans, John Coltrane, Thelonius Monk, Ornette Coleman and people like that. Seeing work in London like Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman performances and amazing jazz, by Roland Kirk, Elvin Jones Quartet (Coltrane had just died) and others, was a revelation. I was completely embroiled in the new art and contemporary music scene. But it was the Scratch Orchestra experience that had the most influence, bringing together artists, composers and performers in an experimental testing ground of ideas.

MR: It is amazing to think of Ornette Coleman's Free Jazz as being related to Jackson Pollock's abstract expressionist paintings. There is a correspondence.

PD: Absolutely.

MR: You were in England for two years?

PD: 18 months through 1968/69. During that time I became fully committed to the Morley College Group, a situation that evolved into the foundation group for Scratch Orchestra... Cornelius Cardew in particular became a mentor

for me... I also met Jim Allen in London at that time. He was on leave (from Elam) and he invited me to come back into sculpture to continue the kinds of things I was doing in London. That invitation gave me freedom to explore performance and intermedia processes in the context of sculpture. The area of sculpture was embracing anything and everything in new media... Super 8mm film, the first video portapaks... I was able to start a branch of Scratch Orchestra here and got involved in processes of composing, a fast learning curve of how to formulate ideas for a group and create structures of sorts to work with. The beginnings of composition for me.

MR: Who were some of your fellow students at Elam?

PD: Bruce Barber, David Brown, Kim Gray, Bronwen Muir, Lisa McAlpine, to name a few; and some of these, along with lecturers Jim Allen and Tony Green, became very receptive participants, a foundation group of sorts for what became the New Zealand Scratch Orchestra.

MR: How influential was Jim Allen?

PD: Jim was a mentor and enthusiast, and a terrific supporter of his students. Within the sculpture context of Elam I had free reign to do pretty much what I wanted to do. I felt constant support from both Jim Allen and Greer Twiss.

MR: How important is it for a student or a young artist to have someone to guide them along the early stages of their development?

PD: Very important I feel. It's not crucial but it furnishes you with confidence, reinforces your ability to carry out investigations, follow your natural curiosity lines and see where things go. It's good to have some guidance. That is what any teacher should ideally be a good guide.

MR: Jim Allen had ideas about politics and the environment?

PD: Yes, and also Greer Twiss. Greer was part of Sculpture and made works with socio-political references. Both Jim and Greer were politicised and very aware of a wider context that art operates in. Jim was particularly open to new media and new avenues for sculpture to move into. At that time, the definition of sculpture was an expanded one that transcended boundaries.

MR: It was no longer necessarily a tactile, three-dimensional medium. It could incorporate video, performance, and installation, whatever.

PD: Yes, as expressive or documenting tools, guided by concepts as well as embracing the modernist history of Dada, Futurism, Fluxus, etc.

MR: Then you became involved in setting up Alternative Cinema, the Auckland Filmmakers' Co-operative?

PD: Yes, around the time I left Elam. I was a friend of Geoff Steven, he was getting Alternative Cinema happening. I became very involved and helped set up the Hobson Street location. We also started a film company, See Hear Films. Mr See and Mr Hear.

MR: You were the soundman?

P.D. Yes. We were keen on doing experimental documentaries. After a lot of negotiation, we got the rights to film the Matakite land march. (*Te Matakite o Aotearoa*, 1975). That was a big one for me. I had always had a strong attraction to Maori culture but had never had the way into it. Then suddenly this privileged and intense experience of the culture. Unforgettable.

MR: With a Nagra?

PD: Yes. We were Whina Cooper's film boys... Once Whina Cooper gave it the nod we were in. It was just great. We followed the march as an integral part of it, for a whole month on the road.

MR: Sleeping on marae?

PD: Yes, different marae every night. Amazing initiation into Maoritanga. The whole marae protocol. It was wonderful. The sonic realm of a

hundred people snoring at night. Great.

MR: You also recorded and created the sound for *Test Pictures* (1975).

PD: I aimed to create a soundtrack using sound effects and voice like musical elements... I got so hooked on audio recording with a Nagra recorder, Sennheiser microphone and headphones. I love nothing more than going out and slowly panning around a landscape and listening to sound... It really tunes your ears. I think that probably had more influence on me, in terms of my continuum of interest in sound, sound performance and sound art than anything else. I still love good documentary too. Good documentary sound recording and good documentary filmmaking is very close to my heart.

MR: Your film and video work is, in a way, related to documentary?

PD: It has definite documentary influences, especially being so nature-oriented. I am attracted to working with natural situations. Any narrative in my work is most often derived from associations with natural elements.

MR: You work across media, your activities incorporating film, video, music and performance. What links these activities together?

PD: The fusing of interests in sound and visual expression, and exploring ways to do that. Film is one way, but also film with performance or video within an installation situation that includes strong sound elements. I guess sound has always been in the foreground for me, and I've found ways to prioritise sound within film or video. In a sense, it's a trigger for me.

MR: Hence creating anticipation with the sound often preceding the image in your video work?

PD: Yes. I used to love sound editing and still really enjoy visual editing particularly with sound. Letting the sound shape the cuts.

MR: Your camerawork and editing style is quite simple.

PD: It is. I love to go out and just shoot stuff and let my eye do the editing whilst shooting.

MR: So a lot of editing is done in camera?

PD: Yes. I like to manipulate things a little when I am editing but I do try to maintain the feeling of the camera shoot.

MR: Is there a lot of preplanning involved?

PD: Sometimes... I do make rough plots, but I

really also like to work with the moment. I love to immerse myself as if being the camera lens... Sometimes it will involve a particular type of camera set-up or device, like mounting a camera upside-down on a canoe, for example... It was wonderful getting on to digital editing and finding that I didn't have to do that so much. I could just flick things upside-down (electronically). But I found from shooting stuff in the Antarctic, long 360-degree pans with an upside-down camera, and then camera right way up, the framing on the upside-down stuff was actually better than trying to flip it later.

MR: Yes. I went through a stage in shooting Super 8mm film and DVCAM when I decided not to look through the viewfinder, not to compose the shots, and what I got was often more interesting than when I set up shots with my eye.

PD: I can believe it.

MR: Then I went to auto focus and auto exposure. Took the mind right out of it and let the machine run the show.

PD: Yes, I do too. I did a whole series of shots around this amazing stone environment in Dry Valley, Antarctica. A little area I nicknamed The Garden of God. An amazingly beautiful, pristine stonescape with a gravel, pebble floor with stones that had been carved by katabatic winds blasting sand around. Because it is an environment where you have huge sand dunes banked up against glaciers and things. Strange conjunctions of unexpected materials and elements; very much an environment of stone, ice, air and a little bit of water. I started exploring the terrain with the camera on wide angle, automatic, just following my nose with the camera. It was like my body being right down amidst the stuff. It was great, like meditations with a camera.

MR: Yes, it can tune you, can't it?

PD: It hones your attention and you are totally in the moment with it.

MR: How important are ideas?

PD: Very important and probably an influence from art school training.

MR: Specific ideas?

PD: I like concepts. I like work to have a conceptual base.

MR: Are you talking about theory?

PD: No, not so much theory. It can be something

kind of poetic. For example, I discovered an aerial out the back of Scott Base. It was part of a conglomeration of communications aerals that were nicknamed Aerial Farm. There was one central aerial that had this huge circular, tubular ring that went around it. Wires were suspended over it or attached to it and then went down to a base plate. The sound of that was particularly strong.

MR: The sound of the wind blowing through the aerial?

PD: I instantly saw, conceptually, that this object had the potential to look like a drawing and to also completely confuse you in terms of the illusion of how the circle appeared when the camera panned up and down it. I shot a few pans up and down the aerial in blizzardy weather, not being sure whether I could make anything of it. Then made a series of quite elaborate sound recordings of the base plate. Which was fantastic. Later on, when I looked at the material I thought, "Hey! Out of this minute or so of material there is a piece." It was all to do with slowing the material down, varying it, shifting it, changing. I also constructed a snow blast, which just obliterates your view.

MR: It is so perceptual. One looks at the aerial and asks oneself, "Is this two dimensional or three dimensional and what is it?" The space is so ambiguous. One goes on asking, "Are these elements advancing or receding?" Then, just as you think that you have figured it out the thing that you are looking at disappears in a snowstorm. Was it even there at all? What is the nature of physical presence? Maybe even, what is more enduring, that object, my perception or nature and what is the relationship between individual perception, cultural constructions and nature? Then the aerial fades back into view. And the sound of the wind blowing through the aerial wires creates so many resonating harmonies. The wind is "playing" the aerial, nature finds its own way with technology.

PD: Yes.

MR: When I first saw *Aerial Farm* it made me think of the cracked glass and sketch-like rendering of *The Bride Striped Bare by Her Bachelors Even* (1915–23) by Marcel Duchamp, as well as a drawing for a proposed cylindrical architectural tower by the utilitarian Russian artist Vladimir Tatlin.

PD: And also Da Vinci. It had the same sort of



Triad1 (1979): Gray Nicol (L) and Philip Dadson (R)

echoes for me.

MR: Is there some philosophy at work here?

PD: I guess that for me there are two primary ways of working. One is just to play with the materials, being led by the nose, the ear, the eye in terms of how things evolve. I find instrument building to be a little bit like that. You start one thing and one thing generates another. Usually, I find, particularly when I am devising a work that might be performative, might be something like *Gung Ho* or something of the From Scratch stuff. I did one recently called *Three Short Films* in which Dan Poynton performed.

MR: The pianist?

PD: A brilliant piano player. It wasn't so much like working with the materials or just playing the piano. There was a concept, to do with the title *Three Short Films*. I wanted to do something that was evocative of soundtracks but that also pushed the boundaries of the piano. The centrepiece, for example, is where the piano is wrapped up like a mummy. It has a curtain that goes all the way around it. It is almost funereal. But then the whole thing comes alive with lights underneath it, fans placed into it and everything sort of activates it. It is a bit like an installation site. It has a transformation thing. Conceptually that was to do with redefining piano in a sculptural or performative way, taking it outside of expected territory.

MR: You mentioned *Gung Ho*. Was that a reference to Rewi Alley?

PD: *Gung Ho 1,2,3,D* began as a piece based around a triadic concept. To do with active/



Ha (Conundrum Quartet#1)

passive reconciling forces. This notion that you can create a triad and if you then have an equilateral and you tessellate it in different ways you constantly create new forms out of the triadic shape. I was fascinated by this dialectic idea that you could have an opposing force, in a sense, something that would negate. And then you have something that comes between and reconciles or pulls the two things together and creates something new. It's an evolutionary kind of principle also, a philosophical idea. That became for me a seed for a lot of work, a whole series of works: *Triad One*, *Triad Two* up to about *Triad Seven*. *Gung Ho* started out like that and then Geoff Chapple, who was part of the group, was doing a documentary with Geoff Steven on Rewi Alley and discovered that the *Gung Ho* insignia was within an equilateral. All those things just came together and that was how the piece came to be called *Gung Ho 1,2,3,D*. The 1,2,3,D was to do with triadic relationships and 1,2,3 dimensions also.

MR: From *Gung Ho* to collaboration.

PD: Yes. Collaboration was the real kernel of that work, actually all that From Scratch stuff was based around working together.

MR: As an ensemble?

PD: With no specific soloist. Something I really loved about indigenous culture music forms too. That was where my interest in hocketing probably came from, that kind of rhythmic sharing of a rhythmic part between players. So you don't necessarily have any soloist but everybody has

an equal role, they are contributing to the final form. Half my composing evolution was to do with trying to find a rhythmic language that gave shape to that concept. Later I was able to put a name to it, hocketing, which was a medieval term to describe exactly the idea of sharing a rhythmic, melodic line between two or more players.

MR: Even if you look at something like Tapa.

PD: Yes. Pattern and utilitarian decoration totally embodies that. It is full of those principles.

MR: It's tradition too, isn't it?

PD: And it would usually bring people together to work together to create the patterns.

MR: You are interested in the idea of communication?

PD: Yes, totally. The art world is full of obscurities but the heart of it is this desire to communicate. I think people want to communicate and certainly that is a strong impulse for me. I like to share the work. I am not making it just for myself.

MR: There is something global about your work?

PD: An aspect that was reinforced from making work like *Earthworks*, which began as a kind of concept and took me to the outreaches of the world. Which was just wonderful. It took me a long time to really digest all the implications of that piece. It has a lot of conceptual layers to it. It was also dealing with the notion of earthworks, which, at the time, was a sculptural form; people moving large areas of earth. I wanted to do a piece that was using the earth in a planetary sense. It was very much a communications piece. It was about communications. It was about people doing physical reports on their being in a particular place at a particular time, all at the same time, all over the world.

MR: Now people have cell phones and the Internet.

PD: And, as Greer Twiss pointed out to me at the time, it had been done before. The Geophysical Year 1957 was one of the first attempts to create simultaneity in geophysical reporting around the planet. What I was doing was a humble little exercise, similar, but from an art basis.

MR: A halfway point between short wave and the Internet.

PD: Yes. The soundtrack is very much like listening to short wave radio.

MR: That was what appealed, the sound I

remembered from short wave but also the concern with the landscape. One has grown up within a regional, landscape art history but where is it in our films? How have contemporary art thought and practice been reflected in our cinema? *Earthworks* brought these things forward for me.

PD: Some nice unexpected things happened too. Going to the volcanic plateau, camping out overnight in an old army hut then going out onto the Desert Road at 6 o'clock in the morning to shoot that. All these people came. The filming was at Spring Equinox, but it snowed. Just a lovely kind of ambience to it.

MR: Were you familiar with what Michael Snow was doing?

PD: Not at that point, but later of course, yes... You find simultaneity in your efforts. Suddenly you have resonances of what other people have done or are doing... You try to make yours distinctly different but it becomes related.

MR: Certain ideas are around.

PD: The ideas are in the air. It was like formulating the ideas for From Scratch, which was kind of like a rhythmic cell concept. Later, when Lucy Lippard visited Auckland and heard what we were doing she said, "You should contact Steve Reich. He has done a lot of this stuff." Which I did. He sent me records. When I first got them I couldn't listen to them (thinking, "If I listen to this stuff I am never going to make anything.") But later I was able to digest it all. He did fantastic stuff.

MR: After I first saw Len Lye's *Free Radicals* it seemed pointless to make any more films. Eventually you find something.

PD: You find your own voice. Your way of dealing with it is different. But it is also wonderful reinforcement. I got to love that concept of universal resonance.

MR: Not just Western things.

PD: Things tend to go in circles, particularly with things like philosophy and spirituality.

MR: What is the difference between Quantum Mechanics and the Tao?

PD: I still have strong impressions of traveling to Papua New Guinea as part of a South Pacific Arts Delegation. A little can of worms at times... We went there with good motives and good intentions, without intentionally stepping on anyone's turf. Although some people said that

we were plagiarising Pacific cultures. I think that what we were doing was sufficiently true to itself and its own integrity. It was not a copy/borrow kind of situation. But you could draw comparisons. It comes down to resonances.

MR: You have your own type of instrumentation, created from industrial materials:

PD: Yes... the heart of it was trying to create a fresh sonic world. Sonic invention. Exploring the potential of new materials.

MR: How did the instrumentation for From Scratch evolve?

PD: It began with the early Scratch Orchestra. The very first From Scratch incarnation, practising the rhythmic cell ideas with Geoff Chapple, Bruce Barber, Gray Nichol, myself, we wanted to look for fresh sound. The idea was to incorporate found, bought or homemade instruments and so we started experimenting. I still have the beautiful old, white, glass light shades. I have whole tuned sets of those.

MR: Is that related to Harry Partch?

PD: It is now, when I think back.

MR: Did you know of him then?

PD: Didn't know anything about Harry Partch until the mid 80s while working on the Mark Two Pipe Stations that became the trademark of From Scratch... Going to the first South Pacific Festival in Rotorua and hearing a bamboo band. That gave me the idea for using PVC down pipes. That was the birth of the Mark One Pipe Stations. But Pipe Stations were never devised as a copy... PVC was an industrial material that produced a sound like bass guitars. It was totally different sound to bamboo sound, which was very mellow and had ethnic connections. Each (From Scratch) station was to be a source for up to four or more tuned elements. So you could have interplay between the elements at the one station. The Mark Two and Three versions of those pipe stations were quite sophisticated physical workout points.

MR: Do you work from musical scores?

PD: Yes, a kind of notation shorthand. Sometimes the things are notated in full.

MR: There is improvisation within the performance?

PD: There was. It evolved that way. The aim was to create an improvisation form from the rhythmic language. Which actually happened

more latterly, in the third or fourth incarnation of From Scratch. We got into things like *Eye Drum* and *Global Hockets* and *Pacific Plate*. Quite a lot of improvisation in those. Totally relying on the musicality and co-operative empathy of the other players. They were good musicians with an ability to improvise with the material.

MR: You have had an evolving musical ensemble?

PD: I wanted to keep evolving. That is an art thing... More latterly I have been creating a solo voice, basing things around improvisations with various instruments (*Sound Tracks* - Phil Dadson *Solo Improvisations*, atoll CD). It's opening up that intermedia territory in a freer way for me.

MR: You collaborated with the filmmaker Gregor Nicholas on two films, which interpreted From Scratch performances, *Drum/Sing* and *Pacific 3,2,1,Zero*.

PD: That was a very constructive and interesting process. We had two episodes of that. Initially, the first drive was to create a piece. We actually devised a piece that we called *Drum/Sing* specifically for the film. It was like a designer made piece for a film performance and then went on to become a piece in its own right. And then, at the same time, we were working on *Pacific 3,2,1,Zero*. Both were really interesting processes. They weren't easy because in both instances the recording was done first and the performance was done to playback, just to allow for the complicated filming processes; very organic, constantly shifting, moving film.

MR: Your video work encompasses almost the whole history of video art from straightforward documentation through to choreographed multi-screen installations (*Footstep Hocket*, 1990), which seem related to dance, rhythm and movement.

PD: Video is a medium I have gone back to whenever I've had an opportunity to go off and make a work by myself. It has usually been either performance with video or just straight video. I have always been attracted to the medium.

MR: Tell me about your involvement in setting up the Interdigitate Video Wall Festival in Auckland.

PD: Intermedia at Elam was concerned with time-based arts - video, film - people like Alison McLean and Niki Caro came through there - performance, sound, audio visual processes and finding ways to combine these things together

to create a fresh expression. That was the whole basis of what intermedia was about. The Aotea Centre, when it was first established, had a video wall that they advertised events on. I discovered that when they put all of the elements of the video together there was a 36 monitor video wall there. This was fairly new media then. So I made a proposal to them that we start an event that just featured the wall in their new theatre. At that time I had Lisa Reihana as a co-lecturer in intermedia. So the two of us got that event up and running over several different incarnations over several different years. It was an exciting opportunity for students, particularly thinking about how you compose video and sound and performance. We also threw it open to the wider video/performance community. There is a really nice archive of all that stuff held at Elam. It would be nice to show it at some point.

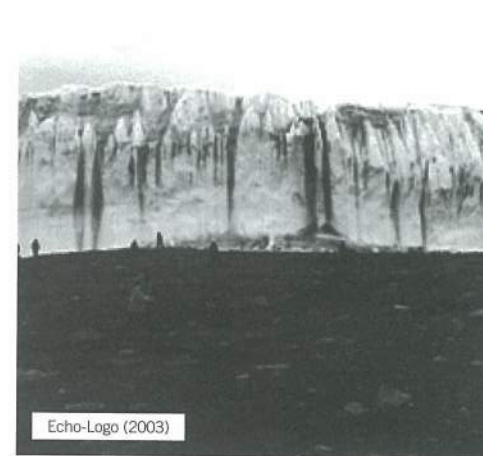
MR: Recently you have been working on the *Polar Projects*, based on your experiences in Antarctica. How did this project come about and what were your intentions?

PD: *Polar Projects* was very much a direct outcome of recording video and sound in Antarctica in the summer of 2003. Actually the story goes back to *Earthworks* because one of the locations in *Earthworks* was Scott Base, Antarctica and that fired up my interest in the place. The Non Science Visitors Programme was introduced about 20 years ago. I think I applied to go there about 16 years ago. I wanted to do something quite elaborate, a performance at the South Pole, all that sort of stuff. Obviously it got turned down. But when they introduced the Artists to Antarctica Fellowship in 1998 I put in another application and was delighted to be invited to go. In my proposal I said I wanted to research the sonic properties of stones and ice. I took a camera and sound gear, and shot a lot of landscape based material. For me it has some of the essential qualities and elements that interest me about the primal male/female qualities in nature. Very dynamic landscape.

MR: What is the sound like down there?

PD: It is pristine. There is not a lot of sound but whatever sound occurs is acute. Even footsteps in the snow.

MR: Dead sound?



PD: Not in the valleys, where you get beautiful echoes. In fact one of the pieces I did, *Echo Logo*, was actually a performance piece creating echoes off the face of the glacier. I was able to involve the scientists on site, and invented a structure for it on the spur of the moment... a simple number process with voice shouts and knocking rocks from the valley floor together. A little bit of protocol transgression, but then there's nothing more satisfying than picking up a couple of rocks and knocking them together.

MR: In *Flutter* we see a piece of fabric attached to a bamboo pole being buffeted by an Antarctic wind which comprises the soundtrack. What is the significance of this piece?

PD: One of the attractions for me was the kinetic motion of the bamboo pole that the flags are attached to. There's something unexpected about seeing bamboo in Antarctica. They have these poles, with red flags for marking safety and danger areas, and yellow flags for pee spots in the field. And a flag is a signifier for territory and colonization. But I like the simplicity of its motion and sound. Seeing the bamboo going through its various modes of vibration. It's a beautiful form. And the sound of a 60K wind is fantastic.

MR: In *Stone Map*, the camera spins and swirls rapidly through the landscape. Is there a performance element involved here?

PD: It feels like a performance when I'm doing it. I think that I really amused the science team who would come out of their tents at midnight to

see me swirling around in the distance outside around a pile of stones. They thought I was wacky. We had terrific conversations to do with mutual obsessions. I was obsessed with what I was into and they were obsessed with theirs. That science/art thing actually has a lot in common. The filming was almost like a documentation of the body performance.

MR: Is there a sense of now, of being totally concentrated on the moment, involved with that?

PD: Totally. That was something that Leon Narbey picked up on when he saw that work, he said that he could really feel the body behind the camera. I was really pleased with that. If it transmits that then it goes a long way to transmitting what I would hope to communicate.

MR: You are currently working with old Super 8mm film footage?

PD: Yes. Stuff that I shot in 1985. I am reconfiguring it for a video wall at the Film Archive.

MR: Is the footage of traveling with From Scratch?

PD: Yes. It was a series of 10 Super 8mm film reels that I shot on the road with From Scratch. I tried everything I could with a Super 8mm camera while I was on tour. Had a lot of fun with it. I love the Super 8 footage. It is hard to convey that on video. But video conveys something.

MR: You taught at Elam for over 20 years. As a teacher, what is the best advice that you would give to an aspiring artist?

PD: Follow your lights, be aware of history and don't be too limited by theory and other people's ideas. Do anything that gives free reign to your natural sense of curiosity and investigation into the nature of things. That, to me, is the freedom and delight of being involved in art making.