

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

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Stephen Greer (SG): I've been starting a lot of these conversations by asking people about their first or early encounters with theatre or performance. I'm really wary of the demand for origin stories, but I still like the idea of first impressions or first influences because I also like a good story. How did you get into this profession, or into making work for a living?

Bryony Kimmings (BK): I was a terrible student and a bad council estate badass bitch when I was young and I nearly dropped out many times. I ended up doing my A Levels, but I was stoned a lot of the time and not into anything apart from drama. I liked doing drama and I applied to Brunel because my friend went there and I'd gone and visited him a couple of times to go raving and I thought I know the place so maybe I'll go to university. I was working in H&M and thought this cannot be my life. I went there because someone was there and I thought I was going to study plays and acting, I didn't know what drama school was. When I got there, it was this weird course that didn't have any plays on it and didn't have any acting and it was just Franko B and Marina Abramović and all of this weird stuff. A lot of people on the course thought it was theatre and were pissed off about it, but I was like these people are fucking awesome. I remember going to see Live Culture at the Tate in 2003 and getting into this weird after party and watching Ursula Martinez pull a hanky out of her vagina and was just like, this is my tribe. Being a working-class loudmouth from a single parent family, I didn't have the same rules that a lot of people had around what you should say and how you should behave. I think I felt like I'd found my tribe there. I'd told my

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

mum when she said that I could go that I was going to do drama but I'd do a law conversion course because she didn't really want me to do drama and I promised her that I'd buy her council flat for her. I told her that you could transfer it to law and that I would do that and then about halfway through the course, I'd changed my hair and I was like a totally new person and I remember thinking, I'm going to be an artist, there's no way that I'm going to do law. Going to Glasgow solidified that. The year we graduated we went to our first NRLA and people were seemingly making money doing it for a job, so I was like this is it, I'm doing it. It took me ten years to actually do it, but it was that course and bleeding in galleries that I thought something about it just feels right. I don't know why, it just connected with my spirit I suppose.

SG: What was that first year up to the National Review like? Was that at the end of your degree studies?

BK: Yes, we were being taught by Stelarc and by Helen Paris who is one of the members of Curious. Helen had encouraged us to go up, she said we're going up there and it was like going to Mecca. There were four of us in this company that we'd started and we'd been super geeky and were making lots of work. We went up there and stayed in the hostel on Jamaica Street near the NRLA and we'd brought all these outfits. We'd made these little boxes that we were going to leave round the venue and they had self-addressed envelopes in them and we wanted people to write back to us. I remember us thinking it was really serious to be there, that we were going to meet someone, it's going to happen, but it was just people getting pissed. When you're outside of a certain set, you just want in. I remember thinking oh my god, there's Forced Entertainment, there's Franko B, you know. That year, I remember seeing Tehching Hsieh who is a very famous Korean American performance artist who I'd studied. He wasn't there performing but he was there, and no one had seen him for twenty years. I remember going and sitting next to him and saying you're my hero, and him going 'heroes are stupid'.

SG: [Laughs].

BK: [Laughs]. And I was like, arrrgh ouch! It was a funny, little, weird, subversive crew of people that seemed my group.

SG: Was that at the Arches that year?

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

BK: It was the Arches. We went every year until it finished. I think after that, it was a couple of years at the Arches and then it went to Tramway where it was never quite as good. It was never that dark, underground club with music coming from next door.

SG: Yes, someone was telling me the other day that the National Review without the dirt wasn't quite the same. There was a bit too much space and a bit too much light at Tramway.

BK: One of the best bits was of course seeing work back-to-back all day every day with that really glossy brochure and really going through it and being in the queues constantly with people, that was great, but it was always at the Arches that post-last show, pissed, that was the best bit. I remember Franko B running this weird club night where there was gay porn on every screen and we were like this is amazing. It did change a bit, but we still carried on going. I think we were older so maybe it was less about the partying, but it was a shame that it didn't have that dirt. It was grimy at the Arches.

SG: I really miss it as a space.

BK: My partner went to Glasgow School of Art to do his MA, but not until 2007 and when I said to him 'did you ever go there?' because he makes performance now, he's not a visual artist, he was like 'no, never heard of it'. I've been telling him all about it. I've got the old brochures and I've been looking at them saying this was amazing. Now, I probably just think about those performances when I think about performance art. I don't sit and think about looking all over the world, because Nikki had done all that work for us. It was like being in a sweet shop. It's a shame it doesn't exist because I feel very out of the loop. I feel like it doesn't exist anymore, it does, but I don't feel like it. It always felt like an anthology of what was happening at the time. It's not possible to do that now.

SG: I'm trying to think of the reasons why it's not possible. Maybe it's partly to do with Nikki moving onto other things and it maybe does require quite a singular person who is going to make it happen, but then also, the money part and the building part is such a huge part of the story.

BK: I went to a lot of festivals around that time, like In Between Time, before SICK! which is still around and before BUZZCUT, before that there was NOW festival in Nottingham. For the first few years we were always at festivals, but the NRLA was the big one. It was always more exciting to watch the artists that were coming in from abroad, for me, because I guess

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

after a while, you know what's going on in Britain and you know what you've got, and you might see the same things. It just felt so expansive. I think it's not possible for it to exist without one person because of the amount of effort it must've taken for her to programme it. The quality was always so high that she must've at least sat and watched the videos if not gone to the place to find the person. She always seemed to manage to find these people and put them on and you'd be like 'I didn't even know Raimund Hoghe existed', I didn't know who Ivana Müller was, I didn't know those people. She seemed to be able to curate the most amazing plethora of artists. Will and I have spoken about it because we were in the middle of trying to rewild a large amount of land and talking about having studios and festivals, and I have said to him, the thing that would be amazing is if we could replicate the NRLA. It was all fed by courses, there were lots of students who would then come up and it all felt very academic. Even though Vaginal Davis is a doctor and she does study, it doesn't feel academic when you're watching the work but it does come from an academic place because it feels like it's in opposition to something so you have to understand what you're fighting against and therefore you have to be an intellectual in some way. We were also in the heyday of political interest in creative industry, so we were in the luxurious space that we didn't even know we were in. At that time art was sexy. After leaving university, I was working at a government quango funded fully by the government that was about the creative industries. The creative industries used to be a thing we'd talk about, whereas now, you probably wouldn't hear that lingo. It was all about giving artists the tools to be businesspeople so that they could bring in economy and that's not an interest of the government, so you don't have that money and infrastructure encouraging people to go and work within that, there's not that same ladder. I work with a lot of young artists and we were quite lucky because we were taught how to be artists, we were taught how to make money, we were taught all those foundational things because there was actually an economy to be able to work in. Now, it doesn't seem like those things pull together to allow you that trajectory.

SG: Yes, that sense of progression or possible progression.

BK: Of course, any other job that you are employed in, you're a cashier, then you're a floor manager, then you're an area manager and you're the head of the company. I can only talk about the early 2000s, but it did feel like you had a possible career and NRLA was part of

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

that because to be a big artist, you would be programmed in the main programme. We got as far as being programmed in the emerging artists part of it but the aspiration would be that one day we might be in the main programme. Now, I would hope as an artist at my level, if it still existed, I would be asked to do something there. When it went, I very much moved into the Fringe because that wasn't there anymore so you have to find the new outlet. That sort of slightly took away the potential to be really experimental. It doesn't mean that you're making work that you don't think will connect because I was always making work that was accessible. I don't think I would've been pissing in a bucket and not telling anyone why, but your tools got smaller.

SG: Yes, the toolkit changes shape or becomes smaller in the context of the Fringe's audiences and the Fringe's economy.

BK: It's sad because of course you're talking about a sophisticated audience which in itself I struggle with, this idea that there is a certain type of person that can consume your work. At least having worked on council estates with young lads and wanting to make them feminists and make work with them, I would hope that my practice would have connected with people who never access art all the way through to being able to perform at the Tate. Performance as we know works in these phases, I remember hearing Lois Keidan talk when they had got Live Culture at the Tate for a weekend, and you were walking into rooms seeing Forced Entertainment instead of seeing Rothko. I remember her speaking and saying it's so funny how we're fashionable again. I remember thinking I wonder when the last time was, and now I think when are we going to get that heyday again because it does reinvent and it comes in different ways. The 1990s would've been the Forced Entertainment theatre side of it and maybe we've had the visual art side of it a bit more. It's a funny old beast because it does require an element of education which on one hand I hate and on the other hand, as a geek who likes knowing about art and understanding the history of art, I want that too.

SG: What's the bit that you hate? The bit that's hierarchical and privileged and exclusive about it?

BK: I guess so. I think there is a part of me that feels like I should be able to bring my nan to stuff and that something about that work, even on a visceral level, really sucks her in and gets her juices flowing, gross [laughs]. My favourite works, no matter how nutty they might

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

appear, would do that. They wouldn't be high-brow and I struggle with things that need to be explained to people. I have a well of experience that means I might be able to sit and say oh, that reminds me of this and makes me think about this and I can articulate what that thing is doing to me, but it doesn't mean that the person sitting next to me who hasn't got an art degree couldn't have felt the same way that I felt but just wouldn't have the tools to articulate it. I think that's neither wrong or right, it's just always a shame to me that we don't have a much wider idea of what art is as a commonplace people in the UK.

SG: So, that transition to the Fringe, would *Sex Idiot* have been the first one at the Fringe, at the Roxy?

BK: It was also my first work, and I was nearly thirty. That gap in between the live art-focused, more audience member, I mean we were making art but it was dreadful, we were learning how to cut our teeth. I think it reminds me a lot about when I was a teenager, which I was thinking about the other day in therapy where Kurt Cobain had died and a friend of mine had said to me, grunge is dead. They'd obviously heard it on MTV or something and I remember taking it really literally and thinking she's telling me that I shouldn't wear these clothes anymore, she's telling me that this is over, and I remember totally changing how I looked and now when I think about it, she was just saying something that came into her head. I just jettisoned it all and was like fuck, grunge is dead, must like seventies disco now. Similarly, the NRLA stopped and this group that I was making art with all went in separate directions: two girls had babies and the other guy moved to New York. I was running Chisenhale Dance Space, I was still in an ecology of experimentalism, but I was much more focussed on dance, not through my own practice as I'd sort of stopped making art, and I remember being so bereft that I'd lost those people that I was working with but also this community. Richard DeDomenici always maintained that it's still there, just keep plugging away, but I'd watch him getting paid two hundred quid to do something and I didn't want to do that. I thought I want a career and I've got this career in Chisenhale, I can't leave it and make work for ten people in a warehouse, I'm not that sort of person. I had this thing of I'm going to stop making art, I'm going to become a producer and produce really good, experimental dance and maybe I'll run Sadler's, that can be my new idea. I remember not really feeling it like I've felt performance, and the Junction said to me, having supported some of the work we'd made as young emerging artists, you know we've got this scheme

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

and it'll pay for you to take a show to Edinburgh and I didn't even know what Edinburgh was. I knew it was a festival and I remember genuinely thinking this is no NRLA, this is just a load of desperate people shaking buckets and being pricks, but the idea that it was funded was suddenly like okay, maybe somehow I can bring these three ideas together. I love performance but I don't feel like I have a home, I have something to say but I don't know how to say it yet, and there is this money. It felt like there was a choice. At the time, I was going out with a visual artist who I'd met at the NRLA the year it finished, and he had a practice. He was a visual artist, so he went to a studio every day and he sat and developed his practice. He made work and he was doing art. I think that's a real visual art thing. With performance, you don't keep feeding your beast because you don't have that opportunity, you don't have a studio. I remember him saying, what have you got to say and I was thinking, shit, what do I have to say? There's this opportunity and they're saying they like me, I'm a good performer perhaps or they just need someone to give this fucking money to. I remember sitting with Stacy Makishi who is a friend of mine and crying and saying is this it for me. I wanted to be an artist and I just couldn't see how to do it. I remember telling her Tom's said what do you have to say, and he was drawing pictures of cats coming out of people's arseholes so what have you got to say. I got this chlamydia test and this woman had said to me, you know that we can call everyone that you might have given a sexually transmitted infection to. If you'd like that service, you just have to give us a list of numbers and we'll anonymously text them that they have to get tested. I remember coming home and thinking that was the weirdest thing. Imagine getting a text on your phone saying you might have chlamydia or any kind of sexually transmitted infection. I had this conversation with Stacy and saying that's the only interesting thing that's happened to me this year and she said, you call them. I was like, what and she said, you should call them. That would be a practice, that would give you something to do. I didn't have a story in me. That's always why I didn't make art because you see Marina Abramović making art in the time of war with guns and carving things and setting things on fire and me thinking I just want to live in Hackney and get pissed all the time. I don't have that. So yes, that first year was *Sex Idiot* and it was the Roxy. The idea was because it was East to Edinburgh and because it was run by Ant, by Anthony Roberts, and he was so into performance and I knew him from NRLA, I knew that he loved Richard, and I knew that he really had his finger on the pulse in terms of who was around and in terms of good quality. He'd programmed something the year before that was

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

on a bus and I'd gone to it on this tour of Edinburgh that they'd sent us on and it was the only place that I felt tiny remnants of that experimentalist tribe. Holly and Ben – before Holly became Hunt and Darton – were eating food, I can remember this exhibition, they were eating food and doing poos and taking photos of the food and then of the poo, and as the festival was going along, they had more and more pictures of food and then poo. Miss High Leg kick was there doing her very Duckie-style show and I remember thinking this is okay. So, when he asked me would I like this money, I knew that it was live art, it was trying to create a programme or space for live art within the festival. I think if he'd not said that, I probably would've said no, but because it was him and because I was working at Chisenhale so I had a studio and I had Stacy as my mentor, I had a pursuit. It felt conceptually sound. I thought it can sit in a theatre context because I did a theatre degree and I understand that people sit and then they clap. I never wanted to make anything for a gallery, I didn't think that I was capable of doing that, so it was a perfect storm. I've never done one of my solo shows anywhere but a festival, whether that's introducing it to the world in Australia and then bringing it over or not. Luckily the first few years I was [there] through Escalator and I was being called things like the princess of performance art, or the live artist from the east. I felt like, although perhaps that's dulled down slightly, I was being afforded the ability to mesh with the run of the mill audience that would see a poster and say that's called *Sex Idiot* that looks like fun, and somehow surreptitiously infiltrate their mind tank with performance art. That felt like a practice that I fell into, but it was the perfect thing for me that I could trick people into being entertained and widen their perception of what theatre could be.

SG: It's interesting that in both of those, I'm thinking of *Sex Idiot* and *7 Day Drunk*, there's a commitment to a real thing that you are doing or have done.

BK: Yes, also with *Credible*, that was when that ended because *Credible* was to become a pop star for a year managed by a nine-year-old kid. We did that before we made the show. They were always called social experiments and I would say I was in the same vein as Victoria Melody who would call herself a social anthropologist without the training. There's an element of 'there's a problem, this is the problem, people don't talk about sex and women enough, about being promiscuous enough, we don't talk about the joy of being a slut'. Then, it's 'what can we do in the real world to prove that this is a problem that needs

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

fixing?', and then, 'how do you by performing it, fix it?' Over time, I became obsessed with the fact that this is theatre and who cares, no one comes to see it, we're not changing the world, we're preaching to the same people. With *Credible*, I was really into Joey Skaggs, who is a prankster and Mark McGowan who is a similar artist in Britain. They prank the press to get them to talk about important things like the monarchy. Mark McGowan released a press release to say he's eating a swan and there are pictures of him on the front page of *The Sun*. Of course, he never ate a swan, but suddenly he's able to have two lines about the fucked-up state of the monarchy on the front page of *The Sun*. With *Credible* it was kind of like yes, I'm going to the Edinburgh festival, maybe one thousand people will see the show, maybe even more, but the most important thing is we hired a media agency and with that show we reached 1.7 million people within the press so then you start to say okay, yes, it's theatre. It is the same old people but it's surreptitiously doing this other job. Then I was able to align once again my feeling of this job is stupid, it's the only thing I can do and yet I hate it, with the feeling that it's doing a good job.

SG: At what point do you get involved with Forest Fringe? Was it Andy or Debbie or Ira, or someone else in that group?

BK: When I first went and did *Sex Idiot* at the Roxy, I was happy with that venue, they seemed a lot less aggressive than most of them. But my friend Hannah who was being my producer asked if I'd ever heard of Forest Fringe. I said no and she was like, 'follow me'. It was when they were still in...

SG: In the church, at the Forest café?

BK: Yes. I remember once again walking in there and being like ah, these guys! It wasn't exactly my vibe, people weren't bleeding but Action Hero were there and Search Party and Greg McLaren, artists that I would say were much more theatrical and they didn't seem like they were from the same world as me. I'd never seen any of those people at the National Review of Live Art for example, but there was this idea that no one gets paid. I didn't do anything there, but I kept going back there to the parties. I knew that Amanda Palmer was there, so I went then. I remember Greg McLaren. He said 'oh come and do live art speed date'. I remember thinking 'ooh live art, no one says that anymore'. I can't even remember what I did, I was in the basement...

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

SG: I went to look it up this afternoon, it was called something like..

BK: ..the Hall of Gratuitous Praise? So I was in the basement, it was seedy, and I actually met my long-term collaborator since, Tom Parkinson, that night. This is the sort of the thing that I don't remember because I'm always drunk or something, but he said I walked into the dressing room and I was wearing a piano key necktie, I don't remember having a piano key necktie and I was like – this is such a cunty thing to admit to – 'where's my rider?'

SG: But you had acquired one.

BK: He was like oh god, who's that wanker? I felt slightly at the periphery of that, I felt like I was cutting my own separate course and I was enjoying being the agent provocateur of the Fringe and I didn't necessarily want to join a collective of people that were trying to do the same thing because I've always wanted to do these things by myself. I didn't want to join in, but I would always pop in.

BK: I think the following time that we went there we tried something at Forest Fringe. It had moved to Leith, and Tim and I tried an early, half an hour version of *Fake It 'Til You Make It* and I was very thankful. Andy and I had started talking a lot after that. I think he joined my board and he and I talked a lot. He's from Cambridge and I'm from outside of Cambridge and we had big plans. I think when it moved, it became more professional. Ira was much more organised. It grew up a bit and then I felt like I wanted to show work there a bit more. It's a strange relationship that I had with Forest Fringe because of that. I don't know what that is about me, it's probably a cunty part of me that's like 'yeah, you're the cool kids but I'm cooler'. It's so gross but it's always worked for me and sat well with my sense of self which is probably dreadful.

SG: So, you do the early version or the scratch version of *Fake It 'Til You Make It* and that's at.. that's the Traverse on the following year because that's where I saw it.

BK: Funnily enough, we'd then made that show and we went to Australia, we went to Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, and Brisbane. I had an agent by then, Avalon. I think I got my agent just after *Credible* and things become different when you join an organisation like that. It becomes about bottom line and the fact that you can, we did, make money on *Credible* for the first time. I think that was the last time that it was funded. There were three shows that were funded by Escalator and then there was never going to be any more money, so it

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

became this thing of okay, if you're going to go, you have to make money or you have to be able to fund it yourself which I wasn't interested in and don't have that kind of money. So, the Traverse offered, everyone offered because of *Credible* and they'd heard it was going well in Australia and a lot of the programmers are there anyway and it won quite a few awards out there. We took the Traverse for the name. I'd always wanted to do the Traverse, but they gave us the little one and of course, being a diva, I was like fuck you. I was pregnant by then, so I was pulling no punches and I said to them in a meeting, you're a fool. This is a hit show, we know it because we're performing it and it's really connecting with people. Avalon pushed for it to be in Traverse 1. It sold out before we'd even got there. I remember getting there and being quite annoyed about it and thinking we're going to make some money but we could have made a lot more, but then I suppose the scramble for tickets was maybe a good thing because we kept tweeting that we were selling out and it was gone by the weekend before. We ended up with Assembly doing an extra show in the big space on the Mound with five hundred people, on a Sunday. Mark Rylance came and I remember him coming up to us afterwards and me thinking I know that man's face and after he walked away, I was like fuck that was Mark Rylance [laughs].

SG: I think it was between *Fake It 'Til You Make It* and *I'm a Phoenix, Bitch* that I got slightly obsessed with the design of your shows. I don't know if you had been working with the same designer.

BK: I always work with David [Curtis-Ring].

SG: There was something about both of them [where] there was this slightly hallucinogenic version of the English landscape that was really recognisable to me [laughs]. I grew up on the edge of London and Kent, an estuary town, so I don't have any kind of rural imaginary.

BK: David is similar. We're both council kids. We both grew up on council estates. Near the countryside, but not close enough to know what the countryside is. I've got this lovely article that I think is now in a book, but Andy wrote a lovely article about me for the book with Maddy Costa that came out recently. He's such a sensitive watcher of work and he's got a great memory. He talks a lot about the slightly trippy, slightly like.. not quite glamorous [space], and I think that's the space in which David and I revel in. You kind of know where we are, but we're not because we're on a stage so we're putting on a show. It's never meant to look like a kitchen, it should always look a bit like a slightly too big kitchen.

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

We've got very similar aesthetics. One of our constant references for the work that we make is *Labyrinth* and especially that bit in the junk yard where the woman is like, 'you forgot your toy'. Every single show we've made it's like 'don't forget to have the *Labyrinth* reference'. Yes, slightly fictional versions of places. I don't know how to articulate what that is, it's just a very similar sense of visual identity. My show is basically his work. Of course, the content is mine, but the look and feel of them is both of us together and he's the man who makes everything.

SG: That's obviously a long-running relationship. I'm always interested in that at a practical level; how it works and how it unfolds. Are you having a conversation from a really early stage about what you think the shape or the vibe or the tone of the show is, and then he appears one day with these beautiful images? Or is it far more piecemeal and more incidental, and you discover it as you go?

BK: On a practical level, David and I use a lot of WhatsApp and we always have a Pinterest. And I definitely always have an idea of the visual identity of something, like in *Sex Idiot*, shamanism and ornithology were mixed together because they were two things that I was interested in at the time. I try not to second guess my taste. For example, *Mega* is just 1990s because I was really obsessed with the nineties at that time. I don't try to pretend that I'm anything other than what I'm feeling and I say that to my students a lot. If you see a leaf and it makes you feel great, and it's that day that leaf is giving you that feeling and it somehow relates to what you're making about medical sciences or chlamydia, then you take that leaf and you put it on the board and it lives in the world that we're making this show in. *Phoenix* for example, there are myths, tropes of femaleness, and there is also this real place, this cottage on a hill and it's haunting me. A lot of the things will be from me going here's an early version of the script and him saying I love this idea that she's had her heart removed, wouldn't she have blood on her nightie if her heart has been removed? And me saying well, it's a metaphor and him saying yes, but if it's a metaphor it can also be a real thing and it can confuse us into remembering that you've spoken about that metaphor and it will allow us to continue that metaphor. We're not looking at it in a literal way, we're looking at it as a memory of something that has been said. It's so interesting. First, we'll fire things at each other, such as the world in which this show happens looks like this, it doesn't have any spikes, it's all rubber, and so we'll remove things and add things and pare it down. Then,

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

there becomes a need for what it needs to do practically and then there becomes scenes.

He does come in with creations, he does walk in with a gown and say this? I'll either say god no, or that's it, or we need to add feathers and then it will be it, or make a big hole in it and burn it. We do a lot of playing and then all of a sudden, it becomes very practical. For example, I can't move in it, I can't breathe in it and you have to let it out. He's not the best at that because he wants to make these sculptural things and I'm like okay, but this has to last for fifty shows.

SG: Yes, I have to be in it for ninety minutes and I have to do it fifty times.

BK: It's our two minds moving playfully together. Luckily, we watched the same films. It's always films. We'll say, it's like *Death Becomes Her*, it's always shit films.

SG: I've been thinking a bit recently about how much of live art is about the quite small scale, about the solo performer, almost like a raw body, it's very DIY. I know a lot of that is to do with the economy of so much live art, that no one's got the money to do more. And then I've been challenging my mental image of that and thinking well, what does live art look like when it's a practice at scale - when you do go okay, how do I produce something which has commercial viability, or which has a funding grant behind it from an institution? Is it helpful to you to think about live art that expansively, do you think about these more recent shows and things like *A Pacifist's Guide to the War on Cancer*? Is that still in your head [as] an expansion of a live art practice or would that be a stretch?

BK: I think the *Pacifist's Guide* is an anomaly. The works in succession that are solos come from a sensibility. Even when we were making *Phoenix*, which had a three-hundred grand budget, it's important to me that the technical side of it is seen, that this is a show, it doesn't become we've got more money so let's hide the mechanics of it because that is part of the storytelling. I'm always standing there telling you a story and we go into the world of the story and we get tangled up in that world, but there is always a person standing and saying hello, my name is Bryony Kimmings, this thing happened to me, now let's go and have a look at it. No matter what you say about budget, the sensibility of needing to remind people to step away from the show and say, you're safe it's okay, or remember what I said earlier and don't forget that. That has always remained very important to the connection that I have with my audience, so it has never felt helpful to make it all shiny, or to make it so that I can't possibly step outside of this because I would ruin all illusion because illusion is

false. It's not helpful for me to step away from my audience any further than I possibly can. Yes, we use the more amazing plethora of things that money buys, but the DIY element of it and putting on things to become things to say I'm this now, is so integral to being able to tell the story for me. It's always felt exciting to have a bigger budget, but it's never felt exciting to use it to step away from the spit and sawdust of one lone performer. Actually, the next show that I'm writing is returning as much as possible to one performer on stage talking. I don't feel the need to try and hide things. I want to have six hats or a projection and that be it. There was, with *Pacifist Guide* for example, this impossibility that comes from a £750,000 budget with eighteen performers in it that you do step away from the ability to genuinely connect with people. Actors for me are not performance artists, they can't take you somewhere imagined, they just pretend that they are in that place. Trying to get them to speak as themselves was a massive hurdle for them. The spit and sawdust were so lost in that show that I hated that show and I still regret how I used the opportunity, but it has afforded me the ability to make something like *Phoenix*. The whole idea of that scheme that Judith set up at Complicité was to be able to recognise that there was a massive gap between an artist who had achieved a modicum of success in the small-scale touring circuit and them being able to move into the mid-scale. That's a massive problem in British theatre and it's not something that you can do easily. It's also not something that you know, you have to learn how to do it. Simon McBurney was teaching me how to do that, but what happened was, for example, my team who I would take to the ends of the earth, weren't allowed to work with me. I had to work with a different designer and so immediately, I lose connection with my visual identity. I wanted to make a musical so we had to have actors and I'm stepping one step further away from being able to communicate directly to the audience. Late in the day of that show, I recorded this voice over in the original, not in the touring version. It was me somehow trying to say, 'I'm here, just listen to what I'm saying, and I wish I was there but I can't be'. It was a real lesson in losing one's voice to a big organisation. Now of course, if they offered me ever again, which I'm sure they won't because afterwards I was very vocal about how I lost my identity within that work and I think that bothered them that I outed them in that way because I think they thought they were being supportive. But if they offered me something now, I would have the self-belief and the self-confidence to say okay, this is still one woman on a stage and there may be other performers in it, but the thing that is important and the thing that people connect

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

with in my work is me. It's difficult for me to acknowledge that without feeling shame. Again it's because I'm that kid in the queue at National Review looking at Franko B and Tehching Hsieh saying idols are stupid and me being like, I'm not an artist. But also really trying to call myself as a live artist, call myself a performance artist, because I see the value in that work and what it does to audiences. It's a funny one. I have found it difficult to marry a growing career and the offers that come in from that and also maintain a foot on the ground that says this is the work I make, this is what is important about it and no matter what size it gets, that is its heart and that is still the same woman who stood on stage with fifteen seats at the zoo saying I don't know what I'm doing. I always feel like I don't know anything about making art. I have surrounded myself with the same people and that's helpful. In *Phoenix* for example, there is a voice telling me off all the time. At the time I just remember being so plagued by him in a studio with the guys and asked if they could change my voice and Lewis was messing around with the pitching of it and I said put me in a man's voice and spent ten minutes telling myself off and just saying it out loud. My therapist has said you need to acknowledge that it's there for it to be able to go. All of the guys afterwards were like, dude that was amazing. He should be in the show and I'm thinking that guy shouldn't be in the show, but it's great because he's sort of gone now as much as I can ever get rid of that negative voice. I've named it and people really liked that part of the show.

SG: Bittersweet.

BK: Yes, this cisgender dude.

SG: Wouldn't it be nice if they didn't love self-loathing? [laughter]

BK: This straight white cisgender dude who hates me, is horrible to me all the time.

SG: The last thing that I'm interested in talking about is people's sense of who their peers are, or who their co-conspirators are, or who their fellow travellers are. You mentioned a range of different artists, including Stacy Makishi as someone who was an early mentor to you. So right now or maybe over the last however many years, whose work are you still looking at across the horizon and doing a little nod of yes, that's still my tribe?

BK: Scottee, who's a friend and my son's godmother, I still feel connected to and I still feel he's doing the work that we all wanted to do. We used to share a studio and he doesn't feel like he's deviated, not in a bad way, I think it's good. He's still on the track that I'm on. Brian

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

Lobel for sure, because he's always wholeheartedly on a crusade and he's never wavered, and I really enjoy that about his work. It's always so conceptually satisfying. Action Hero, I still really love and respect, and I love their work. Some people I haven't seen in a long time, but I always consider Nic Green and Vic Melody such brilliant artists. I like it when people don't deviate from the thing that they geeked out on when we were young, the thing that they've always wanted to do and they still do it. I still love everything Richard DeDomenici makes and want him to be a famous, weird comedian who is making loads of money because I want everyone to know who he is. If things come to Brighton and I would actually buy a ticket, it's probably the people that were my peers. I don't connect too much or have much time for the newbies because I don't have time, it's not that I don't love and think they're brilliant, it's just the thought of going to a show is so rare that I would be so disappointed if I watched something rubbish, so I find myself a bit reticent to use my one evening a week to do it. If I see Blast Theory popping up, I'd want to see their work. I wouldn't go and see Forced Entertainment anymore because I spent money on two or three shows and thought what am I doing here? Figs in Wigs, I'd always want to watch. That's that side. If Andy [Field] makes a work, I'll probably watch it. But then there's also the side of people who are from Soho theatre, and I very much got into comedy from being an associate there, so Dr Brown, Bourgeois & Maurice, Jonny Woo, and the Duckie lot, I'll always check in with them. I do feel like my tribe is still the same. Every now and then, someone will say you have to see this artist, there a couple of dance artists that I'm following. As you get older, you lose contact with the scene and I'm not a social beast anymore, I don't go to festivals, so I've lost that sort of younger, academic interest in things which I miss.

SG: It takes up so much time more than anything else.

BK: And I also think because money is scant, and making good work is hard anyway, it's sort of died. Ivor [McCaskill and Rosana Cade], those two, make me happy. I would go to Duckie. I do sometimes see artists that are new and I think, go on. I couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't walk on stage and then go to another club and do it, I've done that. All of the old crew, Marissa, I'm happy that they keep going. I know how hard it is to keep going, I know how little of my time is now spent on theatre. It's so much telly and film because that's where the money is. I do think it's probably the boring old same old that I've always loved.

Live Art in Scotland: Bryony Kimmings

SG: Yes. I ask that [question] at the end. It's the least structured thought I have in my head, but I'm always so interested in that wider network of people, both intimate friendships and people whose work that we always turn up for.

BK: I would always watch a Complicité show. I would always spend time in the company of that company. I think Lepage.. and we see a lot of opera now because Will works a lot in opera. I go through phases of getting geeky about certain things. Right now, I'm into opera, but it doesn't mean that next week I won't be like visual art is amazing. It's nice to go on a little holiday and you bring things back to your own practice that you wouldn't have done if you hadn't geeked out on something for a while. I really love Lucy McCormick, now she I would turn up for. I feel like I've slightly gone 'you do it and you do it better, off you go, good luck. I think you're a superstar'. Ann Liv Young, I will always watch. My favourite artists are probably still the ones that I saw at the National Review. They're just etched in my mind as such formative experiences, and I talk about those performances when I teach, and people probably think 'what are you talking about, that was 2003? Like Ivana Müller or Iona Kewney, who are they? They don't even make work anymore' They were the things that made me do this job. It's funny because I think as British people we don't look across to Europe as much as we could. With dance, we were always eyes on Europe. Tom worked a lot in Amsterdam so he often has references for stuff that we'll sit and watch that I would never have looked at. I don't feel that connection with performance in Europe and it's sad really because I'm sure there is amazing stuff going on, you just don't see it.