

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

This interview was conducted online via Zoom on 21st October 2021 as part of the Live Art in Scotland research project at the University of Glasgow.

The following is an 'intelligent verbatim' transcript that is intended to be an accurate record which omits some small, repeated phrases or false starts (where someone has spoken and then rephrased themselves) for readability. Text presented in [square brackets] has been added during transcription to clarify meaning and/or to include details offered by the interviewee(s) during the review process.

For further details of this process and guidance on conditions of use, please visit the Live Art in Scotland project website: <https://liveartscotland.org/index.php/about-the-las-collection/>

Stephen Greer (SG): I was reading some interviews with you this morning and I know that you studied English and Film Studies and I think I read that you had started working with performance when making films with friends in New York who were experimenting with their bodies in video works. Can you tell me a little bit about that work and about that stage of your practice?

Soojin Chang (SC): Yes. I never saw myself doing performance, I was really uncomfortable in my body and I think I wanted to experiment and learn with filmmaking to begin with. They were my close friends and they were already involved with live art communities in New York and so that led me to become more immersed in live art and I'd see live art quite often and see the broad range of it. It could be on the street, it could be in nature, it could be in a gallery, it could be in someone's house. I think the kind of live art that I saw made it seem more possible to do it, like really awkward or very basic and raw and not much preparation had to go into it seemed. It seemed spontaneous. When I reached a certain point in my life, I think when I had a huge break-up [laughs], my life was falling apart, but within that death I really felt an urge to express myself bodily. I had come out of a period of abuse and self-abuse, so it was cathartic to share that with other people. From then, I've wanted to keep a video practice going and I have to a certain extent because all my performance works, if they are on video, are more or less self-shot. I think because I became more prioritised in art

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

organisations or institutions or spaces for my performance practice, my performance practice ended up developing more.

SG: Okay. I'm really interested in that development through filmmaking. I know that I've read interviews particularly with women video artists in the seventies and eighties talking about the significance of the agency of working with video and not having to rely on other people to set up film crews for you and the degree of control over the product and over the presentation of your own body being really significant for that generation of artists. What I'm hearing is that there are maybe echoes of that in your initial encounters with video work.

SC: Yes, I think especially because I felt so uncomfortable in my body, it helped that I had that period to myself. On a very boring level it's also much more cost effective [laughs]. As a performance artist you're not working with a huge budget, especially if you're just working on the go. What was I going to say, oh I can't remember. It'll come back to me.

SG: That's okay. It feels like a lot of your works are structured or informed by different kinds of ritual practice or ritual logics and I'm wondering at what point that started to emerge. Was that there in that early work you were making, or do you feel like that is something that has become clearer as a conscious strategy over time?

SC: Okay, let's press on the conscious part because I've noticed recently that my dissociation patterns really affect or are very much embedded in my art practice. Just to explain that briefly, a lot of the time I ask questions that I can't ask in my day-to-day life because psychic or physical threat is too near. In my art practice, I end up asking these broad questions that don't seem personal because maybe I need the audience's energetic transference to answer some of those questions or I need a witnessing to answer some of those questions. My delay in answering those questions is quite long after the performance, but the delay is getting shorter now that I'm becoming more aware of the dissociation and other things of course. Maybe having more time in between to make work has also helped so I'm staying with the process longer. Going back to the ritual, I think ritual has always been part of my work, but I can only say that now because I'm realising just how expansive ritual can be. For me at least, the threads are a few objects or materials, and it could be anything that is signified through my performance and the meaning I want to press onto it, but I think those have always been there. There is always some sort of tactile quality. It could be something

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

like soil, but it will mean something else for the performance. I think that is a very ritualistic thing to do to transmute those materials. I guess it's tied into animist traditions to see the lively qualities of everything. Now that I'm more conscious of it, it helps me structure my performances more. Also, as a communal gathering, I've realised that energetic transference between the audience and I is so important and I think setting it up to be more noticeable as a ritual, even if it's the set or the objects or the way that it's framed through text so that people can realise it's more of a ritual.

SG: It's really interesting to me to think about the relationship between those structures and the more improvisational or unpredictable encounters which are unfolding in them. Maybe rather than can talk in the abstract, I know that one of the pieces that you've made which was presented in Scotland, although I think you also did it at the ICA in London, was *State of Possession* which was a one-to-one performance. Can you talk me through the form of that work as a piece which seems to suggest some of what you've just been describing?

SC: Yes, so for *State of Possession* I was attached by my hair to the space itself and I was in the room with my dog and it was a one-to-one performance. I guess it's more of a one-to-two performance because my dog was there. One person would come in at a time. It was a very basic performance and essentially we have a conversation about possession and what they think about possession. It was different for each person, but certain things stayed the same. For example, when they came in, they had to bow to Ruby [laughs]. I'm trying to remember now. There were a few things in the room that could have signalled to them that an action could be possible, like a bowl full of water so someone may be washed or someone may drink out of it but it wasn't offered and it wasn't suggested for each person. It went with the conversation and with the interaction. If that person seemed like they were open to having their hair washed, then I would ask.

SG: Okay. That sounds like there is a process of close attentiveness in that work. Maybe that's the nature of one-to-one work, but the form of it in each encounter sounds as though it turned on you not guessing what the person wanted but tuning yourself into the possibilities of what they might need or want in the room.

SC: Yes, I think I had a few questions that I repeated to each person. Of all the people in both spaces, only one person asked a question back to me and that really struck me. The way that I read it is when participants walk into an art space, I think they feel like they are in

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

a bit of a passive role, especially in a space which I've inhabited. I'm stretching out and I've been there before them. Maybe it's me being invited by an institution. There are all these power transferences that are put on to me as the artist. But in fact, I'm strapped to my hair, I'm actually in a vulnerable position and anyone could come and do something to me. It was partially an invitation to play with those power dynamics, but I didn't see the back and forth as much. I don't blame the audience; I think it's a precedent that is beyond either of us.

SG: Yes, there's a kind of habit because of those power structures you describe that maybe audiences, and I probably include myself in this, come in and you want to sort of go along with the art or the artist. You don't want to spoil it, you're not the artist in the room, you should go with what is being presented to you.

SC: I guess there is also a level of respect, you don't want to disrespect the artist. I had lovely conversations though. It was very bizarre as well. The CCA clubroom kind of looks like an office space.

SG: Okay, sorry, the sound dropped out just there so can I just get you to repeat that last sentence. You said that the CCA space was like a –

SC: I don't know if you've been there before.

SG: Yes.

SC: It looks kind of like an office space. I think they rent it out for office stuff too, so I just said that it was a bizarre and kind of unsettling and strange yet intimate experience to be there with a stranger at night. I think it also made a difference that nobody was invigilating near us. They had to go through a long corridor alone to get there so there was a passage of being alone and I think that was important.

SG: So that was as part of BUZZCUT's programming of a night called Double Thrills.

SC: Yes.

SG: I guess it was in a different context when it was in the ICA in London.

SC: Yes, that was a different context.

SG: What was the shift of experience like? I'm always interested in how works are experienced differently both for artists and audiences when they shift from one curatorial frame to another.

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

SC: The ICA performance was within a concert. It was These New Puritans who had invited me to open for them. Traditionally, that would be another live music set on stage where they would perform next, but I'm not a live musician and I had suggested doing another iteration of this performance. It was the next day as well. It was strange; they created a steel structure that was so small it could just fit two people in. It was tall and had red fabric.

SG: I think I've seen photographs of it. It's almost cocoon-like.

SC: Yes, or like a womb, I guess. My hair was strung to the steel and as the audience grew outside people would come in one by one into the space. Obviously, there was a different audience base. It was in the ICA so there was a reason they invited These New Puritans to play there, but there was a lot more sexual energy firstly [laughs]. It was less private even though it felt private and nobody could see in at all, but you could hear people getting increasingly excited for a gig. The music wasn't under my control, so there were a lot of things that felt more social. What do you think about that kind of shift?

SG: It's interesting because of how a lot of the time when I've experienced one-to-one work I often find myself thinking about the qualities of intimacy in it and that so many one-to-one works that I've encountered or read accounts of are in private spaces, so the idea of a one-to-one work of the kind you're describing in a space where there is a crowd inches away from you is really interesting to me.

SC: Yes, I guess in some ways even with the sexual energy that I wasn't expecting, if anything did happen that I was uncomfortable with there were so many people just outside this fabric, so it was a different idea of safety. In both cases though I was so surprised and happy that people are so willing to become open and vulnerable to that kind of encounter. In a middle of a gig when you're supposed to be in a crowd to be open to giving yourself in such a vulnerable way was quite nice.

SG: Nice. Did your dog travel with you for the second gig?

SC: No. She did travel with me, but she didn't come, it would have been too loud I think. Yes, so that wasn't there either.

SG: I want to ask you about the thread in your work of interspecies exchange or the human and the non-human, but just while this thought is still in my head, there was a turn of phrase that you used earlier on that I want to come back to and that's the idea of energetic

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

transference. Am I right in thinking there was a work of yours which was called *A Transference*? I want to say it was a collaborative piece which was made with —

SC: Oh with [unclear on recording]

SG: Yes? I've seen a short video clip of it or photographs maybe with what looked like the image of a body being anointed really carefully with red pigment and then being washed away so you could see paler skin underneath.

SC: That wasn't with [unclear on recording] sorry, I was thinking of something else. It was with my collaborator whose name is Georgie Lo. She also goes by Rei-n. That was at Café Oto I believe. That was representative of a sacrifice and so we used beetroot powder and I put it all over her body and then I anointed her with water which then, what is that word, it's not transmute. You know in Christianity when the blood of Christ becomes —

SG: Transubstantiate?

SC: Transubstantiate. Yes, so the powder turns into blood and then I clean it off with clean water and assist her to go.

SG: I'm interested in what that act of transference is there and what the encounter is between you and the other performer maybe just in contrast to you and a member of the public. When you're making that kind of collaborative work, what kind of conversation are you having? Maybe at a very practical level, what is the structure that you agree on within which you then discover other things as the work unfolds?

SC: There were a lot of things that became synchronized that I didn't intend. I didn't know her before, we met on the day. Someone had recommended her to me, but I didn't know the person, she was at a remove in several different ways. It happened to be that she was also exploring what softness within violence means in an eastern philosophical or therapeutic sense. For example, Reiki is based in Samurai values so the eastern relationship with sacrifice and with death is so different from the way that we process death here in the west. It was great that she was already practicing that on her own. If you were analysing what she was doing based on form, she walked in, fell, and lay there the whole time and it doesn't seem like she's doing much, but her entire body completely sunk and the performance was incredible and it's because it blurred the lines between it being a performance and things being planned and not. There was such a heaviness to her body and

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

a surprise when things would happen. There was such an intense reaction to it. I've come to know her more and more through the years, although we've never met each other again since then but we've kept in touch. I'm going on a bit of a tangent here but she's mixed race and she grew up in the UK very far away from her Taiwanese family, context, and culture, but the way that her body responds and holds information is so of an eastern mindset and perspective that she never ceases to surprise and affirm me in how much the body remembers even before our lifetime. I guess that transference of energy can also be thought of in that way through ancestors.

SG: There's a really gorgeous moment in the little piece of video that I think is on your website where she shifts and I would have to go back, I don't know if she does move, I think I noticed a change before she moves which comes after you start pouring the water on her. It's really beautiful.

SC: On that thought, I researched several different sacrifices done by ritual practitioners and what sacrifice means to ritual practitioners and what stayed with me is there was a story about a ritual practitioner who would go round the village and physically ask people to give them an object that represents their karma and the ritual was commissioned by the village for let's say getting rid of bad karma. The ritual practitioner would go around in the morning until night collecting trash and it would become very heavy and they take on the burden of their own and escape their body. They transcend their body and commune with the spirits and the gods to accept this karmic load and only if they accept, then will the village's karmic load be saved. If it wasn't accepted, the ritual practitioner would be left with this karmic burden so there was this sacrifice that's involved in practicing ritual and taking on people's energy.

SG: That's reminding me slightly of an interview I read with you and a discussion of *Death Ritual* and thinking about how trauma and emotional attachment are bound up in how we do or don't empathise with people or things beyond our immediate experience of them. Maybe this is where we pick up the strand of some of the interspecies or more than human encounters in your work. That was a work which was transposing a human funeral ritual to work with fragments of cow body parts or bones, is that right?

SC: Yes.

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

SG: Was that part of that same trajectory of research? Or did you come to that project from a different direction?

SC: I wanted to learn about death rituals in Cambodia. I think it's a place where so much mass death has happened very recently by the Khmer Rouge but they also have a long tradition of approaching death in a very communal way so I wanted to learn about the traditions. I went to Ratanakiri which is in the north-east province where indigenous people live. I did the second ritual in Phnom Penh which is their main city and sat those alongside each other not to critique one or the other in any way but just to see where colonial modernity leaves death practices and where some preserved but also dying indigenous rituals are. In the indigenous ritual, a baby pig was slaughtered. It was very much in documentary-style and I stayed with the family and the elders over the course of the ritual and I showed the pig being slaughtered in a very detailed way with lots of close ups of the cow, I kept the diegetic sounds, lots of the pig squealing, and the next scene was me walking through one of the markets that are in Phnom Penh and showing the massive amounts of dead animal carcasses that are there. Then I did a ritual with a funerary specialist named Khvay Leung who makes DIY music for funerals and he also leads funerals. Following a Buddhist doctrine, doctrine is such a horrible word. Ideology? Ideology also sounds fascist.

SG: I know what you mean, they are both more rigid. A Buddhist practice or ethos maybe.

SC: In his belief system all of us have the potential to be born again as animals so he felt like it was appropriate to do this ritual for cow bones together with me. In the same way the body would be burned after being washed and there would be a series of sound and music that go on in the streets so that everyone hears and everyone shares in the mourning, so we did that. It was still a work in progress, but I showed it in the gallery I was hosted in and there was such an array of intense responses because death has such a presence there. Some people were really upset. There was a misunderstanding because my collaborator who is half-white came and helped with the music for the live exhibition part so it seemed like he was using death sounds and so some people were deeply upset. They didn't know that he is mixed-race, I don't know, maybe his presence triggered trauma related to death. The neighbours were really upset that they had to hear the sound and smell the cow for a while too. That part ended up being a very interesting learning experience. I'm grateful that the gallery was so willing to be open to having that kind of dialogue. The people who run

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

the gallery did message me after because it was quite a traumatic experience having to hear all that all of a sudden, but they were happy with that kind of dialogue happening because it doesn't really happen. The indigenous part of the ritual was interesting because nobody in the audience ever commented on the indigenous ritual. It was almost like the indigenous voice couldn't come out because of this very prominent trauma that lingers in the cities of Cambodia because in the Khmer Rouge the cities were targeted.

The indigenous ritual was really interesting because of the side conversations. The elders would tell my friend Mech Choulay, they would start talking about how many people they killed during the Khmer Rouge because the indigenous people were recruited to do the killings. The Khmer Rouge was promising them a better life, it was like a farmer's revolution that took a dark direction. All these indigenous people that are still living carry this burden of having killed so many people and it was just such an interesting parallel to the slaughtering that they continued to do so thoughtfully and this conflict between that repetitive act of killing. Just to sum it up, there's so much more of a close relationship with killing and sacrifice and it's a burden too that they carry but having that close relationship, whereas in the cities there is way less of a relationship to the supply chain and the actual labour and sacrifice that goes into the things that we consume. Sorry, that went on for a long time.

SG: No, that was so interesting. When your work engages with, provokes, allows for or gives the opportunity for those conversations, is that part of the artwork for you? As in part of the process of what the artwork is, or is it an aftermath? I don't know if there is a better way of describing that, but do you know what I mean? Is it part of the art practice?

SC: Yes. I do see my performance as very much an element of research. I've yet to see any of my work as a finished piece. I think because my work asks such broad questions but also questions that often are to do with death, it's not just up to me, it's an open invitation to sit with that and to challenge our perspectives or even just to have a conversation with our bodies or emotions because there isn't much space to talk about death.

SG: It's interesting... that's a real verbal tic of mine [laughs].

SC: It's genuinely interesting [laughs].

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

SG: I'm reminded of the set up or the structure that was part of the work you made for Take Me Somewhere earlier this year, *A Heifer Would Be Needed For The Sacrifice*, where there was a moment before the live work where you asked us to sit with some of what the work would involve. There was the invitation that we would read an extract of work from Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's book which I can't remember the name of, but it's a work exploring the relationship between the categories of race and species. I think the argument is that they mutually enforce each other. I've engaged with performances before where there has been suggested reading or there has been discussion afterwards, but I don't think I've often, if ever, encountered that frame of an artist asking us to take time to sit with ideas before the work itself. I don't know if you could talk to me a little bit about that decision, but also how you were engaging with Jackson's work.

SC: Yes. It was the first time I'd done it too. It was a response to I guess that question that you asked before in terms of reception and if the way that it is thought about is just as important as the work itself. I think I kind of answered that, I think what I find out after the performance ends up becoming more important. Where do I start with this? On one level, I was very frustrated with how my work was becoming received. I have a big fear of being misunderstood and also of being read in only a western perspective, not to create a polarity between the west and the east but I think there are certain perspectives towards death particularly in how suicide can be wrapped up within sacrifice if it's self-sacrifice. Things that I think audiences here could benefit from if they would expand or be open to understanding these terms in not just a western-centric perspective. Of course with the history of colonialism and enslavement, death was such a big part of that so understanding a colonial history is so integral to understanding death in a western context. I had done a talk for Present Futures which is also based in Scotland and there was a talk between myself and, hold on this is not okay [typing].

SG: I was turning to Google as well because I've read about it and I can't remember.

SC: Oh Hamshya Rajkumar and it was chaired by Dr Laura Bissell. I think I may have talked to you about it briefly before but it was about rejecting the species binary. Hamshya and I are both racialised people and our approach to species is very much entangled with race, colonialism, and power subjugation, which is kind of what binds these things together, but also the bodily generosity of anyone really but especially people within those positions

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

where they are being subjugated and that bodily generosity still exists and how to honour that on its own without the narrative of colonialism. In order to do that, you have to know the narrative of colonialism, you can't just ignore it. That experience, the talk was actually very disappointing for me. There was no framework from the festival. They weren't really prepared to ask those kinds of questions so they asked very generic questions and I'm not faulting them entirely; they did ask us, the artists, if we would like to choose our own chair and it was very open in that sense. Hamshya and I hadn't done many artist talks before, it's not our practice so we went with it and I feel like we were maybe misrepresented but the audience also misses out on the depth of our history and our practice and what we're working with. I don't think audiences want to consume racialised people as objects either, but if they don't have the tools they will misunderstand us. That was a thing that I did before Take Me Somewhere and so for Take Me Somewhere I really wanted to give the audience a bit more context.

SG: I guess that context is also about pushing knowing that there is a wider context again of white dominated institutions and a very culturally white landscape.

SC: Yes. There is a very strong line of solidarity just because of histories of subjugation from England so I think it's a really interesting place to make art.

SG: Yes and in what other terms that solidarity is constructed, how do you preserve a necessary recognition of difference in histories and traditions while still reaching for that political claim.

SC: Yes, so just to tie together with what you said about preserving those differences, I think that's one of the most important takeaways from Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's work. She approaches species by embracing differences rather than the more traditional approach to relating to animals in art representation and zoological representation, which is to anthropomorphise them, to humanise them and grow that representation. I think Zakiyyah Iman Jackson approaches it by embracing and honouring those differences as a default and seeing where you land. One of the things she talks about is that the goal for many black artists that she references such as Wangechi Mutu and Octavia Butler, in their fictive worlds the goal isn't necessarily to destroy hierarchies. We think of utopia as there being no hierarchies, everyone is happy, all animals are happy, but Zakiyyah Iman Jackson talks about how that is not necessarily possible because there will always be a reliance on one another

but it's important for those roles not to be static. She goes even further to make a more complicated point that I may not be able to say too clearly to you today so if it doesn't make sense then don't quote me on it, but basically she goes on to say if we think of subjugation or think of submission as these very horrible states to be in, that's already a gender bias, or anything that has to do with the reception of being a negative thing that reinforces that mindset and it's disqualifying the lived experience of people who were slaves or who do live in subjugation by saying I don't want to be like them. She has argued that maybe we can abstract the power dynamics between dominance and submission into different meanings. That can only be possible if we know very well the histories of colonialism and enslavement.

SG: I'm thinking about the connections between what you're describing and some of the vocabulary of the work itself and thinking about biohacking and the images and practices of IVF. Can you tell me a little bit about how you came to those particular technologies as the means of performance making?

SC: Yes, I'm trying to remember because it's branched off into so many different themes. I was struck by Sophie Lewis's *Full Surrogacy Now*. I don't know if you've read it but it's like an encyclopaedia of the surrogate industry around the world and the way that modern surrogacy operates is through IVF. I guess I was struck by the potential for queer families and non-biological families that have essentially been created and it opens lines of that through IVF and through surrogacy. It's not being perceived that way. It's maybe not being marketed that way, it's still very much reinforcing heterosexual family coupledness and not honouring the bodily labour of the surrogates themselves and there are so many things going on there so I was interested to see what I could explore by opening up this technology from the perspective of a non-human that is looking for family. The first half of my research was very cynical. I was very critical of how this technology was being corrupted and everything is for money and that's definitely true, but I reached a point in the performance where I wanted to leave it open and be more neutral about it so that the technology is available to be taken up by other people. I think too much critique leaves little opening for any querying, however, that realisation didn't come until after I did that performance. That performance at Take Me Somewhere was the only live iteration that will happen in this body of work, but it will exist as a film that I'm making outside of it which is shot at home and in the highlands so that Take Me Somewhere performance was an integral step of the

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

research but it really did just exist as research for me. One of the main things that came out of that performance was, I don't think I'm answering your question —

SG: No that's fine [laughs].

SC: One of the things that happened was that I implant myself so I open up my cervix and I implant myself with what is meant to be an embryo and so I mixed semen and an egg cell and I implant myself. This is probably inappropriate for your book, but when I masturbate, I don't penetrate myself. I just never found that much pleasure from it. I do other sorts of stuff [laughs]. So I don't actually touch inside of my body so often. That was one of the first times where I facilitated self-touch although it was by prosthesis. It was interesting that there was a use of prosthesis to touch myself. It unlocked a lot of bodily trauma for me because I was able to have control over what that touch is and the kind of power that is held in the body but also how that could be facilitated from outside of the body. The second part was that I ended up taking the morning after pill. I didn't really plan on it but I was in a period of dissociation and thought yes I can do this to my body, whatever. I took the pill and went through a huge period of killing things off in my life. I killed off my relationship. I think it's a wariness and performance and moving through the body's ability to kill that I learned through the experience.

SG: The interview that I read this morning had a line about performance is putting yourself in what could be or what already is ignored and then moving through that space. It sounds like the research process you're describing is often a very reflexive one and is to do with you changing or developing your understanding of yourself as a person and as an artist.

SC: Yes. Just to come back to your first question, there are so many parallels with the animals. There is so much of their reproductive function that happens because of politics or because of the economy and there are so many parallels with humans and with wombs that are also subjected to the same fate. There is also a history of medical coloniality where lots of black women were essentially experimented on and I know that the impacts of racism can still exist in those care facilities. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson talks a lot about how they are not offered care in the same degree as white women because there is this understanding that black women can somehow deal with more pain and that becomes so complicated. Firstly, no one should be dealing with any amount of pain that is not necessary and all people with wombs have to go through pain to varying degrees because of how little

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

research there is on reproductive care that is beyond giving birth. It's almost just implanted that people with wombs should feel pain and within that there are so many horrifying degrees of that and there isn't much solidarity for example and that solidarity will only be reached if that history of medical coloniality can be reckoned with.

SG: It's making me think about one of the other aspects of that that I've read about at least which is that alongside this, or I guess it's partly an extension of the same thing, but so many pharmaceutical remedies have been developed on the basis of test groups of primarily white people. There are practices of medication and diagnosing which are not attentive to the particular needs of people who aren't white Caucasian for example. When it comes to knowing the complex interactions of chemistry and drug remedies it's based on a research sample where we just don't know what the implications might be.

SC: I wasn't even considering the pharmaceuticals but that's a big component. I actually wanted to touch upon that and about science and scientists. I learned that there is a ritual to a lab setting and working in a lab. There is a huge visual culture to it too. Everything is colour-coded and there is a step by step that you take. Even the history of science could be dated back to magic and mysticism with the book *Picatrix* coming from Arab roots and being written by someone who is Arab. I was very inspired by trying to see what could happen if scientists see their work as ritual or as magic. They do have people's lives in their hands. There is such a history of magic.

SG: What was it like making that work as a live performance for camera because it was part of Take Me Somewhere's hybrid or digital programme this year because of the pandemic?

SC: The whole Take Me Somewhere team did such a great job and I know it was something they had never done before. I'm super grateful for the environment that they created. It was really comfortable and easy and they gave as much support as they could. However, I don't think I would ever do that again because it made me realise a lot of what I talked to you about today. The energetic transference from the audience is so important to me especially as a ritual. I think it did something else because it existed on a screen and people were watching it at the same time but in different places. For me, there was nothing I got back from the audience and so it felt really isolating. In terms of preparation though, it made it a lot easier. I was able to do some camera tricks to make it seem like I was doing some things that I wasn't and there were no nerves because it was a closed set of three

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

people so that part made it a lot more calming. I think it's tied to working with the camera but also working in that space in Tramway in T4 which might be tied to live art in general in Scotland. I think there is still an expectation of live art or performance art to be tied to theatre or dance. I think there is a history of that in the space and in the audience and there is definitely an expectation that I have of the audience to think like that and expectations that I brought in with me to the performance. I hadn't performed all through covid and I also had expectations of what a performance should look like. My performance practice is generally raw, I don't have scientific equipment, it's way less planned, so for me too, I think there were expectations of how it should go. Perhaps it was a good opportunity to blend those together, theatre, dance, science, and live art, however, maybe because it wasn't intentional to blend all of those together it wasn't as effective. I read one review of it by somebody on a blog and firstly I have to discount it because they said the inside of my cervix and the whole process was horrific so I immediately have to discount it because the inside of someone's body shouldn't be horrific. I think they were reading it from a theatre-going perspective. I don't know how they framed it, but it was something like there is no space for it there, something like that. Like how far can performance art go on within theatre. It was something like that.

SG: I think there are quite strong expectations but my experience of them has been that they can be strongly held but really nebulous at the same time. There is this sense of what should be, but then if you ask someone about what they were expecting, it's quite challenging for them to articulate why something did or didn't meet their expectations. I suppose maybe what we're talking about here is this challenge of the frame of live art as something which is persistently open ended and the game of trying to define what does count as live art and what doesn't is a little bit of a waste of time because it's a series of open-ended questions or possibilities. I guess my last question is maybe about your experience of the kind of structures or curatorial frames which you've found as supporting this kind of practice or your kind of interdisciplinary practice. Part of it might be to do with encounters which are enabling to create the kind of contexts which are necessary for your work to be understood in the way that you would like it to be understood, but are there other dynamics which you think are important for supporting live art or interdisciplinary practice? That's a huge question, sorry [laughs].

Live Art in Scotland: Soojin Chang

SC: I mean you're asking what other things can institutions and organisations do?

SG: Yes, I think so. My interest in asking is that I've been thinking quite a lot, more since we last spoke, about the relationship between artists' practices and the development of their practice and the structures in which their work gets developed, promoted, or presented and how that relationship can be an enabling one but also sometimes forecloses the possibilities of how work is made or understood and I'm motivated to ask how can you broaden or sustain or create a positive set of conditions for artists' work to put it simply.

SC: I think some organisations are starting to do this across the UK, but I think more funding that is not commission-focussed, so supporting an artist's salary or a residency that is more than six weeks. I think Atlas is thinking about doing an artist residency that is twenty-five years right now. I'm saying this because so much of performance is on a small scale in organisations. They will give you two hundred pounds to do one thing one night and then that's it. If any other artists are like me and they dissociate during their performance practice, there isn't much time to process what's happening and if it's done as research, how do you process what comes after. I think as a performer your practice gets a bit fragmented and it's only recently through covid and through having a bit of a longer commission that I've been able to work through those in a meaningful way. Also, because I love live art that is raw and that requires very little, I think as artists progress in their career there is maybe an expectation to do bigger things if you're going to get more of a commission. You kind of have to prove what you're going to do with that commission. Are you going to have a set or a crew and there are different things that come with that, so maybe for organisations to express that it's okay to be research heavy, you don't even have to create something at the end, they can be experiments and you can also take time to rest. Maybe we could also resist the over productivity mode of what it means to advance in your career.