

Live Art in Scotland: Gillian Dyson

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Gillian Dyson (GD): I started in fine art and I did a degree at what was Sunderland Polytechnic [1986-89], which at the time had no third area, only painting, printmaking, and sculpture. I found myself in printmaking and on reflection, I think it was quite a macho art school: men in plaid shirts made sculpture. Photography was still being discussed in terms of whether or not it was art [and the documentary photography] movement in the north-east was still emerging in the late nineties. [I was however tutored a little by the mail artist Robin Corzier and the feminist art history lectures by Dr Penny Dunford were a massive influence]. By the end of my degree, I'd fallen in with a couple of other young artists on the course who [talked about film, and feminism]. I'd begun to make things on the beach. I found out some of my family history and I would take some objects [onto the beach belonging to] a great-grandfather who was a merchant seaman and I would make a sandcastle [sculpture with these objects] photograph it and take the sand back into my printmaking to make layered textures. Knowing what I know now, this was a move towards installation and performance art, but I didn't have that language [to discuss it in these terms] and [performance] wasn't supported on my degree. I then had a year out and then I got into the Slade (1990-92). I got onto what I think was media art [Higher Diploma/ MA] so performance was part of that; visual art; material, analogue media, post-1970s practice. Two influential tutors [for me where Lis Rhodes] a founder of the women's Film-makers' Co-op and the performance artist Stuart Brisley. I guess when I made my proposal to the university they must have seen something in my developmental work. I immediately went into making performance,

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performance to camera and performance in studio. For the MA at the time, again it was early 1990s, this was an experimental area that wasn't painting (and the famous life studio painting was still going on). I think the course had a lot of attachment to a sixties model of anti-commodity art, so it was definitely about ephemerality, time-basedness, and liveness and I was really well supported as a student financially because I got a grant. I don't even know how I got that. I didn't pay for my postgrad' and I was working a bit but also starting to get bits of funding from the Arts Council. The first people I thought of when you asked who is important in that jigsaw were people like [Joanna Scanlan, and then Lois Keidan who worked at the ICA and ACE, taking up the baton for interdisciplinary then live arts with her influential strategy document in 1991, and] Tony White who was the [interdisciplinary] officer for ACE in the late '90s. I never got money from theatre, I got it from the film [and interdisciplinary] department, I think. I began to perform in Europe mostly. There were a number of live and new media art festivals. There was one in Arnhem in the Netherlands, another in Berlin that I particularly remember, certain AVE in Arnhem I went back to a few times. It was a fantastic, generous offer. You turn up, you make performance but you're part of the festival so you're in this dialogue with lots of other artists, and you're seeing a lot of work. It doesn't exist now that model. There are festivals, but they are much more like exhibition festivals rather than participation festivals. I think these were almost like trade fairs where you go and talk to people who are also dentists or whatever. That was really important. Then the Dartington link is at the time, I was working with my then partner Tim Brennan and he got a teaching position and I was offered a junior fellowship at Dartington like a visiting lecture. I was there to make my own work and do a little bit of teaching and I'd already started freelance teaching at places like Crewe and Alsager and Nottingham Trent and I was doing visiting lectures, making performance, but being at Dartington for a good couple of years meant that I was working alongside some really interesting people having the departments in theatre, dance, and music and then this developing area called visual performance. Sally Morgan was leading a programme in socially engaged practice or something like that, which was a little bit like community art, but leaving the kind of pejorative implications of what that might mean. So, yes, there was some really interesting stuff happening and some really interesting students. I taught people like Gary Winters from Lone Twin, [and Mark Jeffery who went on to join Goat Island] - people who I now meet as my peers which is really delightful. I think it introduced me more clearly to the lineages of

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performance that I didn't know through that fine art route. Jumping ahead, what I'm involved in at the moment is, I've got a developing artistic practice grant from Arts Council England and one of my questions in my head post-PhD is what is my technique? Or what is what is the practice? I think in the visual arts, you don't get taught performance. You do performance of an extension of mark making or sculptural space making and so there isn't a clear vocabulary to describe how you make compositional decisions in the same way as theatre and dance. From there I was making work and then I got a kind of residency at Hull School of Art and Design. Hull is where I'm from and where my family is and I knew if I went and did that, I could do it on the cheap and I could stay at my parents. This residency was split between Hull Time Based Arts and the College of Arts. Subsequently, I became employed as a fractional post at the School of Art and then as the project coordinator for Hull Time Based Arts and so that's where that link comes in. I think I was there for ten years [from 1995-2001] and again in terms of my own learning, I was seeing really accomplished media work that combined or challenged or troubled this sense of liveness because it would have media ties but experienced in the live temporal space so not necessarily a film screening but something that was using new technologies and film, video, and sound as a performative practice.

SG: Was it in Hull at Time Based Arts or at Dartington where you first came in contact with Platform? I'm just thinking about who the National Review was partnering with through this period.

GD: I can't remember. I'd have to look at the dates and work it out, I guess. I knew about Platform. I don't even know which Platforms I was in and which I facilitated. In Hull we definitely facilitated the Platforms, but I don't know if I did one before that. For example, I've performed in Sheffield and when I think about it, that might have been part of a Platform. I'm not sure. I don't really know how to find out [laughs].

SG: [Laughs]. I was trying to work out which was your first year at the National Review because I can see you're in the programme for 1993 at the ICA, but it looks like you've been invited back that year because there is a little note in the programme that this the solid state strand and it's people who have been invited back after three, five, or seven years. I've looked in the programmes three, five, and seven years back and I can't find your name and I

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was wondering whether you'd come with a group of artists or in some other capacity, but maybe that's beside the point. Do you remember that one at the ICA in London?

GD: Does it have a title, does say which work it was?

SG: Yes, it was a piece called *Corvus Corvax*.

GD: Yes. I do. This is Nikki Millican. I don't know when she first saw my work. I did that piece at the ICA and then she invited me to go to Belluard Bollwerk in Fribourg Switzerland with that piece of work. Now I'm saying out loud, maybe it was the other way round. Maybe that's where the returning artist thing comes, I don't know. I think I performed in Glasgow. One of the people in that family tree that I think has been quite important in a really quiet way is Jason Bowman because I remember going up to National Review and staying at his house and he's such a good networker and generous character. I think he was really important in making me feel comfortable and welcome. I definitely performed in Glasgow in that early 2000s or late nineties period.

SG: I thought I had a note that you'd done the piece called *Sight Unseen* which looked like it was performed at The Arches in 2010.

GD: Yes, that's quite late. When I'm thinking about Jason, I'm talking about 1998 or something like that.

SG: What do you remember of the festival as a space? I'm thinking about what you were saying earlier about the idea of a festival as a kind of trade show, as a space of participation rather than just exhibition. What do you remember of it as a space?

GD: That space in The Arches when you go through the railway road tunnel first of all, where you come out of the station at the back and there are chip shops and things that are underneath. It always had an edginess being in those spaces and I remember even just coming in 2010 if felt like it had been practically tidied up where the lighting rigs and things were. My memory of it originally was a much a rougher environment but also being more sited in Glasgow. I don't know the geographic areas, it might have been as you cross the bridge to go over to Tramway, there were tower blocks. Is that Govan, I'm not sure?

SG: Govan is on the other side of the river, yes.

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GD: I can remember going to see stuff anyway and also in the market somewhere, so they obviously were siting works a little bit as well. I think thinking of the post punk, you know, to have something that isn't crazy but is sort of structured anti-establishmentness was a starting point or was an atmosphere. Glasgow hadn't gone through the gentrification that it has now so that's what I mean. The actual physical environment round that railway station was a bit shitty and odd, not unfamiliar in any city.

SG: You're not the first person to say that their earlier memories of The Arches before it had the lottery funded money was of it being a bit dirty and a bit grotty, but that also being part of the excitement of the space.

GD: Well, problematising it. I think in a way we've got slightly out of the habit of being in those spaces, but I think it will happen more. I think people are already going back to really impromptu, found places. I was trying to think what have I done in Glasgow and as an audience I remember going to see Test Department in some big railway shed.

SG: That might have been at Tramway because they did quite a few performances there.

GD: Again, it felt rough. It didn't feel like Tramway as I know it now. It was more exposed to the elements.

SG: I'll have a look and see if I can work it out because I know that they did do stuff in a few different places. It's striking that both of those venues are spaces which had major refurbishment projects in the early 2000s or late nineties. I don't know if the Tramway was lottery funded, The Arches one certainly was.

GD: They are post-industrial spaces so I think there is something of the expression of that industrial, working class history of the city that is coming through much like when you think of urban punk music. It's a celebration or a recognition of that sense of hard work and that these things don't just materialise but sometimes you can just do it.

SG: The way you're describing that is making me think of Nikki Millican, of doing the work and making it happen. Before she commissioned you for that festival that you mentioned or which ever way round it was, was she someone that was on your radar or was it through that relationship, you said you weren't sure when she first saw your work?

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GD: Certainly, before I went to Switzerland I knew her and she knew me. By that point I was still in the southwest because I formed a collaboration with Tim Brennan Sally Morgan and Sally Tallent. We all made performance art and we formed this collaboration called PSW Performance South West, so I already knew Nikki Millican at this point. I remember her coming to see my work. I'm jumping around a bit, but then there is Bristol. I think Arnolfini was really interesting at that kind of moment. They had a black box theatre space but a curator there, [Diana Warden], wanted work that was 'not theatre'. [I made work for the black box and a found building – a bank]. I think there was, and possibly still is, a strange kind of [division between what] goes into the art gallery and what goes into the theatre: what do they do with work that is somehow in an in-between conceptual space? I'm sure I knew Nikki then. I'm trying to think, there was another [supportive] woman at the Arts Council [in Combined Arts – Bronac Ferran]. I guess these people are all ten to fifteen years older than me and just had that vision. They were seeing new approaches to live work. At a kind of more theatre end of the spectrum were theatre companies like Desperate Optimists and Prototype. I was at the other side of that spectrum which was more visual arts, solo performance art, and very low material use. These people were happy to support all of that.

SG: Thinking about that aesthetic is maybe a good way to talk about one or two of your own works in closer detail. It was interesting to me when you told me about the grant of the project you're currently working on and thinking about what your practice is. I've always understood your work in terms of maybe the choice of materials more than anything else and I don't know if that's fair or not, but I'm struck by how many of your pieces involve working with quite ordinary materials, with mundane, domestic, or everyday materials and working with them in a way which renders them uncanny. The work of yours that I was watching this morning because there is documentation of it that happens to be online as part of the NRLA30 website was *Sight Unseen*, where you are working with simple processes and materials. Maybe we can just go back to that one, I don't know if you can remember the development of it. It's one where it starts with a kind of clear concrete floor of one of The Arches spaces with you describing the performance space by pulling very slowly this wooden chair round the space and then there is a second chair and then the work unfolds from there. Do you remember making that work?

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GD: Yes. I think you're right, definitely this investigation of objects or placing of objects in the space in relation to my body to create a dialogue and to invite meaning. First of all, the chairs themselves are chapel chairs, so already I was interested in introducing that sense that there are objects that have been given a kind of ritual status but not in an overt way.

SG: It's the material design of a chair that has that little shelf or pocket at the back so the person sitting behind you can put their hymnal in it.

GD: Yes. There is something kind of institutional about that. They're a little bit schooly as well and there is a certain aesthetic which you may say is nice or pleasing. To have two there is a sense of there being an absence present, are they standing in proxies for other people, am I inviting somebody else to sit there, am I sitting there? I was conscious of constructing that. The decision of what I was wearing which is a black dress with a button sleeve, but I've got bare legs and feet, so again, there is something slightly puritan about the style of the dress but it's not costume. It is in my wardrobe now and it is just a dress, but it's quite carefully thought about. This idea fed into my PhD, that these inanimate objects become animate, by that dragging action have voice. They make sound. In the context of that dirty floor in The Arches, and I've done it subsequently in other spaces, it introduces a sense of presence. There is presence of these objects and presence of me in the tension that is set up there. It creates a site. Then I've got the spinning tops and they're kind of delightfully playful. They are a children's toy, but they're old fashioned and they're metal. Again, they have this singing voice that is kind of weird and ghostly, but not so weird as to be disturbing. In the time it takes to set all this out, it's kind of boring, it's kind of requesting some commitment of the audience, and you can see when you look at documentation that there is always somebody who is really into it and then there is somebody else who is writing or on their phone. I know that I did that at the same time that Ron Athey was performing.

SG: [Laughs]. How do you know?

GD: I just remember that. I remember loads of people and somebody coming up to me and going oh sorry, I can't come to your performance, I'm going to Ron Athey and I remember thinking oh, well fuck you [laughs].

SG: [Laughs].

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GD: Great, thanks for that scheduling [laughs].

SG: Maybe we'll come back to that, the material reality of that festival and stuff being programmed back-to-back.

GS: It's a piece of work that unfolds and then I adopt this kind of glossolalic voice. I've done spoken work in performances before but I haven't really used my voice in that way, this was new and again something that I am investigating at the moment. This idea of drawing this seeming language but it's not real, there's no language there, and people hearing different things in it and it's in that space and there are a load of people sat around you and you've always got that weird sensation or expectation of people coming to see your work and it's sort of not a show but it's showing off at the same time. I think it's a really odd tension. I remember talking to Carl [Laverly] about it and unpacking what and who audience is in the research work and you need those people as witness. Something like National Review created audience. It's actually quite hard to get audience for non-stage, non-bums-on-seats work. It's the domestics of managing an audience, so creating a critical mass of people that move between spaces is another asset or skill of those kind of festival environments because you capture all those people and you can test them on all sorts of things and because the artists are the audience as well, there is a generosity and a kind of camaraderie that I think is really important.

SG: There's a moment in that performance where you're standing on the chair and you go from whispering and it just feels like it's air leaving your mouth to start with and it does become louder but not clearer. I've written glossolalia, a kind of sound poetry. There's also an embodiment that seems to go with that voice as well. There is a moment in the documentation that I've seen where your hands start to rise up as well. Maybe I've been primed to see that because of the faintly religious chairs that I recognised, but there is a moment there which is to do with a channelling of voices with those hands rising.

GD: I'm conscious of that but trying to it an unaffected way. I'm not claiming that I'm doing a séance or something [laughs]. If people want to read that then I know that's in the room. There is something about, in a funny sort of way, showing how easy it is to manipulate that but at the same time, it isn't fake because once you start to go into that experience as the artist performer, I feel that in my body. I'm certainly not taking the mickey. It's not parodying, but I'm not claiming it to be that. It's this much written thing about presence, I

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think. That sense of presence and intention is not just experienced by the spectator but it's in your experience and intention. As soon as you decide that you're doing that, you're in this kind of heightened sense and the audience can't feel what I'm feeling but they can see how I'm feeling it.

SG: It's interesting. I'm trying to work out because I hadn't, until we started this conversation, thought about what was happening in the work in terms of any kind of potentially sacred register. I'm now thinking about if I allow that to be in the room as you just said, how does that shape what I think is going on, particularly when the objects are so mundane and so ordinary. I couldn't quite see from the film; is it stones that have been on the chair which you then place in your mouth in the last gesture or last sequence.

GD: Yes. I can't remember how many, four or five. I put the pebbles in my mouth and then I take them out and I hold them on my hand. I don't know where that gesture came from, but something I think that reoccurs and that certainly appears in my research work is muting the mouth. There is something awful about that as well. If somebody else did it to you and filled your mouth with pebbles, that's a really violent action. But to do it so carefully and in such a controlled way, there is something of a kind of resistance and acceptance and ritualised. I'm not a religious person. Maybe it's also a device to show, it's a visual stopper. I can take them out and then have they got something of that form of the mouth, but they're a found thing and they're just off the beach or from a garden. Placing them on a chair, I can see from my perspective as I'm doing that, that's a neat little composition. It's like a still life and that pleases me. You're over there so you're not seeing it from the same perspective but maybe you have a sense of that being somehow a pleasing, orderly gesture.

SG: I want to go back to what you were saying about the piece of work unfolding and what you were suggesting about it inviting a particular kind of attention. I suppose I'm thinking about how that might sit in tension with the busyness of the festival if there are people who can't see your work because they've chosen to see another artist's work. I also know that one of the experiences of the festival was people getting up and leaving during people's work because they had to go and see something else or because they were just tired.

GD: I know from anecdotes, of course Ron Athey, interesting talking about ritual and religion and the body, I know that there were people who left that work because it was so disturbing and it's very difficult work to be in a physical space with so there's a sort of irony

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[laughs]. Even myself, you know what it's like, you get the programme and you highlight what you want to see and it starts off with people who are your mates and the celebrities and then you think I wonder what I'll be doing and sometimes you come across something that you maybe wouldn't have chosen to go to, but then you end up there and actually that's a really important experience of the festival. I think I must have taken students with me that year. I think Marcia Farquhar was on and she was doing that twenty-four-hour thing. I think that's classic in a way because to begin with you might amble in there and think it's a bit boring, or I don't really know what's happening, I'm waiting for another thing, but then you find yourself going back there and how that layers through the experience of the festival is a really clever piece of work. It's a good piece of work but it's a smart strategy and a massive commitment from the artist to do that. I think quite a few things operate in that way. There must have been things that were repeated and had two or three showings or one-to-one performances. That simultaneousness of things going on and how you decide and then at some point you need to eat, or you go out, or you just hang out with people. I've forgotten his name, the guy who was the compère.

SG: Ian Smith.

GD: Oh Ian Smith.

SG: And before that it was Neil Bartlett.

GD: Neil Bartlett, yes. So, their function as well where you were kind of posted. They would make jokes about that because you would be queuing for things and they'd be saying don't bother queuing for that, you're not going to get in. Go and see this other thing. I think there was a kind of recognition of that process going on which was really great.

SG: I don't know why it appeals to me so much but maybe it's to do with this recognition of the pragmatics of a busy material event, while also a genuine attempt to honour the stakes of different artist's work and knowing that different work is going to unfold in different ways and ask or invite different things of the audience and to try and hold all those pieces together at the same time.

GD: It's not all loud work either. You're right, I think the value of my work is quiet. I think about festivals like Fierce now or a venue like Duckie, I can't see how my work could go there because I think it would get a little bit lost in the literal noise. I think National Review

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supported durational work and it supported younger artists who were trying things out. I'm sure I've seen people like Fiona Templeton there and I'm thinking of work that is a bit more delicate in its material.

SG: The word that you used in passing earlier on was generosity and I think I've heard in conversation with other people on this project but also documentation of different panel discussions, that a really sought-after quality of the National Review was the way in which artists responded to each other's work. I'm sure there were still people putting on work which wasn't great and people being polite and saying polite things about it, but that sensibility of generosity and creating a space where you could offer support to other artists or receive it in return. Does that match your recollection of it?

GD: Yes, I think so. Sometimes work needs time to bed in. Even talking about my own piece here I'm already thinking it was kind of smarter than I realised. I saw Franko B perform and not to do any disservice to him, the documentation we know often looks more spectacular than the performance because you don't get all that other noise and things [surrounding the artist]. It was really important that that person did that thing, even though it was a bit tatty around the edges or maybe they remade it later and it got refined or whatever. That is the nature of liveness. Just as I'm speaking to you I've got to blurt it out, let it be heard, let it be seen, and then people make a decision of how they're going to encounter the work. The encounter isn't just in the first iteration. I don't even know how often [the National Review] was. It wasn't every year was it, was it every two years?

SG: Yes, it had a few years where it didn't run because of grant reasons, but it became a biennial or a rough pattern of that.

GD: Like you were saying, the connection with other venues like ICA. ICA is off my radar now as a place for performance work but at the time, I think it was really important. Again, very well supported by the Arts Council with that interaction between film and exhibition programme. I'm trying to remember where else. Oh, Greenroom in Manchester. There was a sense of a kind of network of national organisations.

SG: I suppose the last thing that I'd be curious in asking you about is about that sense of the expanded ecology and knowing that there was a moment where organisations like the National Review, Hull Time Based Arts, Greenroom, and the ICA, it felt like there was an

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established ecology or network and that network doesn't really exist in that form anymore. Quite a few of those organisations we've mentioned don't exist for one reason or another and others have changed their remit. I suppose I'm interested in your sense of what exists or what's valuable in such a network. Is it about creating those spaces where the showing of work is more developmental in nature and it's not just about a presentational thing that goes this is the work, it is a finished product, I will now go and show it here and I'll show it here, that there is the space for this kind of showing of slightly incomplete work even by very established artists and that there is a value in that.

GD: Yes, I think there is a value. I don't know how conscious that was on their part. If you were not making work in theatre spaces then you only got a chance to show and make the work for festivals. I'm just thinking, jumping ahead, the launch of the Horizon programme with Battersea, GIFT, Fierce, and I can't remember some of the others, and I suppose maybe in a way they are attempting to regenerate that kind of approach where you've got a platform of existing work and then you've got a residency of developmental work. It's not many though, it's only half a dozen people. What I'm not seeing around at the moment is graduate programme [for] graduate artists. Manchester had Furnace that Neil Mackenzie ran from MMU, but that lost its funding I believe. That vision, conscious or not, or pragmatism, if you invite student artists or young graduate artists, you bring an audience again don't you so it's a really pragmatic strategy. Hull Time Based Arts exploited that with having an art school on our doorstep. You get your students involved, they can be runners and technicians and helpers and that sort of thing, you can get some of them showing their work and they're going to bring audience, but they are the artists of the future. It's such a cliché. They are going to be making the work and then they're getting to meet people who are at various stages in the industry who can talk to them. People like Guillermo Gómez-Peña would always talk with people. He's not unapproachable, hugely charismatic, crazy looking person, but he's not scary as a human being. Same with somebody like Franko. I think it's just enabling artists to have conversations with each other.

SG: It's interesting that Horizon format. From what I understand, it is an attempt to slightly rethink the showcase model, but it is still centred on a kind of showcasing process that it does have these residencies alongside it. What I think is really interesting is that I don't think

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it's a process that necessarily has to happen in August. It's been aligned with the Edinburgh festivals, but the residencies aren't in Edinburgh.

GD: No.

SG: And so much of the work that is being shown is going to be digital.

GD: I think also given the two years we've had, rightly they've chosen a lot of people who would be seen as marginalised in different frames, but the 'but' to that is, how do you create sustainable practice for people. What do you do when you've had the gig? I think for people like you and I, others see you in academic roles and think we've got good jobs and can afford to go and do stuff, but I'm still not getting the gig. I don't know behind the scenes how National Review ran in that developmental way maybe particularly for Scottish artists, but I think by having the platform process, they sort of farmed that out to somebody else so they'd say to a college or another organisation, you pick people you're interested in and then we'll come and see that so that gives that artist a kind of two stage. They do the gig in Manchester and then they get another gig so there's that chance and the money to remake your work for The Arches.

SG: There was a really conscious change from the Platform to what was then called Elevator. I think at a moment where they went there are lots of equivalents to Platform around the UK, maybe it's more beneficial to us to work with a slightly smaller number of artists with Elevator. Maybe it's not a slightly smaller number of artists, that's maybe not fair, but I think there was a shift from paying expenses to paying fees at that point. There was an interesting relationship to going how to feed a certain if not professionalisation but just career building. The other interesting thing around the showcase stuff is the British Council showcase is on hold. They're not coming back until they see what the landscape is because there is now Made in Scotland, there's Made in Wales or the equivalent of it, and now there's the Arts Council England sponsored one, and they're trying to work out what their role is.

GD: Again I think back in the nineties/2000s it was possible to get an invite from somewhere like National Review or Hull Time Based Arts and then make an ad-hoc proposal to the Arts Council to get some match funding or to cover your expenses. Whereas you can't just willy nilly apply to the Arts Council now, there is a kind of rolling programme. You had an Arts Council officer who would now the programmes regionally and either come at it from the

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organisation's point of view who would be saying we want these people, or the individual artists could have a conversation with them. I'm not quite sure what the Scottish system is now but certainly in England that level of support has gone, so you don't build a relationship and you don't have that sense that you can look for the opportunities for showing knowing that you probably could get some money from the Arts Council to kind of subsidise what you were doing. I suppose what I'm also thinking about is coming from England although I'm in the north of England it's still a four-hour journey to Glasgow, so you need to have quite a few things going on to make it worth you doing it especially if you're an artist on a small budget. BUZZCUT is obviously another one in that kind of offspring of National Review in some way, but you're going to come to a festival in a way that you don't just go to see a show or an exhibition because you know that you can stay a couple of nights or at least have a good day there and see a few things. It's a kind of practical offer that a festival makes.

SG: Yes. I think you're right.

GD: Really interesting. You're making me think about Hull Time Based Arts and despite getting this kind of retrospective event with Hull 2017 City of Culture, that archival process has never been done. It just seems such a shame. I think there is something to be said about a city like Hull in the way you're thinking about Glasgow and what is the symbiosis of place and live art.

SG: There is definitely a relationship between post-industrial cities or a post-industrial town and live art practice I think that is really significant in a way that I can't quite articulate yet. It's maybe something to do with what I was saying right at the start of our conversation, it's something to do with the conditions of possibility.

GD: And there's a lot of interest now in ecology and ecologies of performance. I think I do see it as an urban practice in a lot of ways. It's politics because it's about loss and wealth, or lack of it, it's about the physical materials of those urban spaces, it's about clay and brick and loud music and electricity. It's not about trees.

SG: [Laughs].

GD: You know what I mean?

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SG: Yes. The major example of live art practice in Scotland that doesn't feel strictly urban to me is some of the projects which are associated with Deveron Arts now called Deveron Projects who are up in Aberdeenshire.

GD: Yes.

SG: I'm going back and forth thinking about how I'm going to try and write about that practice because it clearly is an organisation that primarily engages with visual art, but the number of people who have gone there and ended up making participatory and performance-based projects is huge. People like Anthony Schrag who is based in Edinburgh, that's where he teaches at the moment. He made a few things at National Review, he's made stuff at the CCA, and he's been making work in lots of different forms for about twenty or thirty years.

GD: CCA yes, that's the other place.

SG: It's just interesting. The fun thing of trying to think about Deveron Arts in the context of live art has been going if I take the city, if I take the urban out of live art, what is left for me to recognise? What do all those claims to live art's expansive radicalism look like when they don't have the city as a backdrop? And that's a rhetorical question as much as anything else.

GD: When you think of the big issues like sexuality, race, and gender, how are they expressed without the city?