

## Live Art in Scotland: Rosana Cade

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Stephen Greer (SG): Can I ask you to introduce yourself? So, I might say something like, hi I'm Steve, I'm a writer and a teacher and at the moment I am mainly interested in live art in Scotland. If we could just start off that way, maybe.

Rosana Cade (RC): Hi, I'm Rosana, I am a queer non-binary artist and I work a lot in performance but my work takes many different forms and happens in lots of different contexts and being queer and non-binary is something that is central to how I think about making work, which is I suppose about pushing against norms that restrict us and working with fluidity and unfixedness and multiple possibilities and potential for change and thinking about how we can connect.

SG: To start off and you've maybe started to answer this question, one of the things I'm interested in is how people find live art or performance art or maybe how live art finds them whether as artists or activists or as audience members. Do you have a sense of your early encounters with, or impressions of, live art, or maybe something that you recognised as your kind of art, maybe 'there is an opportunity here for me'?

RC: I always feel a bit embarrassed by my story really, but basically when I was a teenager, I wanted to be an actor, I don't know why that's embarrassing. So, I went to do a foundation in acting at East 15 drama school and what that foundation in acting showed me was that I didn't want to be an actor, but that there was something in live performance that I was drawn to, that the things that were important to me were being able to express myself.

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There was lots of things in the world that I felt passionately about that I wanted to be working with and it seemed to me that training to act was more about training to be someone who would be able to take direction and be moulded into lots of different characters but not necessarily about me being able to express myself [laughs]. So, I sort of came to live art and experimental performance almost as, not a default, but because I'd gone into the world of more traditional theatre and saw that it wasn't for me, and then I was just looking for places that were dealing with performance in a different way and I discovered the contemporary performance course at the RSAMD as it was then, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland now. That seemed to be talking about performance in a different way, but I wouldn't say at that stage I had any understanding of what live art was at all. There was just an instinct that that would be a good course to choose and so I guess it was through my education on that course that I became exposed to live art. A very particular way that we were exposed to it at that time was we went to the National Review of Live Art which was on every year which was a huge festival, but yes there were lots of other things to go and see. At that time, it really felt like I was in the place for live art, Glasgow had a lot going on.

SG: It's interesting, I've spoken to a few other people who sort of encountered more traditional forms of actor training and realised in the process of it that, not only was this not giving them what they wanted, it wasn't giving them the opportunities in the world that they needed or wanted. We'll come back and talk about the National Review because it's such a huge part of Glasgow's history, Scotland's history, before we get into that big picture stuff, let's chat a bit about your own work. You've suggested in your introduction that you make for lots of different contexts, maybe more typical conventional theatre spaces but also lots of work for queer and club settings, sort of as a route into that I'm interested in hearing about some of the regular or repeated collaborations that are spread through your different work. So, working with people like Ivor MacAskill, Nic Green and also with your sister Amy Cade. Could you perhaps tell me a bit about your experience of a few of those collaborative projects, so working on stuff like *MOOT MOOT* or working on something like *Cock and Bull* and I'm conscious that there are two very different modes of collaboration there.

RC: Sure, in a way all of those feel quite different kinds of collaboration. Something I would say is I feel all of my work is collaborative and I don't think I've made a solo piece of work

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ever and have spent very little time on my own in a studio because for me that's not a productive way of working. I'm really interested in collaborating with other people and thinking about how we collaborate because it feels like an important skill for thinking about how we live with other people as well. In my life in some ways, I have collaborated with people who are very close to me like very close friends and my partner and my big sister, and I don't know if I have a way of relating to people where I'm like, let's do something together. I don't know, I feel like a lot of my friendships turn into some kind of collaboration as well, which isn't always a great idea.

SG: [Laughs]. But do you have a sense that there has to be an existing relationship of one kind or another that's there before there is an artistic collaboration? Does that tend to be the case?

RC: I would say in some ways it has for a lot of my big projects but I'm also very wary of that being a really nepotistic approach and that means that the pool of people you work with might be quite small. Thinking about working with my sister and thinking about working with Ivor, the projects are very specific. So, I did a project with my older sister because at the time I was trying to understand her decisions around going into sex work and trying to reconcile that with my own feminist ideas. It felt like we'd lived together as teenagers and she was someone I looked up to incredibly closely and then we both went off between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four and had these very different experiences, but both of us experiencing our own feminisms and it felt like I wanted to reconnect with her and understand where she was coming from. So that was the desire to work with my sister and that was a very personal desire, but I felt like it was interesting for a wider audience to perhaps listen to our two very different experiences together but be seeing that through the lens of two people who are sisters. I think that was quite a powerful framing for the work and provided a listening between us and understanding and acceptance and I think it worked quite well. Interestingly, when I worked with my sister, I made a stage show called *Sister* which we did at the Fringe, we toured it a bit. I made a show as part of the process, which only needs me to perform it, which is a one-on-one performance. I think, in some ways, it's a slightly more successful piece of work conceptually and I think it's a bit more open and the form of it is a bit more interesting. That piece, I still tour that now, even though I made it in 2012. I was collaborating with my sister, with someone who isn't an

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artist, and so there was only a set amount of time that we could work together, and actually her life changed and her priorities shifted and what she was thinking about shifted, so for her, engaging in the work I was doing was a very different commitment whereas for me that was part of my career. I could speak about that collaboration for a long time but it was very particular because she was my big sister and there was an inherent power dynamic which had been there for twenty-four years before we started working which was that she was the one with the knowledge and I learnt from her, and in this we had to shift that because we were kind of coming as equals to it, but actually I was the one with knowledge and experience of making performance, so that was quite hard to shift. So yes, I don't need to speak about that piece of work for too long.

SG: [Laughs].

RC: That was an interesting collaboration and one that I found quite difficult but I'm quite glad I did it because it shifted mine and my sister's dynamic in the way that we understand each other, in a way that I can't imagine happening if we hadn't gone on that process together. I think that affected my whole family in quite a difficult way at first but in a way that was useful.

SG: So, working with Ivor or working with Nic you're obviously working with experienced artists where there's a different landscape of collaboration and negotiation.

RC: Exactly yes. Working with Nic, that's her work really and she's inviting me in, and we do devise stuff together, but her brain is very much in control of those processes and does a lot of the work of composing those pieces. I learned so much working with her and Laura because they both have skills that I don't have and I think they bring out stuff in me as a performer which I'm not able to bring out myself, stuff that I really enjoy doing, stuff that's quite complicated choreographically.

SG: So, things like *Cock and Bull*, am I right that there's a version with two performers and a version which is three or has it just been the two of you that performed it has changed? I can't remember.

RC: There's a version that's a show that's an hour and that's the one we've done the most, and there's a durational one which is two people and I've always been in every single one [laughs], but there have been different combinations and different ones just because of Nic

and Laura having children at different times. So yes, working with them, they're two people I looked up to hugely when I was a student and was involved in their piece *Trilogy*. I was really grateful to be asked to work with them because we had quite a long-term collaboration doing *Cock and Bull*, performing *Cock and Bull* and making this new piece which sadly didn't get performed because of COVID. I think we'd been working together for about seven years and fairly regularly within that time and I think it's really interesting how having a process with other people allows you to understand their life and what's happening for them in a certain way, and all of us had different things going on at that time which must have influenced what we were bringing to the room to an extent, even if that's not necessarily what we were dealing with in the room. I sort of feel grateful for having connections to those people through doing the work.

SG: I had a conversation with Nic about when that show was still in development and before it got cancelled by the pandemic and she was talking about that particular rhythm of working, where instead of having like three weeks or six weeks intensively, there was a pattern where you were in each other's lives a little bit but over a much longer period of time and that was part of her interest in thinking about structures of collaboration and structures of support. That was really striking to me thinking about how there might be a sort of structure of support in artistic development that doesn't have the same temporality as your conventional rehearsal period?

RC: Yes, exactly. It's funny because I feel like the conventional rehearsal period is not really something I've experienced in making and I feel like all of my processes have been quite different, which I'm now owning as a non-binary approach [laughs] where I suppose the process emerges in relation to the project, so it's not like beginning the project in a set way of how we make work, it's kind of a conversation between what's available, what you want to do, what does the idea need, what would be a new way of doing it that might be something new. I think that's how Nic was approaching that and in some ways on a really practical level, it was great to have that kind of employment over a long period of time. The piece me and Ivor are about to show we've been making for three years. I think also when you're making something, whenever the end point comes, you're going to show something that's where you're up to at that time. It might be finished, it might not be finished, who knows! We could keep making this show until we're ninety, that would actually be really

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interesting, and I suppose the piece we're making at the moment is called *The Making of Pinocchio* which is in response to Ivor's transition, and we're really thinking about this idea of something that is constantly in the making. It was interesting, that piece with Nic and Norah as well, if we'd shown something in the first year the piece would have been very different, but we could've showed something then. It's sort of like, how long do you let something keep evolving for and when do you need to put that time pressure in and go, it's got to get to that place and sometimes that's so arbitrary when that deadline comes.

SG: Whether it's because there's a performance date or festival, or I guess also because the money runs out, or a funder goes we want to see the thing we've asked you to make [laughs].

RC: Exactly. I get so scared of the deadline but also the deadline also has to come for you to shift up a gear and start making some decisions. Definitely for me and Ivor, otherwise it's just endless ideas and we don't commit [laughs], so that narrowing process. I've gone off on one a bit, I should probably talk about working with Ivor. So, Ivor MacAskill is my partner and we actually worked together before we got together, we made a show called *Strange Hungers* for Glasgay! about lesbian history. That was our relationship before we were partners and I think there was something in our ease of performing with each other. I suppose there was a kind of unstaged ease and chemistry that worked well that might have drawn us to each other, so we decided to collaborate in life after we'd collaborated in art!

SG: [Laughs].

RC: We've definitely been working together a lot more in the past few years. It's good to talk about things practically sometimes, to be honest we just weren't seeing much of each other because we were both busy working on different projects and being very fortunate to be on tour quite a lot. I got commissioned to work on something by Fierce and the Marlborough and it was very open, whatever I wanted to make, which again is a very privileged position to be in and I guess at that point I was just thinking me and Ivor have fun when we work together, it would be nice to spend more time together! [Laughs]. Let's see what it would be like to go on a proper process together. We were a bit nervous about it because we had been doing stuff together since we'd been a couple, but it was much more like club and cabaret stuff with our band Double Pussy Clit Fuck, which is very like, let's just make something on the day. At first, we found it quite hard to go on a longer process

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together and I think we were coming with a lot of insecurities. The thing is, when you're working with people like your sister or your partner, or someone like Nic Green who's someone I've always looked up to, so I was sort of bringing that relationship into the room. You've always got this other relationship which is also there in the room as well as you being collaborators, and they demand different roles from you. So, because me and Ivor are partners, we trust each other so much, we can be so open with each other, we can improvise with each other in a way where we know what each other are thinking but also, we can be our absolute worst selves to each other that we would never be to another collaborator, so it's like trying to keep those boundaries in the room can sometimes be hard. I think also sometimes one of us will be struggling a bit or feeling anxious or having a hard time, and then it's like it's hard for me to be both your partner and your collaborator right now because those roles are different.

SG: Those roles are asking different things from you.

RC: Exactly, yes. So, there are challenges with it, but I also feel very very lucky that me and Ivor can work together and in general we do really enjoy it. I love performing with Ivor, that's a real joy. I find him very very funny, and I really like our dynamic and chemistry on stage.

SG: That commission from the Marlborough and I beg your pardon, I forgot the name of it.

RC: Fierce.

SG: Was that the origin of the Pinocchio show, because I can't remember the name of that [laughs] apologies! I wrote it down and I can't read my handwriting. Was that what became *MOOT MOOT*?

RC: Yes sorry, I didn't finish that story, that was when we made *MOOT MOOT*. In 2017 we did that and then in 2018 we did *MOOT MOOT* and that seemed to go quite well, and we were happy with it, so we were like, let's keep working together. Actually, this process we're currently doing began with getting the Diane Torr bursary and we'd said we don't want to make a show, but we should respond creatively during this time of gender transition because we feel that would be beneficial to us. We don't know if anything's going to come out of it or not, we don't want to put pressure on ourselves, but we're artists, we're creative people so that's how we process things and it's also how we have time and space to do

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things together. We had a few different residencies and we started exploring his gender transition and our experience of that as a couple which is very undocumented actually, couples going through transition together. Unless it's some drama and they split up. It felt like it was important for us to do things together. We started thinking about *Pinnocchio* and got very excited so now we're making this show which is sort of about our collaboration as a couple and our identities. It's interesting because I made an autobiographical piece with my sister and now in this piece we're looking at what it means to be real and shifting ideas about truth and authenticity and I suppose within that we're trying to question this idea of autobiographical performance and that being a fixed truth, to problematise the idea of any kind of fixed hold on a truth of yourself, so trying to create something that has a shifting nature to it which is why it feels important that it's made over a long period of time and hopefully the piece will allow responses in a moment rather than being a set text or something.

SG: It's so interesting, both the process and the content of that work. I've been conscious of a few queer and trans performance makers who have been in this space where they've been acknowledging the really important role of autobiographical performance in the history of queer and trans performance but have also really started interrogating its limits and the way in which testimony and bodies are expected to offer a definitive proof which can be really empowering but can also be incredibly limited. It almost closes down as many opportunities as it might offer to you.

RC: Yes exactly, I think that there's a hunger for those narratives to be told in a particular way and to fit a kind of binary idea of transition and one that has to start from a place of trauma and pain and go into a place of being fixed. The thing is that's also similar to what you have to do within a medical transition process, like tell my life in a certain narrative of a kind of cis idea of what gender is and it goes along with the way that we tell so many stories. Of course, we know, or we believe that the experience of being in a body is a lot more complicated and messy and that we shift through time backwards and forwards. Using the narrative of *Pinocchio* is also quite useful for us. The piece is kind of in response to our autobiographical journey over the last few years but it's shown through a fictional narrative of people who are trying to create a version of *Pinocchio*, but they're sort of working on it in the show, that's the idea.



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SG: Nice, nice. Before we move on, something that just occurred to me, thinking about how that work is currently being supported by The Work Room which is sort of associated with the physical space at Tramway and is next to Scottish Ballet. One of my private theories in this project and I keep telling it to people so it's not a private theory very much longer [laughs] is that there is a slightly underexamined tradition, or significance, of movement and choreographic practice in the history and development of live art practice and practitioners in Scotland, whether that's in the role that development agencies like The Work Room are playing, or if it's because of the languages people are using in their performance making. I've increasingly thought about Nic Green's work in choreographic terms and that piece *MOOT MOOT*, for me that's a piece of work that could easily be programmed into a contemporary dance festival, I haven't checked where it's toured so it might well have already!

RC: It was meant to be at The Place in London which is the place for dance, sorry I'm interrupting.

SG: No, it's fine! Conversation [laughs].

RC: Yes, so that has been seen from a choreographic perspective and I can understand that lens to look at it. I feel like from touring quite a lot in Europe, mainly northern European places like Germany, Belgium and Switzerland, I think there seems like there's more of a crossover between live art and dance but I don't think they're necessarily using the term live art but there's these spaces where people from a dance background and a visual art background and a theatre background are all working and actually, I think a lot of people working in dance are making stuff that fits into live art as well as the other way round. Words mean different things to different people.

SG: Just that simple point about the words meaning different things to different people, even though I've got this private theory about the significance of the choreographic, I'm also really hesitant about using that word because I don't know that it's really useful to describe what's going on or it's useful to help understand what's going on. It's become a bit of a placeholder, maybe like how live art is a placeholder for the expanded field of things that you might do with your body in a live moment [laughs]. You've already spoken to this a little bit, but I'm also interested in some of the work that you continue to do in club and queer spaces. You mentioned the band Double Pussy Clit Fuck but there's also things like Disco

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Derrick and Drag Mother. Where does that sit in this landscape of working? Because that's things where you have assistants or collaborators. You're also more identifiable as a single solo performer, certainly Disco Derrick and Drag Mother where you are a singular figure perhaps.

RC: I've just got one other thing to say on that point and then I'll go on to talk about these. I was just thinking that *Walking:Holding* is a piece that is programmed in dance festivals, in theatre festivals, in live art festivals, or when someone's just having a day and things are happening in a town. I call it a performance, but that word completely confuses a lot of people and something that piece of work does is bring people in who are not in our world. I'm interested in the language that we use through pieces of work and when does that open things up and when does it close things down. Often if I'm talking about *Walking:Holding* and trying to bring people into it we might just say it's a special walking tour and in a way I'm like, does that diminish a piece of art? I don't know, but it's helping people to understand what it is and therefore being involved in it and have the experience and that's the important thing.

SG: Yes. Let's stick with that, *Walking:Holding* actually. It's next on my list. So, this was first made in Glasgow but it's a site-sensitive piece. The path on which the participants and hand holders take is redesigned or recreated for each location it's staged in.

RC: Yes. I first made it in 2011 and I've taken it to over forty places now, and it involves one audience member at a time going on a walk through the city or town and holding hands with a series of different people one after the other from the six or seven people and it lasts about forty minutes, and those people are local people who are in it who I lead on a process to prepare them for the work and I plan the route for the performance based on their relationship to the town itself as well as looking for particular things in the city. As I said, it's happened in lots of different contexts.

SG: So that work, I think I took part in it, I experienced it, I don't know what the language is! I did it [laughs] during the Sexology season I think at The Arches? I think that's when it was. I've since thought and tried to write about it quite a lot since then. I'm interested in that work particularly in relationship to what you've already said and also already talking about the queer feminist discourse that runs through all of your practice maybe that it's a work which seems to be informed by lots of different things, both by elements of your own

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autobiographical encounter with walking in public and being identified as different or experiencing that, but it also being a work about intimacy in public as well. Maybe the question is about your sense of where this work came from and how it continues to involve over forty iterations of it.

RC: I think something to say about my practice in general or how I think about performance is I'm interested in creating opportunities for people to have experiences that they wouldn't normally have and that kind of allow them to act slightly outside of the boundaries that they're normally acting within. I think this can be very exciting, it can be an opportunity for understanding something a different way, understanding other people in a different way. I think a lot of that is incorporated in *Walking:Holding* but I do see the idea of making live performance is kind of about creating live experiences, and also queer world-making, because it's literally like creating worlds and different ways of being together. With *Walking:Holding* when I first made it I was very much responding to my own experiences of same-sex hand-holding and kind of looking at queer activism. I suppose also at that time I was beginning to understand and be interested in intersectional ways of looking at difference and not just thinking about gender, recognising that I may be in a same-sex couple but I also have white privilege and able body privilege and that affects how I experience being in public space so I started doing some experiments, holding hands with different people and became very interested in how our identity affects how we experience being out in public and this idea that in cities we share spaces with hundreds of different people, but we may all be having a different experience depending on our identity or our past relationship with that space. It felt important to create something that would allow us to share some of these differences and there's an Audre Lorde quote which I always quote when I talk about the piece which is, 'It's not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognise, accept and celebrate those differences.' It's thinking about how can we understand different people's experiences of the city. When I first made it I was very much thinking about the relationship between the people that are walking and holding hands and the rest of the public, the physical space, and was thinking a lot less about this intimate act between you and a stranger and I think through performing it in many different places and meeting different people I've learned so many different things that the project can be about for people. That action of taking a stranger's hand in a city centre is one that's very powerful

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and a real actual act of solidarity with this other being no matter what or no matter who they are. I think one of my favourite responses to the piece is that it gives you this experience of walking around your town and looking at everyone and imagining that they are the next hand holder because you don't know who it's going to be. Seeing everyone as a potential companion, which is a real shift in how we look at strangers and how we think about our connectiveness so whilst it is about for me highlighting the importance of difference and our privileges, trying to understand differences so we can work together to create a fairer society. There's also something in there about a connection and a shared humanity and an embodiment of that, and I think it really does shift how you look at other people.

SG: It's hard now to separate what I felt and knew at the time and what has occurred to me since [laughs] in the years that have passed, but I remember thinking, I think I felt at the time, a sense of sort of slightly precarious solidarity, that there was an act of care that I was involved in and I didn't know quite what direction it was travelling in, if I was taking care of the person or if they were taking care of me, and also what responsibility we might have for each other. I had this flickering thought of turning into an alleyway walking on cobbles, and thinking if we have to run can I run on cobbles? Can this person run on cobbles? It was a totally safe middle of the day experience, I was at no risk but that thought does pass through my mind occasionally walking through side streets, I'm not especially a visibly queer person but it stills occurs to me.

RC: The alleyway is put in there for that reason to perhaps, there is something about being in an alleyway when you feel a sense of danger potentially and what would I do in that situation? For me I feel a bit insecure, it's interesting we talk about that version, I feel like I've very slightly tweaked the piece since then and also very much developed the process I go on with the performers and that one, in particular, I find it very hard to do in Glasgow because when I do *Walking:Holding* in another place I go there and that is what I'm doing and I'm fully immersed in that project and I'm new to the city so I'm finding out about it through these people. That version in Glasgow to be honest, it wasn't as well supported as it should be. So when I think about that I'm like oh that wasn't *Walking:Holding* but it was *Walking:Holding* because the basic premise of it is so similar but there actually is now a little bit of information that the audience gets at the beginning which slightly frames it and

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slightly tells you the parameters without changing it that much at all. The actual confusion around what the relationship is a bit too much for some people. Just making clear that it's not scripted, and you can talk about what you want, and you don't have to talk. Just a few little things. With one-on-one work, I think the invitation has to be clear because what people are experiencing is an uncertainty about what they're meant to be doing which can be a detriment to the work. I'm not saying that's what you were saying was going on because I think that question is still really important for you to feel that and what would I do in this situation and am I responsible for this person, are they responsible for me? We're in public, anything could happen, is all kind of part of the work.

SG: My overriding, stronger memory of the work afterwards was a sense of almost adrenaline and pleasure of, I can't remember when I last met six strangers, I can't remember when I last held hands in public with someone and the kind of afterglow of that actually [laughs].

RC: Yes, I'm still reminded how rare that is and also how profound it can be, not necessarily profound in a deep meaningful way, what do I mean? People can often come back from it elated. It can be so nourishing. There are loads of things I can say about it that sound so cheesy in a way, but it can be both very challenging and provocative and confronting and also be kind of nourishing, uplifting, connecting, and joyful. In terms of these ideas about performance being queer world-making, there's something in that about imagining something more utopic in terms of how we can relate and enacting that over and over again, so that's important to that piece, I think. That's something that I've put into a film as well which at first I was very against documenting *Walking:Holding* because the actual experience is so much about being there and being live and it's multi-sensorial, and sitting and looking at it you're in a completely different position to if you're actually putting your body there and the presence is so important. Touching on what you were saying before about activism, I think for me there's links within *Walking:Holding* to protests and to pride marches and the idea of taking up space and saying this is a place where people like me are allowed to be. After a while of touring it I was like I'm getting this interesting perspective where I'm getting to see what it's like in different places and I can't rely on my own memory to hold all this. I think there is perhaps something interesting that could be shared if I were to try and contain a few different ones together and also there's so many people who would

never come to *Walking:Holding* the live performance, but potentially there's something of the discourse in the project that could be shared with a much wider audience if I was to turn it into a film. I went on quite an interesting process to think about how to do that and I think particularly in the past year it's been really amazing to have had that film because it is a way for so many people to connect to the project and have a very different experience, but I think still find interest in the themes and things to connect to there and think about.

SG: I'm conscious of that film which is gorgeous, there's a piece of audio documentation which sits somewhere between I guess an audio description of the work but also it does have some of the experiential qualities of doing the work. I think maybe at the start of that piece of that documentation you do suggest that a person listens to it while walking around outside rather than sat at home.

RC: Yes, I'd forgotten about that [laughs] that's when I was first saying I need to find a way to actually share some of the things that are coming up. I made that for the Sexology program at The Arches and at that time I was interested in how the form of documentation can be in relation to the performance itself. The idea was that you would walk around out in the public while you listen to it which has been interesting for people to do that. I'd forgotten about that! [Laughs].

SG: [Laughs]. When you go back and listen to it whether it at all reflects the work that now exists, but I really like it. Certainly, I've shared it with students as one of the ways of encountering the work because they can't do it in person. It's still out there in the world, it's a lovely piece of work, I think.

RC: Okay, good [laughs].

SG: I also wanted to ask you a little bit about your broader sense of the spaces and places for live art in Scotland. We've talked a little bit about some of these institutions, we've talked about the National Review for Live Art. I don't know if we've mentioned it, but the image of The Arches has been in my head just as a place where some of your work has been performed over the years. It's really just to ask you about your sense of that, knowing also that you were one of the co-founders of BUZZCUT which I think has played a really significant role in creating a space for live art and experimental practices. Maybe we should

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start with the origins of BUZZCUT, coming out of the sudden collapse of New Territories or the sudden closure of New Territories and New Moves International.

RC: Yes. I was getting ready to speak about The Arches then.

SG: Oh no, start with The Arches, whichever makes sense for you.

RC: I don't know why, to me they're kind of separate conversations because I feel like The Arches is related to my own practice. I realised when it closed that I hadn't worked anywhere else in Scotland, other than showing work at the Fringe and that The Arches had supported every single piece of work that I'd made and since it closed, I've barely done anything in Scotland, so it was really my artistic home. That's my relationship to it in terms of my practice, I feel hugely, hugely lucky that when I was a student it was there as a place to go and see amazing work, also to go clubbing and go to gigs. We were going to talk a little bit about clubs and theatre and we've moved on from that conversation but I absolutely love clubbing and nightlife and I think that's a really important space for queerness, not for everyone as well, we need other spaces for queerness that are accessible to everyone but that is somewhere that I really enjoy the kind of transgression of those spaces and I think what was amazing about The Arches was that you could have those different forms together in that place and I don't know if that's why I developed those different strands of my practice quite naturally or if it's just desire and working for the places you want to be maybe.

SG: It was so sudden. I'm talking to so many people, particularly those who made work in Glasgow, for whom The Arches played a really significant role in their practice and just their life full stop. The fragility of what was holding that bit of the ecology was and maybe still is quite alarming to me at least.

RC: Yes, absolutely. Something I'm really interested in is context and community or thinking about community as a kind of spatial practice rather than identity groups basically but thinking about the spaces that we're in as being communities, so locales and that connecting us in different ways. When we think about performance, again this idea of it making worlds and building communities. It's kind of a really obvious thing to say but it is really significant that having a physical building meant that there was this different sense of community that you could kind of feel connected to. There were problems with it as well,

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there were people who were in it and people who weren't in it. I know there were people who felt outside of it. It was something that I felt a sense of belonging there and all the people that you would see just because it was there, that's kind of how connections were made. I'm so sad, the saddest thing is not seeing people in the past year, but I remember feeling a bit like that after The Arches closed because it was like where do we gather to see things, and actually The Arches closing was what spurred us on as BUZZCUT to do Double Thrills. Obviously BUZZCUT had been mainly an annual festival and we'd done other bits and bobs and it was born out of the lack of something else which I could talk about. This sense that we weren't going to have anywhere to see more fully formed shows or to gather regularly outside of festivals and felt like a lack so we wanted to put on a monthly performance programme at the CCA and that's something that has built its own community around it and that Karl's taken on and has done brilliant things with it. The Arches put on these festivals where we got to see really interesting work which Take Me Somewhere has also done but it was also a place where you could go and make stuff. The rooms were crap, the rehearsal rooms were really rubbish but they were there! And they were in the middle of the city, and you'd be in one room, someone else would be in another room and there was the bar you could go to. It was definitely not a very good space for people being sober or things like that. It was very much the club and the drinking side of it perhaps was quite a big side of it in some ways, I don't need to talk about that very much. There was an infrastructure that felt incredibly supportive, and I think it had a huge impact on me as a student and an emerging artist. I was making everything there and showing it there before it went elsewhere, and I don't think we have anything that's taken that place sadly.

SG: I can remember seeing something very early on in the first Take Me Somewhere and seeing lots of people I knew and then realising there was a much larger number of people there who were sort of slightly background familiar to me and I was like where have I seen these people? I don't know any of them and I was like oh it's The Arches [laughs], that's where I've seen these people. Maybe it was imagined familiarity, maybe those people weren't at all from The Arches, maybe I've completely invented it, but there was a sense of an extended community being reconstituted through the festival. I was seeing Kieran Hurley's show. Is it called *Heads Up*?



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RC: I just want to take a minute to say I'm really fucking angry about what happened because culturally it is so wrong and when they put on *Super Night Shot*, the Gob Squad show in, was it 2018, in The Arches, did you go to it? They opened The Arches up, and I was like I'm going to look at the studio theatre and I opened the door, and it was a fucking kitchen, it was a fucking kitchen! We have to be so angry about it because the city centre is full of places to eat and shop and spend money and that is not doing anyone any good and those spaces are so important for so many people and we don't have those spaces anywhere else. Anyway, I know you know all that.

SG: Seeing *Super Night Shot* I think that was the first time I'd been back to The Arches after it had closed and my last experience prior to that had been helping someone load a van because the building was shutting and so people were just trying to get their set, their club, get everything out of the building so a friend was getting their show out and needed a hand, so literally stuffing things in a van, helping people stack chairs.

RC: I think we all have to pay attention to how quickly things can change and these places that are so important that we imagined would just always be there just go and it was so weird that summer because I went to see *Super Night Shot* and then I was performing at a festival in Germany, amazing festival, it's in Wiesbaden, it's a biennale, and at that time it was called Bad News but it's the most amazing festival I've ever been to in terms of the way they build a context. I know I'm going on a tangent here but it's the Opera House, but it's run by contemporary artists and the Opera House is this huge opulent kind of grotesque but very wealthy building, it's all golden. What they did was they got Rewa which is like a German supermarket, like Tesco or something, and they made a Rewa supermarket inside the Opera House and it was like this dystopic future of these right-wing views that are coming up in Europe, like what if? What if this happened? The art was all in this disused shopping centre and some art was on in a porn cinema. It was a really amazing multileveled experience that you were having but everyone was like oh god yeah imagine if the theatre was a supermarket, and they turned the main stage into the drive-in cinema. They made it so that cars could drive onto the main stage of this cinema. It was amazing! But I was like this is happening! I've literally just been in the theatre in my town, and I opened the door and it's a fucking kitchen! It's real. It was just a very trippy dystopic experience and that has

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happened and it's shit [laughs]. We need to pay attention and build things back and hold onto them. I don't know how but I do try.

SG: If you're good to chat for just a last few minutes, maybe this is to speak directly about BUZZCUT and the different shapes it's taken. As you've sort of said it maybe started as annual festival while also doing programmes of work for people like Forest Fringe and other places outside of Scotland and then there was the development of Double Thrills which as you say is this recurring night at the CCA here in Glasgow where the programme is often touring or slightly more established artists along with work which is still emerging or is being made by emerging artists. It would feel weird to talk to you and not talk about BUZZCUT at all [laughs].

RC: Yes, sorry I've gone on about other things

SG: No, no it's all great, it's all brilliant. I just wouldn't want to talk to you and not invite you to chat about it.

RC: BUZZCUT came about when New Territories folded, and I had just graduated and I had received a commission from New Territories so was very directly impacted by that thing then not happening. I said to Nick Anderson who I started it with, how can we try and provide opportunities for artists if there aren't opportunities at the moment. We were really reflecting on The National Review of Live Art which had ended the year before and how important that experience had been to us as students, going into that place where we could see so much stuff and it was this really immersive experience of a festival. We were kind of thinking about the loss of that, partly for students because that was our experience, but also as emerging artists where are the opportunities, I've just had this opportunity taken away, how can we maybe make some other opportunities. That was kind of where BUZZCUT began from. In terms of responding to The National Review of Live Art as well, I suppose we were also trying to create something that was new and different. Where we were feeling about live art at that point, it can be framed as this very niche form and spoken about in a particular language but actually, we feel like it's something that is very open in terms of form and that potentially lots of different people might be able to enjoy and take something from and people working in live art are just making so many different things so how could we create a festival that would perhaps have quite a welcoming kind of ethos and be thinking about accessibility in lots of different ways and thinking about the money side of it

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differently and trying to think about value and exchange differently so it was a real kind of experiment in community and in ethics and we were like in our early/mid-twenties and full of energy and ready to just work our arses off to make something happen. I think that kind of energy went into it, and it became quite popular quite quickly and we really felt like we were responding to need because lots of artists were applying to be in it. It started in the city centre and in the third year we moved to the Pearce Institute and then that kind of became our home for a bit. We were also thinking about how we could do some projects in Govan and in the area around there. There were loads of things about BUZZCUT that were successful and really kind of building that idea of community and connections between artists across the UK. I think that even though we kept asking for money to help us with organisational development, we were never given it and I think we were kind of coming from a position of scarcity, that we needed to do more and more, there aren't opportunities, we need to have as many artists as we can, we need to keep doing this, and eventually, the thing got a little bit too big for our ethics and we didn't have time to grow them. I actually stepped back before the last festival; I didn't work on that one. I think it was brilliant, I think it had just become too stretched though and it was really wise for Karl to kind of take a break. He's been re-establishing what it is and there was meant to be a festival last year but obviously it didn't happen.

SG: It's interesting, trying to balance those things. On the one hand there is the real desire for the festival or there is a need which the festival might speak to, and then there's maybe also an imperative which comes from funders explicit or implicitly which is about growth, 'come back to us when it's established, come back to us when it's bigger' and that responding to those needs and imperatives in a way which is ethical and also sustainable that doesn't make you burn yourself out is really difficult [laughs], especially when you're inventing it, not from scratch, but you're creating the infrastructure.

RC: Yes, exactly. We had no training at all in how to do any of the things that are involved in putting on a festival other than making art. I think that approach was really useful, and it helped us create something that felt quite different to a lot of other festivals, but sustainability was not something that we understood. In the end, I found it too hard to work on, but also it was like my career and BUZZCUT grew a hell of a lot in the kind of six years, and I didn't feel able to do them both and I knew what I was more interested in was moving

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towards being an artist. Working on BUZZCUT, it had stopped feeling like being an artist in a way.

SG: It's interesting, you realising that moment of going, the work of the festival is pulling me in a different direction or is demanding more energy from me than I have because of what I want to commit to my work as an artist, and I'm just thinking about how other artist-led organisations or festivals, how do the people who are in positions of.. whether it's curatorship or leadership, how do you balance those things. I'm just thinking about the parallel but quite different history of how Forest Fringe evolved from Debbie Pearson in the first year, to Andy in the second and then working with Ira in later years and how their practices as individual artists ran thick and thin through those festivals and I think maybe just now thinking, I think Debbie and Ira both had work on during the Fringe, but maybe Andy did as well actually. I've just thought about the complete difficulty of, I have to hold space for these other artists for this festival and I'm also going to try and make my own work [laughs].

RC: I think it's absolutely incredible that they do that, and we've sort of chatted about it because they feel like they want to be on the same level as the artists who are presenting work, so they put themselves in that position as well and I understand that, and I agree with in lots of ways. I think my feeling was for me, my head when I'm being an artist, I mean it depends on the project, but I need to be very focused on that thing to give it its attention and do my best job of being an artist and that is such a different headspace to running a festival but then BUZZCUT and Forest Fringe are slightly different beasts I suppose. I really respect Forest Fringe and those three are all practising artists and so I feel like they have a quite an interesting reflective process on what they're doing and have in the past few years shifted and done lots of different things and I think with BUZZCUT, actually, Nic stopped working as an artist and then with Karl coming in as well who have more producer processes. I think it's partly because of what BUZZCUT was trying to do and what it was trying to support, it naturally kind of needed to lean into perhaps working in that producer way. Potentially if it had been artist-led it might have shifted into something different, I don't know.

SG: The more I think about it the more I'm thinking I need to find new words for it. I talk about artist-led, but I wouldn't necessarily say producer-led but a lot of the work I'm looking

at sits in the meeting point of both of those things actually. There's a curatorial practice which is different in my head from the kind of artistic directorship which might characterise the Edinburgh International Festival. I can't work out which judgements I'm bringing to that distinction at the moment, but there's something about an approach to curation that I think is interesting. There's a lovely essay by Debbie where she talks about the curatorial approach of Forest Fringe, and I think it's in that piece where she talks about the attempt to create spaces for artists that wouldn't exist in this kind of collaborative communal space for artists working together. She also says but ultimately Forest Fringe is three people, it's me and Andy and Ira and we're making decisions about who to include and who not to include, who to programme and who not to programme and those decisions are informed by friendships as well as professional relationships and there's no getting away from that. I'm wildly paraphrasing what she says but I just thought that was so interesting to go there's this commitment to egalitarianism but at the same time there's acknowledgement which isn't a contradiction which goes also, we are the three people who run the damn thing, we do all the work, well not all the work.

RC: Those distinctions between the different roles are very interesting and I could talk about it a lot, but I won't. With BUZZCUT, the idea to have an open application was very important for us. The way we looked at that was that we wanted to be artists themselves selecting to come, so we would say we're putting on this thing, here's what we can offer, which in the first year this is really how it was because we really couldn't offer very much, we just wanted to make something happen. We were surprised that we got one hundred people applying because we weren't even paying people's travel, but we were like oh lots of people want to do something, let's make this thing happen. So, I guess rather than us just choosing people even if we've seen their work or whatever, it's being like here's the offer, is this speaking to you right now in terms of what you need? And you contact us via a quite simple application form saying this is what you want to do and why it's speaking to you right now. Of course that works quite well to a point but then by the time it gets to the fourth year and we have nearly five hundred applications I'm just like, this is not a good process because all these artists are doing that work of writing those forms and our decisions were really about trying to think about a festival as creating a community, how do we make this community accessible, how do we have lots of different voices there, lots of different experiences and

trying to programme in a non-hierarchical way in terms of how the work is positioned within the event as well. I think a real strength of BUZZCUT was that audiences would take risks and see things they wouldn't normally go to because it was all pay what you can and you didn't necessarily know what you were walking into, rather than a festival where you've got here's the emerging artists and here's the established ones. I suppose there was a kind of fluidity within the programming in terms of the scheduling of the work as well and that was purposeful, so again trying to look at where those hierarchies are. It's a really tricky dynamic and I think something I found quite uncomfortable actually, to be in that position. Artists are just powerless in lots of ways in our industry. I don't know what the answer to that is.

SG: It's just really interesting to hear you speak to what does a non-hierarchical approach to programming look like at the very level of organising artists and pieces of work into spaces in the duration of a day, particularly when you go to a festival like the Fringe and the trappings or the mechanisms of the hierarchy, like the 8pm slot in a one-hundred-and-twenty-seater is so for me, so transparent. The prestige that's attached to those things go so far in advance of what the show might be able to do or be. I don't have a clever answer, but if that's what you're trying to pursue what does that look like at the level of programming, at the level of organising a performance.

RC: I think another thing that was really important for us with BUZZCUT which I think we achieved earlier on and then it shifted was to have a space where artists felt like they could try things out and experiment and really take risks and perhaps work in different forms. I think that we did find we were getting more established artists applying to BUZZCUT with like, I've just got this idea, it's not something I'm going to get funding for and kind of just seeing people do things that sat outside of the kind of project driven industry that we're in which is quite, you have to make this thing that is going to be a product that is going to tour in order to have a living, whereas BUZZCUT was quite like, do you want to just come and spend twelve hours in a room having a go at this. I really miss that as an audience member and it wasn't just that as well, it was a mish mash [laughs] of works at different stages and people experimenting or really showcasing something but I think when we introduced Double Thrills we were thinking that for things that are actual shows, maybe BUZZCUT isn't the best thing for them because technically we have very little infrastructure so maybe we can support actual made shows for people wanting to tour them at Double Thrills and

maybe have BUZZCUT as this place of experiments, but what happens is it becomes popular and it becomes popular with programmers and so then you're like, yes come and take a risk but here's all the programmers in live art in the UK so is it actually a safe space for you to take a risk? We don't want them not to come because it's also really great if they see stuff and they like it and people are getting connections so how to kind of figure out what we were actually trying to offer artists because I think BUZZCUT was definitely about that, what can we do for artists primarily and there's so many things that they need that counterbalance each other and that's why we need more things and more opportunities so you don't have one thing trying to do it all! Which obviously we don't. There are some opportunities, but I would sort of like to just apply and have a go. A kind of low pressure experiment, because that's what art can also be about and yes anyway, blah blah blah.

SG: [laughs] That's all glorious. That's perfect. I got to the bottom of my list of things I wanted to ask you about and you've been so generous with your time, that's all been so brilliant. What you were just saying at the end there, I've been thinking about what happens when things get successful, and just that point about programmers then turn up and suddenly the space of experimentation becomes one of intense scrutiny and that's something you both don't want, and you want at the same time perhaps as an artist. It's like I hadn't quite grasped that bit of the dynamic so yes, thank you for that. I'm going to think about that some more [laughs].

RC: Yes, and I actually think programmers need to take a bit more responsibility for not just writing an artist off because I think it can happen when there's an emerging artist and people haven't heard of them, they try something out, it doesn't go very well and any programmer in the room is just like oh they're not very good. That's a bit harsh and I'm not saying that all programmers are like that, but I don't know, it's really vulnerable being an artist and putting your stuff out there and programmers need to foster those spaces for experimenting which I think they do, I don't know, it's not a binary.

SG: Responsibility is maybe the wrong word but there is a dynamic of care that everyone would benefit from being held in mind.

RC: Yes, exactly because that's not a space where we're not asking audiences to pay for tickets which is a different thing, so you know, I don't know, which is why I think there was a real generosity amongst people, but programmers never pay for their tickets.