

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

This interview was conducted online via Zoom on 19th August 2021 as part of the Live Art in Scotland research project at the University of Glasgow.

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

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

Stephen Greer (SG): I've been starting these conversations in lots of different ways but the one I keep coming back to, is asking people about how they came to be working in theatre and performance and live art and what their route in was. And even though I'm wary about origin stories, I think it's a useful and interesting place to start because it doesn't always start with performance. What feels like the first point of contact or the route in for you?

Ivor MacAskill (IM): I'm thinking it is useful because it makes a lot of connections potentially as well. I did my degree at Dartington College of Arts and that began in 1998, and the course I did was called Theatre, which was quite vague but during that time, I must've found out somehow the National Review of Live Art was on, and I think there was a busload of people who were going. Someone had hired a bus to take people up to Glasgow and I was like, my parents live in Glasgow, I'm from Glasgow, I've got somewhere to stay. Let's see what happens. I think most of the people who were going were more from a performance writing course or something, so it was maybe more that and I think me and another person I worked with came up. I guess it would have been at The Arches then, so we'd have seen quite a few things, some real live art heroes. I didn't really know what it was I was doing, it just seemed fun and interesting. I don't totally remember it being connected into our course that much but there was a lot of things that I didn't totally understand while I was doing my course [laughs].

SG: [Laughs].

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

IM: I guess it just seemed like that's performance or that's theatre. The influences on that course were quite varied anyway, so there was contemporary theatre. Depending on the tutors, some tutors were into Grotowski and that kind of thing was coming in and some were more dance-based, so there was dance influence and then in the other courses you would get more performance art and live art, so it was all there in the mix. Something being called live art would've been the NRLA.

SG: So even though the programme was called Theatre, you'd have a sense of what that might be at that stage?

IM: Yes, I think so.

SG: Do you remember anything about that first National Review or was it just the impression of just stuff? Quite a few people have talked about the first live review encounter of being really formative, but just being a rush of memory.

IM: Yeah, I think it's probably blurry because with the NRLA you would go repeatedly and meet the same people and it all gets squished together. I'm pretty sure, it must have been the first couple of years, I think I saw Kira O'Reilly doing something with cupping so that would have been in an arch with lights and darkness around and people fainting and things like that. What else do I remember, I think I remember Ian Smith would have been doing all the MC stuff so I think that was quite a strong image as well, something like Ian Smith in a big bright suit doing his stuff would have given me a sense that live art isn't all bloodletting and is lots of different things, and that sort of theatricality could be there as well.

SG: Did Reader come out of studying at Dartington or was that after?

IM: That's so funny that you found that little book [a publication made by Reader held in the CCA archive] as well. Yes, Reader was a company we formed for a degree show [called *So Long*]. That was me and Robert Walton, Hannah Still, Lalage Harries and James Leadbitter who's now the vacuum cleaner [who didn't study at Dartington but was a good friend of Robert so came in to work on lighting and AV with us]. So, we made our degree show together in our final term and then moved up to Glasgow and continued working together for a few years.

SG: Was it quite a pragmatic decision to carry on working together? Or did you have particular plans for that promise of collective working? I'm thinking about who some of the

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

influences might have been at Dartington and the collective model of Goat Island being really influential around that time. It still is I suppose. And also Forced Entertainment. Was there a particular model you had in your head?

IM: I think the course was actually very ensemble focused, you only really did solo work in different electives so the idea of ensemble-based, co-devising, that was what you were kind of being taught to do actually so it seemed like that's what you did. As you say, Goat Island was a big influence. Gob Squad we saw at some point, people like Blast Theory were around and that just seemed like that's what you do. We'd had a good experience making our work together, well actually, not entirely a good experience [laughs].

SG: Enough of a good experience!

IM: Enough of a good experience. There were definitely good connections and certainly Robert and I enjoyed spending time together [laughs]. We actually were given a few opportunities to do our degree show in a couple of different places, so there was a sense of well let's keep it going anyway because that's continuing. We did it at Brunel University through Phil Stanier and somewhere else as well [at the Goat Island Summer School in Bristol, in 2002]. I don't know if it was pragmatic because when that dissipated it was like the pragmatism of being an ensemble soon disappeared because it's not fundable. I think the decision to move to Glasgow was maybe pragmatic because I think we felt like London would be too big for us and because in Glasgow at that time I think something had happened with the CCA. I think it was reopening after it had its refurbishment. The Arches was obviously an option because we'd seen National Review of Live Art and there was support there, and I think Tramway was doing more stuff, so it felt like Glasgow was a good place to go to.

SG: So, the place I came across that little booklet that I showed you was in the CCA collection. It was in a file relating to the creative residencies that the CCA was running at that time and so Reader had one of those for a period?

IM: Yes. That must have been after a few years, maybe 2003 or 2004, does it have a date on it? [Laughs].

SG: I didn't physically take it away. I've got pictures to hand. Yes, I think that's about right because it was relating to a project that seemed to come in the middle of the fourteen or

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

fifteen or sixteen works that Reader did, which was part of the *Strangers and Intimacy* project where you were doing things at distance with artists in Melbourne.

IM: Yes. Let me just see if I can find a thing that'll jump my memory [laughs].

SG: It was *Songs from the Burning Bed*, and it was 2004.

IM: Okay. Yes, Robert's the one who's good at keeping track of things! [laughs]. His history is what matters. So, we came up to Glasgow and we were around and we got a few little things. There were a few live performance nights and events through a gallery [Market Gallery] in the east end of Glasgow that I can't remember the name of. Anyway, there were always a few bits and pieces here and there, and CCA was doing these creative labs, and Grace Surman was a curator there for a while, and someone called Lucinda. It was a case of a few people who were curating work and performance would give us a bit of space and time. *Songs from the Burning Bed* was a few different events over time, and we did a few performances in the CCA, is it the CCA 5 the big gym space? We did another one that was lots of audio tours around the CCA space that was part of another festival. Grace put on these live art festivals over a couple of years. So, we were doing little things like that.

SG: What kind of work was that? What kind of pieces or shows were you making with Reader?

IM: It was quite a mix, we made a second show that was trying to be similar to the first piece that we made which was called *So Long*. The second one was called something like [laughs] a really long, annoying, obnoxious title!

SG: [laughs] One of those double barrelled or triple barrelled...

IM: Something like, your hand on my heart and the world's still burning, or something like that [laughs]. We had space in The Arches, we had loads of time which was great. I think we had it over the summer, and we were in that place of we have been given this space, so we'll be in the basement of The Arches all summer, no daylight, we have to make the most of this opportunity, nobody's getting paid. We made this quite depressed piece, it definitely had some gestural movement in it, some long strange speeches, it had props that we found in my parents' attic [laughs] and things like that and it used one of the big Arches. Not many people came but a few people came. One night we were performing and because it was at the end of the arch where they had a fire exit door and the cleaner came in [laughs] and was

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

like, what's happening? I happened to be at the back and said we're just doing a performance now so come back later. Fun times. So, we were doing those kind of shows and also doing smaller things and pieces of writing.

SG: Was Jackie Wylie already at The Arches at that moment? Or was that Andy Arnold?

IM: I think it must've been Andy, I think Jackie was there, but I don't think she was in charge, but I can't totally remember. I suppose with The Arches that went on in terms of doing Arches Live or doing little scratch performances and trying things out and building up to doing bigger pieces. We made that show and took it to a few places.

SG: Okay. So, if I've got the timeline right, after making that sequence of works as Reader, that's the moment where you and Robert Walton start working together as Fish and Game, was that around 2005 time?

IM: Yes, it was probably later than that. I'll just have a look. There are so many people called Robert Walton. Oh, his website is so fancy.

SG: [Laughs].

IM: He's got it as 2001–2005. Oh yeah that's right, we were also making performances as guest directors at the RSAMD which is now RCS, on the contemporary performance practice course. For a few Christmases we'd work with the students to make theatre performances. The first one we had people like Nic Green, Laura Bradshaw and Murray Wason. We also made a show at Tramway in 2003, which was supported by a Dark Lights commission, there was a time when Tramway was commissioning stuff. I suppose it's the theatrical side of live art but definitely, with a live art sensibility, I guess. The last big performance or project of Reader was *Strangers and Intimacy* thing connecting with Australia. Then there was a bit of a breakdown in Reader [laughs] and Robert and I decided to get a new name and be Fish and Game when we made Otter Pie which was a sort of theatrical thing that then toured in Scotland.

SG: That was a show which did have some of those folk you just mentioned in it, Nic Green, Laura Bradshaw and Murray Wason [and Jodie Wilkinson].

IM: Yes, exactly.

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

SG: So that shift from working as an ensemble to a duo, but still working with other artists, I'm guessing part of that was because as you say, that collective structure no longer worked, but I'm guessing it was partly to do with that friendship with Robert.

IM: Yes. There were a few things going on. I think by that time I was probably starting to do work. I was working doing more children's performances and doing school performances with a theatre company and also thinking I need to get paid doing work as well! There was a strong connection between me and Robert and then because we'd started to develop this practice that was co-directing with groups of students as well, it seemed it was okay for those different practices to be held within this collaboration even though it wasn't always going to be us and an ensemble. Forming an ensemble for a particular work and then disbanding that was easier for us to keep going, I guess.

SG: So, Fish and Game became a holding structure for you to do lots of different things with you and Robert at the core of it?

IM: Yes, I think so. Robert was starting to do more teaching at the RCS which was taking up more time, but then we also started making these video, iPad performance things as well, but that was in 2010, what were we doing for 5 years? [Laughs].

SG: That's maybe even when your work first came on my radar, and it would have been *Alma Mater* I want to say?

IM: Yes.

SG: One of those works is at the Scotland Street Museum, was it that one or another of the iPad works?

IM: Yes, you know what [laughs], two of them have the exact same name because we couldn't really work it out, which is a really bad idea but anyway, it's fine [laughs]. *Alma Mater* at Scotland Street Museum was the first one we did which was for IETM [a meeting of the international network for contemporary performing arts whose cultural programme was curated by Steve Slater] that was happening in Glasgow. We had this little commission to make that and gave it a go. The second one was connected to that and sort of a sequel in a way, but then we were like how do we do this as a site-specific piece that could be tourable? And so, then that one was created for the Fringe in 2011 [as part of the Made in Scotland showcase].

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

SG: It's interesting thinking about the centre of gravity of so much theatre and live art in particular in Glasgow and in Scotland and knowing the particular role the Fringe has in that as well. I just want to trace back slightly: is this when you are starting to make work for children and young people? You were working with another theatre company rather than making your own stuff at that point?

IM: Yes. I worked at a company called Eco Drama and it wasn't very live art, but it wasn't that far away from what I usually do, so that was basically my job over quite a few years, and I toured with that. I also worked in Glasgow museums and was working with children there and through that, whilst doing some research and creating some workshops, I got in touch with Imagineate, and then got more embroiled in children's work and stuff, so that was going on at the same time. So, *Otter Pie* was the main show that we were creating and touring between 2006–2008 and then we both had our jobs, so it was less intensely working together.

SG: Was it through Imagineate that you met and started to work with Fiona Manson? What's the thread there to come through to The Polar Bear shows?

IM: Fiona Manson was also on the CPP course, and we had quite a few placement students who would work with us, there was quite a few that worked with us on *Otter Pie*. Then Fiona Manson came and did a placement with me, and we did a few bits and pieces and then carried on working with each other from that. It was 2010 when we started doing Polar Bears [laughs].

SG: Then there's this track between the children's shows and The Polar Bears shows in particular, some of I guess more explicitly live art stuff. There's a big overlap in the middle, I'm thinking about some things that were maybe done as part of, I want to say the Commonwealth Games Cultural Programme? Interventions in public spaces which feel to me feel really informed by a live art sensibility, but are also intended to be really broad in terms of their audience?

IM: Yes. I think one of the reasons I was really happy to get involved with Imagineate, when I found them, I thought this is really great because the artistic development side of the Imagineate organisation has been, particularly run by Fiona Ferguson, very open to devising processes, live art, mixing visual art and performance arts, and has been very connected to a

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

European sensibility as well. There was a lot of opportunity I felt there to develop as an artist that was completely missing in any other options. When we moved up it was like, there's the Tramway and we've got the CCA and The Arches and it's all exciting work, and the NRLA is happening but there was always this sense of, what we do in Scotland is playwriting and if you aren't a playwright then forget about it. There were a few cases where people were coming with, not necessarily live art but more contemporary performance practice and then it's like actually what you want to do is be a playwright, so people like Kieran Hurley or Gary McNair, often white cis het men but that's another thing [laughs], but this sense of if you want to keep going, you can make these shows and devise them if you want, but you want it to have a script and it needs to fit into those more traditional models. I think a lot about my practice is trying to fit into different contexts and hopefully, hold onto something that's just mine but is also fitting into those spaces. I've always been like okay where are the opportunities? Is it more in a theatrical thing? What does that context look like? How could I fit into that? Is it a children's theatre thing? Is it a street theatre thing? And I know it's not something everybody does, but there's definitely something about the live art approach that means that you're not worrying about the particular form, or you're excited about what my response to those different formats and spaces could look like? So, I think there is definitely something about moving between those seemingly different contexts. As you say, there's something about that live art approach, using the tools of live art to engage with the public in different ways.

SG: Lovely. When we get into the 2000s, 2010s rather, Forest Fringe was really active around this period. I guess BUZZCUT also starts off as well. I know that you presented work in both of those contexts, both are spaces which have been quite deliberately trying to create spaces for queer work and for live art work. Following the thread of one of them, *STUD* which is your solo show, was that first performed at BUZZCUT? I'm trying to remember where I first saw it.

IM: Yes, that was made for BUZZCUT in April 2015, something like that. I think with Forest Fringe, actually we made something that Fiona performed in. There was something I was doing around the early days of Forest Fringe where I was dressing up as a sea captain, I'm not sure what I was doing or what that was about. Anyway, there was a performance I made for Forest Fringe, early on at that time, but meeting those people and seeing people who

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

had been around like Gemma and Jim from [Action Hero] and Ira, Andy and Debbie and all those kinds of people, people coming from London so there being this influence seeing that kind of work that's experimental but also very nice [laughs]. Everything was really nice and gentle and supportive. That was all quite informative, having more connection to the context you might be able to take your work in. I suppose that's what was missing and still is actually, where do you take the work? There's a couple of venues but there's not like a touring venue or anything for live art. I made *STUD* and definitely had a sense of I'd like a solo show that I could tour to those tiny studios in England and also make something without having to apply for funding. Also, knowing the context and knowing that it was partly a safe space to try things out, but also by that point, there were so many presenters and promoters coming that it was actually definitely going to be [laughs] quite high pressured and also could lead onto more things.

SG: It's interesting there is what could be a contradiction there, BUZZCUT as a safe space, but as you just said, one that can be quite high pressured at the same time.

IM: Yes [laughs].

SG: Do you feel like that was obvious at the time, or was that in retrospect?

IM: I think I could feel that kind of, not contradiction, but holding multiple things at once. I think Rosana [Cade] would say that BUZZCUT was holding lots of things and was amazing, but it had its problems and things. Within that, being slightly older than some of the other people who were making stuff or being a bit further on in my career, there was that sense of well, I'm not just new trying this out, so I should be able to do this [laughs]. But I think one of the good things about BUZZCUT was the wealth of what the opportunity meant, so having photographers and an amazing video at the end of it and having it seen by people, the opportunity offered really high value.

SG: One thing that's become clearer to me, or one of the things I've started thinking about BUZZCUT that I hadn't before, has come through listening to people talking about the National Review of Live Art and talking about how it gave them a community, it gave them access to a community of peers when quite often the hierarchy of people who are really superstars, they were really accessible and really generous. I think there's a little bit of rose-tinted glasses in their recollection, but enough people are saying that for me to think that is

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

actually true, there was a space where you met your peers or your potential peers, and that was a really important part of artistic development. Part of what you were describing there about BUZZCUT is making me think that that was also part of the dynamic of that festival period of its existence.

IM: Yes, I think for me there was a difference between NRLA and Forest Fringe and BUZZCUT, but this might also be to do with age and experience. I started to go there still as a student very early on, I did feel like I wasn't going to be in NRLA anytime soon. There was definitely a separation between the people that are watching and the people who are programmed, whereas I think with BUZZCUT you would definitely see some people who had just graduated, so maybe more of a mix of who's watching and who's performing. As I say, that might also just be, I had just graduated so Nikki Millican is not going to be banging your door down. They did try to have that programme for graduates and things like that.

SG: Yes. They shifted from the platform thing which was programmed events all around the UK to the slightly more specifically focussed thing that was called Elevator? I'm not sure which year that changed in. That became less about brand new graduates making their first work and was a little bit more developmentally focused maybe.

IM: I'm just thinking as well, obviously attached to the NRA and new territories, the winter schools were really amazing and that was definitely a chance to connect to these incredible artists who could have felt very distant but actually in a workshop setting, as you say, were really generous. That made a big impact, I really remember some of those. I did a workshop with Lee Wen and Alastair MacLennan and spent a few days with them and with a group of quite varied people who would travel to those workshops as well. I don't know exactly how that has influenced the work or anything, but it was really amazing to connect with that and have that. I think that was before LADA was doing DIYs and things like that, so it was pretty amazing to have that. I think there was definitely something of those festivals popping up and going, oh I'm not crazy, I definitely have a degree in this thing that the rest of the year if I'm only seeing plays or new writing, you definitely had a sense of, have I lost my mind? I'm pretty sure there's another way of being on stage or putting your thoughts together, so there was that [laughs].

SG: Yes. It's really interesting hearing you mention Alastair MacLennan. I'm curious as to his work as an artist, whether you're familiar or how familiar you are with it. I came across a

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

story written in *The Scotsman* recently, in the last five years, and the line said, he's the most famous Scottish artist you've never heard about. I guess part of that is to do with the fact that he spent a significant period of his life and career working in Northern Ireland. I'm interested in the idea of the slightly absent tradition of performance artist in Scotland, so maybe it's a direct question about whether you'd come across Alastair MacLennan before?

IM: No, only through NRLA, never heard of him. Also being a Scottish person who actually lives in Scotland [laughs] it is a bit strange. That is a place of tension, are there any Scottish artists in Scotland? Does that matter? How is it that the opportunities that are available and the spaces can really clearly be seen by people coming from the outside, coming in? Is it to do with the Scottish psyche of not being able to enjoy them while you're here or whatever, that you have to go somewhere else [laughs]. I don't know what that's about but it's definitely something!

SG: We've mentioned Rosana a few moments ago. The other thing that I wanted to pick up on was that thread of collaboration which I guess have been slightly more recent. I was reminded of a show called *Strange Hungers* that you made back in 2011, which I think Rosana was in along with Deb Jones, and can I remember her name, Lizy.

IM: Stirrat?

SG: Lizy Stirrat.

IM: Magic fingers is her name, she's just magic fingers [laughs]. Robert and I, the last show that we made, I think it was the last one we made at RCS with the CPP students, was a piece called *Sing, Sing, Sing* which Rosana was in, so there's definitely that connection of meeting the artists as students and then making them work for you for not very much money! Obviously that project happened before we were together, and we were seeing different people. That was a commission from Glasgay! I guess that was another place where you could fit something a bit more contemporary. It was sort of comedy live art, I guess. Did you see that? [laughs]

SG: I never saw it! I was living in Edinburgh at that time.

IM: Right. Yes, it was quite theatrical and quite hammy in lots of ways but also quite subversive.

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

SG: And then there's quite a jump in time between that show and the shows that you've made relatively recently: *MOOT MOOT*, *The Making of Pinocchio*, and I guess the ongoing queer punk concept band Double Pussy Clit Fuck. I don't know when that started but I guess it's been going on for a while.

IM: [Laughs].

SG: I think I remember having a conversation with you in the CCA or in passing somewhere about a bit of apprehension approaching *MOOT MOOT* as a project where you were going to collaborate as a pair of artists for the first time.

IM: Yes, we've worked it all out now, it's easy now! [Laughs].

SG: [Laughs].

IM: I think with *MOOT MOOT* it was maybe coming back into a collaboration after working a lot solo. That difficulty of being trained and really loving an ensemble and group-making and feeling like, oh I have to do things on my own and have this solo voice, which I also think is really useful and I'm not saying anything against that but coming back together again was definitely a bit daunting, particularly being a couple and living together. I think with that process there was a lot of learning about how to show up as our best selves as well. We realised that when we're working together it's quite good for us to travel separately and then try to remember, what would you be doing if you were working with people who aren't your partner and you'd probably be saying yes a lot more, rather than going no, I don't think that's a good idea and shooting ideas down straight away [laughs]. So there was a bit of that I think with *MOOT MOOT* and also worries about whether the other person thought our work was any good. Being very black and white thinking about Rosana making these amazing socially engaged pieces that change people's lives and it's all about the political and stuff like that, and Ivor just makes these silly polar bear shows and it's always funny and how can those two things come together. What we hope or what we've found, is that the collaboration, both of those things can be true and really help each other as well. It means there's a playfulness in the work that is also grounded in quite strong shared values and a sort of political side to it as well. I probably was quite worried about it, collaborating is a hard thing to do I guess, whatever you do [laughs].

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

SG: And if you then layer into that, all the dynamics that go with being in a relationship with someone.

IM: Yes.

SG: I always remember the language of gymnastics, a high tariff manoeuvre [laughs].

IM: It's pretty high tariff, it's high stakes! You hope that the payoff is going to be good. I think one thing we realised with *The Making of Pinocchio*, that was a long process over three years and was definitely a lot of time of just us talking and exploring and things like that. Once we moved into the production phase, we were like actually we need a good, safe, strong team. So, kind of creating with the lighting designer and the sound and the producer, creating that ensemble and trying to have that team effort to make it happen. That feels like kind of an ensemble thing that's formed for that process.

SG: I was going to ask about what felt like a really significant dimension of the live sound in *MOOT MOOT* in particular, running alongside the physical score of the piece and the spoken score of the piece. The live sound mixing and the video work that seems really key to *The Making of Pinocchio* or at least in the version that was livestreamed. So, I guess I'm interested in what point you and Rosana as the performers of the work started to have conversations with other artists about how they're going to work or collaborate. So maybe with the example of *MOOT MOOT*, was there a moment where you realised this sound score is going to require other people?

IM: We knew there was something about radio, or maybe it was just that we wanted to make our voices lower, and we were friends with Yas [Clarke] and were like, can you come for like a day or something? Or we just wanted to explore what would it be like if our voices could be different, or we could sound like different people or something like that. We called Yaz Twiddly Knobs as well because he just comes with his little setup of knobs and buttons and stuff. There's not really much conversation, it's just we start doing something and then he will start making sounds. Without much discussion, he kind of infiltrated it and then became integral to the work [laughs].

SG: [Laughs].

IM: In all of that there were conversations about what the work is, what it means, what it could be, and I think bringing people into that has always been really useful. It gets to a

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

certain point where it's necessary to open it up more. I think it's also not completely necessary and it could just be two of us making a version of these works, but obviously it becomes much richer. With *The Making of Pinocchio*, we had quite early discussions with Tim Spooner and those are quite open, we were thinking about materials, so what does it mean to think about wood. Just in these conversations, it opens up ideas of what if there were four different scenes and what if there were different worlds or different realities. The sort of conversations that are kind of about design and aesthetics but are really about the meaning of what could be happening with people. Just really amazing and fruitful collaborations, but definitely coming from a place where we've done a lot of work already to work out what we're dealing with.

SG: In the context of that project as well, I'm just trying to think of the timeline of the moment where you realised that the presentation, the version that's going to appear at Take Me Somewhere, is going to be the pandemic edition, it's unavoidably framed by that in how it's going to be staged.

IM: That was in February, and it was quite a blow because the way that we'd been imagining the work was definitely about the theatricality and being really connected with people in the space. I think our immediate response was just, well we just can't do it, that's it. Luckily there was enough support and time to be able to engage with the actual equipment and to work with it. We'd already had the idea that there would be a live-feed camera in it so the end on camera that allows you to do the forced perspective was there. Because we already had the team together that meant the whole team could have thoughts on how does this work, what could you do. Jo Palmer who's our Lighting Designer is also our Production Manager, and also knows loads about video stuff [laughs] which you're like thank fuck. She was like well you could have this speed, and I can make it all go like this and I'll put it all into Q Lab and you don't have to worry about it. She basically did the job of about three people and solved a lot of problems so having that technical thing there, then the whole team thinking about what does it mean to have these frames and we had already been thinking about frames, things being on and off, what's shown to people, what people see and things like that. It did become a really enjoyable creative challenge to sort of think philosophically about what does it mean for it to be in this frame rather than people can just looking anywhere, and it's been a revelation because you can actually control what people see. But

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

now we're in this stage of translating it back into being a theatre performance, it's going to tour, so we've gone back into that well it's just not possible! We can't do it as a theatre show!

SG: [Laughs].

IM: We've already made this perfect film! So, it's those conversations again of okay, what do we like about the live performance? That feels at the moment like a re-learning after spending a year and a half going well, I never liked live performance anyway, it's fine. Sort of survival mode of trying not to remember how much you want to be on the stage in front of people [laughs]. So, it's hard to turn that back on again.

SG: That's brilliant. The very last thing I wanted to ask about, I'm trying to keep an eye on the time, was maybe just to ask about the work I know you've done as a dramaturg or a director for other artists. I think I'm right in saying that you worked with Dickie Beau and *The House of Strange Loops* and that you've also worked with Mamoru Iriguchi on *Eaten*. Maybe just to round off, where does that sit in your practice as an artist? How did those relationships come about? Obviously, a different kind of collaboration where you're maybe not the leader of those projects.

IM: Just to say with *The House of Strange Loops* that was quite a strange project [that came out of a LADA DIY workshop at National Theatre Studio in 2015]. I think the original idea was that Dickie was interested in having a sort of a drag family or expanding the idea of what that was, and I think over time that just became a bit complicated, so there was a rehearsal process for a sharing which never quite happened because there were issues. There was a night that we did at Bethnal Green Working Men's Club. Rosana and I made a piece for that. We've got Double Pussy Clit Fuck, but we've also got dressing up as men with moustaches, so we did a piece in that. What was that called? [It was called Strange Loops Sex Tapes]. It was some sort of porn thing, but we were in flannel pyjamas, and we would do this stylised thing across a bed and that would get videoed and then it would get projected, and we would do it again and I can't remember. Anyway, we did that in the bar, so that was a fun sort of live art thing. But yes, I didn't dramaturg any of Dickie Beau's works [laughs].

SG: Okay I'm sorry, my mistake for conflating bits of your bio online [laughs].

IM: It's okay! I'm confused as well.

SG: [Laughs].

IM: I don't know where you found an actual bio from me because it won't be on my website [laughs]. I have done a lot of dramaturgy with Emma Frankland. That was really the first time where I did something where I was like I'm definitely the dramaturgy of this, on her piece *Rituals for Change*. I've done things where I'm never quite sure is it dramaturgy, is it consultancy, is it mentoring and facilitation stuff. What it usually works out as is kind of being an outside eye, but also being an outside questioner and just being interested in what people are up to, and saying this is what I'm seeing, and have you thought about this? With all of them, it's quite clear to me that it's their work and what can I do to support that, but I really enjoy it because of that. I was going to say because there's no responsibility but actually there is probably more responsibility in a way because you want to try and meet the person where they are and try to help them to do what it is that they want to do and what the work needs. I do find it a useful process to help me when I'm making my own work as well to fold back on. I think with Mamoru's work, it feels like being a bridge between Mamoru's mind and vision and an audience who might not know exactly what's going on in his mind [laughs]. What I've also enjoyed is working with artists who haven't made work for children before and trying to think about what it needs to be for children and usually, there's not that much to change, it's just thinking about it in slightly different ways. I guess in terms of live art, just bringing a more playful sensibility to what's possible and thinking about it in terms of forms, does it need to be sitting down, could it be moving around, could it be interactive, does it have to be a full-length show, could it be twenty minutes of this and then a workshop? Things like that.

SG: So, thinking from a live art perspective there becomes about gently challenging what I guess are our assumed thoughts about what theatre might look like?

IM: Yes, I'd say so. When I think about live art it's really wide ranging, a big range of forms and ways of doing things. The stuff that I enjoy is the stuff that has a sense of humour and curiosity about it and is part of an enquiry, so I think that's what I enjoy about it. Every project is an enquiry in getting to be interested in something different and thinking about how that might translate into some sort of live moment, and that that live moment might be a conduit between you and some other people [laughs]. It's kind of as basic as that, but that's what I'm interested in. LADA is a big thing and I'm trying to work out when I would

Live Art in Scotland: Ivor MacAskill

have first engaged with LADA. I think I remember me and Robert going to meet Lois Keidan early on at some point in London. I think they were doing little artist support sessions then.

SG: Yes.

IM: The main thing I remember her saying was, you probably have everything you need, you just need to do it. I would have been aware of Lois through her early stuff, and going that's Lois Keidan, but I guess it does make me think of this sense of Live Art UK just not ever really reaching up to Scotland, feeling like you would have to go to London to make those connections and then you might be able to do it. Also, I was just thinking that when we moved up to Glasgow, when we just graduated, and we were putting in applications into what was then the Scottish Arts Council, it was that you had to apply to Drama as well, and even when that changed to Theatre, there's always been this question of where does the live art fit in? You mentioned the stuff around the cultural programme for the Commonwealth Games. I can't remember who was on the panel for some of those commissions, but there was something about the way they split things up. Did they say something like Performance and Physical Theatre? There was some kind of weird name that I hadn't heard before, but basically, a lot of the theatre performances were more on the live art spectrum, but yes apart from that with Creative Scotland it's never been that, does anyone know what live art is? Is that a term that anyone uses?