

Live Art in Scotland: Andy Field

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Stephen Greer (SG): One of the ways I've been starting these conversations is by asking people about their first encounters with performance or with live art, or with what they'd maybe later recognise as live art. And I'm really wary of the neatness of the [idea of an] origin story but I am interested in first encounters or people's routes into performance or performance making.

Andy Field (AF): It's an interesting one. There's one origin story which is now canon because I wrote about it in my book, which is when I was in Chris Perkins' *Like Skinnydipping* and we went to NSDF. I studied in Edinburgh as you know and got very heavily involved in The Bedlam Theatre, which had always been my intention because I'd always been very much into drama, but drama in a quite conventional frame I didn't do GCSE theatre or A Level or anything, I went to a Saturday morning drama school and did Shakespeare excerpts or LAMDA acting exams and things. When I came to Edinburgh I was not particularly knowledgeable and was trying to soak up everything I could, which was mainly reading Tom Stoppard plays and things like that and then in the second term of my first year when I was cast in this play, we went to the National Student Drama Festival and I remember we went to see a company from Dartington School of Art that was called Deer Park and they performed this show in a gymnasium. I think it might have been the same venue that we

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were performing in later in the week. I remember there were about five performers, it was the first time I'd seen a devised work and it was very much under the rubric of live art, rather than devised physical theatre or anything like that. It was fragmentary snatches of found text and movement. There was lots of moving of bits of pot plants around and suchlike and I think I found it baffling at the time, but also so incredibly compelling and beautiful and I'd never seen anything like it. I remember getting this little book that they'd made to accompany it afterwards and in the book there was this quote and I can't remember who the quote was from and I also know now having researched it that I'm not remembering the quote correctly because when I've tried to look it up, the only things I can find are examples of me quoting it so I've been mis-quoting this for so long now that that's now become a part of the google archive. The quote said something like, 'this is more the expression of a longing than an account of what is actually happening', and there is something about that that unlocked something in the way that I understood what performance could be. I think it was the moment at which I managed to unharness performance from the domain of literature. I wasn't trying to read this in a semiotic way anymore.

SG: I'm just thinking about that in relationship to your studies at the University of Edinburgh where I also studied, as you know. The degree there was really strong, but it was ground in a particular literary analysis so when it did engage with performance that was the first lens. When you came back from that transformative moment, I'm conscious that all the way through this time the National Review of Live Art was happening in Glasgow on the other side of the country and at that time I was heavily involved in comedy and I certainly wasn't going across to see that kind of thing Were you involved with going to see that wider performance scene at all?

AF: No, I think I was very much ensconced within the university community and didn't venture far beyond that other than to go and watch the occasional band at a venue in Glasgow because they weren't coming to Edinburgh. In my third year I went away to Canada so I was completely absorbed by the student theatre and its internal politics and community, as well you would know about.

SG: Yes, I'm thinking about very much how absorbed I was for many years in that and not really looking beyond the horizon of that.

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AF: One thing that maybe is the next chain in that thread for me, which connects to one of your future questions, was that I think partly because of the experience I had with that show. At the Fringe in the summer, I would start to seek out that kind of work and that's how I came to find Aurora Nova as a venue that became very quickly my favourite venue at the Festival and then later in my university life, I guess it was while I was still a student in 2006 so my final summer after I graduated, I got a job working as a box office assistant at Aurora Nova so that was my first proper job at the Festival. I used to be a ghost tour guide and I worked for a summer at C venues but I had very little connection to it so that felt like a first job where you really care about the venue and its programme and you're trying to get very involved and meet the people who are running the venue and so forth. Then when I was down in London, I did an internship which essentially just involved working for free for a lot of time. It involved going to the house of the then producer of Aurora Nova Touring, Paula Van Hagen, and doing lots of odd jobs for her and trying to write funding applications for things I was in no way qualified for or able to write. Then the next summer I went back, and I was artist liaison at Aurora Nova, which would be 2007, which was the first year of Forest Fringe when Debbie was running Forest Fringe as a sort of pilot model, and I did a show there. So that's the direct link from Deer Park to Aurora Nova to Forest Fringe.

SG: What kind of work were you seeing at Aurora Nova? What kind of work were they programming?

AF: It was a lot of European dance. The venue was run by Wolfgang Hoffmann who came from Fabrik in Potsdam, so rooted in contemporary dance. People like Derevo were always there. I saw a couple of Derevo shows. One of the ones that influenced me the most was Rotozaza, seeing Ant Hampton and Silvia Mercuriali's work there and becoming friends with them through that. Certainly, I think my friendship with Ant and looking up to him, he was hugely influential in terms of the work that I would go on to make. Both Silvia and Ant separately and together became part of the community around Forest Fringe and presented work there as well. Some North American work as well: Rude Mechanicals from Austin, John Moran and *Men Wear Bowlers*, I remember that, a mime show from New York. It kind of covered quite a spectrum of devised dance-influenced work.

SG: I'm trying to remember the name of the Rude Mechanicals show because I saw one of them...

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AF: *Get Your War On.*

SG: Yes. The four performers and overhead projectors.

AF: Yes. It was an attempt to create a live adaptation of an internet comic strip that was very popular during the George Bush era, and it was fascinating. Ron Berry who now runs Fusebox Festival in Austin was in that show and that's how I first met him and many years later Forest Fringe went to Austin and lots of Forest Fringe affiliated artists have been involved with Fusebox over the years. That was the sort of nascent thing there and then I got to meet Wolfgang there and he ended up bringing over a show that my friend Polly and I had made in the first year of Forest Fringe. He brought it over to Dublin Fringe and that was our first big international touring opportunity. I think Aurora Nova at the Festival and Shunt in London were the two huge influences on Forest Fringe in its nascent period for Debbie and I certainly.

SG: Before we get on to Forest Fringe: it's definitely a leading question and the answer might be no. But as I've been reading through newspaper coverage and accounts of experimental, or physical and visual theatre which is how it gets framed at the Fringe, Aurora Nova doesn't really feature very heavily in a lot of that coverage. But the name that comes up again and again is Demarco. And I slightly struggle with the amount of emphasis that's being placed on the work of Demarco and Demarco associated venues because they never loomed very large in my experience of the Festival and that's not a comment on the quality of the work there, but I'm trying to locate...

AF: It was never of any interest. I didn't really know anything about Demarco, it wasn't an influence at all. People like Song of the Goat, they first came to Aurora Nova before they went to other venues. I suppose that might be partly to do with geography, it might be partly to do with ownership. It was run from Brighton by Komedia initially and then when they ran out of money, Assembly took it on for one year and then it shut down. I think probably because it was never financially viable, it was a huge investment to make Aurora Nova happen. But where it was located geographically, how far out of town it was, it always felt like a bit of a secret, I think. Certainly, when I was working on the box office, you got lots of people who came down and were very pleased with themselves and talked about how much they loved it and they would only come for the international festival and this. We tried to cultivate some of that with Forest Fringe because people would come to Aurora

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Nova; the big space, the upstairs space and the downstairs space. People would come and they'd spend all day just hopping between the two spaces and then leave again. They'd do one day there because heaven forbid you should have to walk down that hill more than once in the entire Festival.

SG: Was that St Stephen's? I should've checked my notes, but I think that's where The Arches took over that space.

AF: Yes. It was. The Arches didn't really use the main space very much, they used the downstairs studio space. It's also where Northern Stage first did their version. The thing with Aurora Nova was that they brought over the whole of this very, I hate to be stereotyping, but a very efficient German technical team. That main church space at St Stephen's is huge and they would just transform it in the space of about three days. They'd completely black it out, turn it into a huge theatre space with a huge dance stage. The acoustics in there were terrible but it was very good for things like Deravo, big scale dance theatre spectacle. But no one other than Aurora Nova really had the resources or the right kind of programme to use that space in the same way, so I don't think that The Arches ever attempted to fully tech out the main space as a theatre in the same way that Aurora Nova did.

SG: Yes. I think some of the work that I know was programmed there was small-scale, deliberately intimate stuff. Some of Adrian Howells' [work].

AF: I got my feet washed there.

SG: Yes. Exactly, Foot Washing for the Sole would've been 2009, maybe later. You've already mentioned that the first year of Forest Fringe, that pilot year, was led or initiated by Debbie. You had a piece of work in that year and then obviously in the following years you became one of its co-directors. Can you tell me a little bit about that evolution or that journey, that next step?

AF: Without wanting to go back too far, it's probably useful to know a little bit about mine and Debbie's relationship. Debbie's from Canada. We met at Queen's University Kingston, Ontario and I was on an exchange year. Debbie was in her final year at Queen's, and we became very good friends very quickly. At the end of that year, I moved back to Edinburgh, and she was wondering what she was going to do with her life, and I said well, if you want to

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come and stay on my sofa and spend a bit of time – she’s got a British passport because of her dad – here, you can. And so, she did come over, she lived on my sofa for a bit and then got a flat of her own in Edinburgh. While she was there, she started volunteering at The Forest Café as well as being involved in The Bedlam Theatre. We made a show together at Bedlam, she was in a big puppet show that was at the Fringe as well, I think, with Pangolin’s Teatime. Then we moved down to London together to do an MA. We were very close all the way through that. In 2007, The Forest Café invited Deborah to curate a programme of performance at the Café because they wanted to have something happening that was a kind of response to, or alternative to, the main Fringe, a kind of Forest Café Fringe. They didn’t really have any money or resources, but they knew that Deborah or Ryan knew that Deborah was a person who knew about theatre and might be interested in doing that. So, she did that in the first year. September/October time 2007, we were sort of reflecting back on what that experience had been like. It was very small scale at that point and technically everything was a workshop because they didn’t have a theatre licence. There were clear green shoots of possibility that were already visible. Because I had a relationship with Lyn Gardner from having been a blogger, as well you know Steve, and had written occasionally for *The Guardian*, or maybe not yet, but she knew who I was, so she came along to the event that I did in 2007, which was called *Exposures*. It was a kind of photo treasure hunt that was very shamelessly influenced by something that I’d read in a Forced Entertainment book, which again shows you those early live art influences. I’d read about them restaging *Nights in this City* in Rotterdam in a city that they didn’t know, and how one of the first things they did was went and interviewed people in Rotterdam to try and get a kind of psycho-geographic map of the city by asking weird questions like, if you were going to hide a body in the city where would you hide it, that kind of thing. I was very influenced by this, to kind of essentially do the same thing, but as a performance. So, Lyn came, and she did this and she really enjoyed it and she wrote a *Guardian* blog about the Forest Fringe and about this experience and it felt like there was some real potential there. Deborah knew that it had been an exhausting experience for her and not necessarily a wholly enjoyable one. She also had to do another year of her MA because she’d done it part-time, so she didn’t have the capacity to run it for a second year on her own. So, we made the decision, I honestly couldn’t say whether I offered myself or whether she asked, but between us we made the decision that we would run it together. It was useful because by that point, I had a

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job at Battersea Arts Centre and was able to use that to leverage a little bit of money from them to help increase the budget. It became a useful avenue to meeting a bunch of artists of a similar age to us who could come and be a part of the project. We met Action Hero and Tinned Fingers' Ira Brand and a number of other people, Search Party, I think, and a number of other people who became very integral to Forest Fringe in future years. I think that Forest Fringe from its very beginnings was born out of this act of generosity and this attempt to distribute power more evenly. Debbie instituted this thing and then very generously immediately shared it with me, and it became our thing. Then several years later, we did the same thing again and it became Ira's thing. We've always tried to ensure that it feels like it belongs to all of those artists as much as it belongs to us, and I think that that is embedded in the DNA of the project.

SG: I know that maybe even from very early on, you talked about the origins of Forest Fringe but also its conditions were, well there are lots of different things, the financial crisis of 2007 and you talk playfully about it in the Forest Fringe book that they happened at the same time and it's not a coincidence, one did cause the other, but also that it was a response to the heavily commercial nature of the Fringe at that time. I think that's a dynamic which has continued and probably got more pronounced. I suppose two of the dynamics that I've been trying to think about through what Forest Fringe was doing, have been to do with both reducing risk and financial risk, but also creating opportunities or spaces that otherwise didn't exist elsewhere at the Festival. So, making space for durational work, in a very practical way of programming work that couldn't be programmed elsewhere. That's my sort of retrospective gaze as an outsider. Were those part of the active conversations you were having with Deborah when you were programming? Were you thinking we know that we're interested in this work in part because we know it couldn't find a home elsewhere?

AF: It's a good question. Thinking back, I certainly think that there was an extent to which we were aware that we had a space that enabled people to do things that they couldn't do elsewhere. In large part, that was because of the economics of it. What we definitely talked about from the very beginning, was wanting to reduce the economic risk associated with artists going to Edinburgh, so that we could increase the potential for artistic risk-taking. So, in the very first year that we ran it together, in 2008, we used some of the money that BAC

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gave us, which wasn't a lot, it was one thousand or two thousand pounds. We used most of that to rent a flat which then became a key part of the offer that we were making to artists: you can come up here and stay a few days and you won't have to pay for any accommodation, you can put on something in this space for two or three days and therefore you can take risks that you wouldn't be able to take elsewhere. I think we partly learned that as we went. I don't think that we had the sophistication in our understanding of form and of the live art landscape to have said, we're going to set this space up for durational performance or intimate performance, or whatever else. The main thing that we talked about in the early days was work-in-progress and I think that came from the influence of Battersea Arts Centre and the scratch model, the idea that this was a place where you could come and try out a new idea. I think that certainly, very quickly we became aware that the lack of commercial imperative enabled this more experimental approach to form. So, in the first year, Ed Rapley came and did a series of games for one person at a time in one of the basement rooms at Forest Fringe. Lucy Ellinson did a piece for an audience that was for about four people in the altar space in the main church. Those two pieces in particular, how much we loved them and how much audiences loved them really helped us to understand what it was that we could do that other spaces couldn't do. So, by the time we get to even 2009, the next year, Brian Lobel approached us via email, and we had the idea that we would do this durational piece with him and that we would do two durational pieces, one that he was doing and one that Helen Plewis was doing at the same time and so we kind devoted a day to durational performance. At the same time, we expanded the amount of intimate performance, so Tania El Khoury came down for the first time and she did a show that was for one person at a time. I'm sure there were others that I'm not remembering. I don't think we set out with the intention, but as with a lot of things with Forest Fringe, we learned by doing what the affordances of that space were and what the affordances of our model were and what that meant that we could do that others couldn't do.

SG: It's sort of interesting then that maybe not quite at that moment, but in later years as the Forest Fringe became better known and became more successful, I'm guessing that this is around the moment where you and Deborah and maybe Ira are being approached to talk about the Forest Fringe. I'm aware of a pressure or expectation for artist-led initiatives to narrate a reproduceable form, rather than describe what was a response to a moving set of

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circumstances or opportunities. Do you remember that, of suddenly Arts Council-related people or other festivals going, 'tell us how to do Forest Fringe, what's the formula'?

AF: Yes. There was definitely that. One of the things that we did was say well we'll come and do it for you. From very early on we had this notion that Forest Fringe could be this entity that travelled and appeared in other spaces. We quite quickly developed a model for an international micro-festival which would be the condensed spirit and energy of Forest Fringe reproduced by us in other places around the world. We managed to kind of convince the British Council of the efficacy of that model with a bit of help from a venue in Portugal, from Culturgest. That was one of our responses I suppose 'we couldn't possibly tell you what it is, you'll just have to pay us'.

SG: [Laughs]. That is the other major aspect of Forest Fringe's work, or maybe what Forest Fringe continues to become, is a sense of curation as an artistic practice in itself and I know that Debbie has written explicitly about that. One thing that's coming to mind here as we're doing this very obediently chronological narration, I'm sort of watching myself about that, is that through this period you're working at Bristo Place? I can never remember the name of the street.

AF: Yes.

SG: That obviously comes to an end when the ownership of the building comes under dispute because the charity that owns it or runs it runs out of money.

AF: Edinburgh University settlement.

SG: Yes. So, you then move to another space where you do Paper Stages for a year or so and then you're at The Out of the Blue Drill Hall down in Leith Walk.

AF: From 2013, yes.

SG: I guess two things that I'm interested in, one is just what that move of site down to Leith brought about. But maybe the bigger question is about the work of sustaining the event year after year when maybe you're getting funding on a project basis, or money which is for a few years at a time.

AF: It was always year by year. We never had any money, so every year we'd start again. We were very lucky to be supported for about five years running by Jerwood Charitable

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Foundation. Each year that was me writing and having further conversations with Shonagh Manson at Jerwood and writing a new application and each year, them being like okay, but this is probably the last one. There was an effort sustaining that. Jumping forward briefly, that's one of the reasons why we chose to stop rather than hand it on to somebody else, because it was really hard, and we didn't want to set somebody else up for failure. Over the years we exhausted all of the little pots of money that we could gain access to whilst retaining the wilfully informal, collective approach and form that we had. We'd gone through Jerwood, we found other little foundations that we could apply to, we'd done a crowd funder. The money had run out and it felt like if we just handed this on to a younger generation of artists, we'd be setting them up for failure. Much better to try and use the last bit of money we had to give artists a little bit of seed funding to do something new that belonged to them and didn't come burdened with the name and expectations of Forest Fringe.

SG: I think I remember reading when you as a group said we're taking a step back, it's a pause, which then turned into, we're not going to return, that it was also informed by a sense that there were certain forms of exploitation which were partly linked to use of free labour and access to the Festival which you as an organisation were addressing but were also – not to put words in your mouth – aware of your own place in that systemic problem.

AF: Yes, absolutely. I think that was it. Coming back to your previous question, as an answer to that or to follow on from that, I think that what defined that second era of Forest Fringe from 2013-2016, four years I think we did at the Drill Hall, was a kind of greater maturity which perhaps is a necessary function of the fact that I was twenty-nine in 2013 rather than twenty-three or whatever when we started. We'd toured all over the world, we were more established, we had a more sophisticated understanding both of the kind of politics and economics of the cultural ecology, but also of our own politics. I think that what feels to me like the defining thing of that move is a greater sense of responsibility and a greater sense of awareness of really essential things like access and exploitation of ourselves, exploitation of the artists that come, the situation with volunteers was very complicated because you're increasingly aware that coming and volunteering at Forest Fringe has a certain cachet and opens certain doors, but the only people who could do it were the people who could afford to come and fund themselves to come to Edinburgh for a full summer.

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SG: There's a sort of self-exploitation there which is only accessible if you've got existing privileges of one kind or another.

AF: Exactly. We tried to rectify that. I suppose the most interesting stuff that we were doing in that second era was about attempts to address what we now recognise as the failings of the Fringe more generally and of ourselves as part of that. With the volunteers we set up a relationship with the University of Chichester where they supported students to come and work for us and work with us, who wouldn't be able to come to Edinburgh otherwise. It brought a different demographic to come and volunteer and have those opportunities. It was very gratifying to see that a number of the people who came and volunteered from Chichester, and they're still in their late twenties or early thirties, but they are having successful careers or continue to have successful careers within the arts. We did a lot of work about accessibility at that point. We were still discovering what the particular nature of the power that we had was. We were still a very small, poorly funded operation. The whole of Forest Fringe, even in those years, probably still cost less than ten grand to put on. We recognised that we had huge influence within the Fringe and so I suppose we started to be more aware of our ability to leverage that influence in quite performative ways in order to initiate change, essentially by shaming the rest of the festival with the logic of if even these guys can do this, then you have absolutely no excuse. In terms of access, we worked really hard on that throughout that period. We worked a lot with Solar Bear to create a programme of work for deaf audiences, which didn't seem to exist at all at the Festival, or if it did it was in this very piecemeal way. Solar Bear said to us one of the problems for our audiences is that all the BSL shows at the Fringe, of which there were very few, are on different days and in different places so for our audience, it's going to cost them loads to come to Edinburgh to watch one show for a day. So, we had a BSL day that we created in consultation with them. We'd have thirty or forty people from Edinburgh and from Glasgow who would watch all of the shows and they'd all be signed. We also worked with visual impairment charities to create a route through our programme for visually impaired audiences. The venue now was completely accessible, which was something that was completely not true of the previous venue.

SG: So, we're moving from the original Forest Fringe space which was upstairs or downstairs.

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AF: Up a giant flight of concrete stairs or down a flight of concrete stairs. We were working with people like Ant Roberts at Colchester Arts Centre and Escalator East to Edinburgh to initiate these larger conversations about access at the Festival. We did a series of events, we worked with Unlimited and people like that. I think that was a perfect example of us recognising that we may not have the economic power or the administrative power, we didn't know the people at the Fringe Society very well, we didn't know the other venues, we didn't have their economic clout, but what we did have from the very beginning were people, journalists, press, the cognoscenti of the Festival had looked to Forest Fringe and so it had this outsized influence and we learned to leverage that much better in later years, for good I suppose. Perhaps partly because we didn't need to be so focused on leverage for the benefit of the artists because the artists, by that stage, had grown up with us and for the most part, were more established and took care of themselves a bit more so we could look beyond our initial needs as a community and assess what we felt that the festival as a whole perhaps needed more of.

SG: It's really interesting thinking about what you just said in relation to that question of resources and resilience, and you talking about how the artists that you worked with, them developing their own practice to a stage where, as you say, they're more able to take care of themselves. There's a line in the Forest Fringe *The First Ten Years* book where I think you say that we made a virtue out of meagre circumstances and then later on, you started to push at the limits of always making do. It feels like that sense of pushing at the limits of always making do might be read as you deciding to demand more resources, and I'm sure you were trying to get better funding and you were securing better resources, but actually that pushing was a turning outwards of the organisation's energies in a sense. I'm aware that during this period you start working with BUZZCUT, I think Forest Fringe comes through to The Arches to do micro-festivals and BUZZCUT, did they do one or two weekenders or smaller programmes?

AF: Yes, they did. At least one, I think maybe two years of collaborating with BUZZCUT. We also did a year of collaborating with The Arches and I can't remember what the specific details were, but we won a Fringe First for it, which was kind of funny. It was given to ourselves and The Arches for innovative collaboration. For the life of me, I can't remember what it was.

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SG: I found details of a weekend of work which was in September.

AF: Oh, this was during the Festival. So, when The Arches had their space at St Stephen's, we did a weekend at The Arches as part of a micro-festival, which was great actually and had Jenna Watt, Nic Green had a video installation, but we also brought Abigail Conway, Ed Rapley, Debbie [Pearson] was there, David [Overend] who is now an academic and teaches. This isn't really relevant, but it was the same night as Death Disco, I remember that because we finished at nine or ten and then The Arches crew had an hour or forty-five minutes to turn it around before Death Disco was starting. That was amazing to watch them doing that.

SG: Through this period, you're obviously developing your own practice as an artist, helping run and curate this festival, this group or entity, whatever we call Forest Fringe, but you're making your own work by yourself but also in collaboration with others. I'm just curious about what was feeding that development, was it through the work and through the relationships and the friendships that you were developing through Forest Fringe? There is a thread of work that starts to be with and for younger people and I'm interested in the evolution of that. There are quite a few pieces which seem to be installation works or performance installation works, which have quite a high level of interactivity.

AF: My route as an artist I suppose was, as I went on, even at Edinburgh, I became more and more interested in interactivity and engagement with the audience. Work which I've, with hindsight, have started to talk about as being encounters. The way that I've superimposed this is as a means of finding logic in the scattergun journey of my work. But I think in the beginning, even if I couldn't have articulated it in this way, I was interested in the notion of the encounter and the encounter as the material of the performance in the same way that a dancer's body might be the material of a performance in a dance or that the playscript might be material of the performance in a theatre show. So, this began tentatively I think in my last year at Edinburgh. Debbie and I made a show where we got the audience to sit on stage at The Bedlam and they lit the event with torches and it was Debbie delivering this monologue, and she was trying to persuade them to come and sit with her and she paid one of them five pounds and it kept looping and then the fire alarm was set off and everyone had to leave. But already, you can see these nascent attempts to think about what it means to be an audience to encounter a performance and through that performance to encounter each other and the space. When I moved down to London, maybe pragmatically, the people

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who seemed most interested in the work that I was interested in making were a company called Hide and Seek, who were a games company. A lot of the most successful things I did as a young artist were sort of street games and interactive experiences. I mean successful in that people actually liked them. I did one project called *Moveyhouse* that was influenced by a Claus Oldenburg happening and we got to tour that to various parts of the country. But definitely during most of the years of Forest Fringe I struggled with my practice, I think I was kind of thrashing around, people didn't seem that interested or excited about it. I wasn't paying enough attention to it because Forest Fringe always took precedent. Some of those installational things, the reason for that was because I knew that if I wanted to present something as part of Forest Fringe, it would need to be installational because I would be occupied running the event. The crash site you mentioned in your questions, that was very specifically the aim. With some of these micro-festivals we wanted an event that would soak up audience's time without requiring much oversight or management and would travel very easily so it was really just a set deck of cards so you could just put it in your hand luggage and then it would take a couple of hours to lay out on the floor of the venue. I think we did it in Portugal and we did a version of it in San Francisco. I think I also ended up doing a version of it somewhere in Glasgow for another completely unrelated event that someone was putting on. But yes, a lot of that stuff pragmatically that was it. I almost got to the point at various points where I was like I don't know if I should be an artist. People don't seem that interested, and it seems like people are much more interested in the stuff that I'm doing with Forest Fringe, and I ended up applying for a few artistic director jobs and not getting them or getting interviews and getting very close. I was interviewed twice to run The Bush when that guy ended up getting it, I can't remember his name. I got interviewed for The Gate, I got interviewed for National Theatre Wales when John [McGrath] left. I got offered a job running a festival in Australia and then turned it down because I decided I didn't want to move to Australia. There was a period where that felt like it was the arc and the only people who consistently supported and were interested in my work were Jackie and LJ at The Arches. That felt like that was my home as an artist. The two pieces that have really defined my ability to even call myself an artist and have initiated the rest of my career were both works that were commissioned by The Arches. There was a show called *Motor Vehicle Sundown* that was an audio performance that happened in a car and that was first commissioned during the offsite season that they did when The Arches or Central Station

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was being renovated. And then *Lookout*, which is a show I made with young people and those two pieces have been the foundation for any amount of career that I currently have and they're both entirely thanks to LJ and Jackie.

SG: That relationship with LJ and Jackie, what was the offer, was it an invitation? I'm always interested in how producers or curators say 'do you have anything that you're working on?' or whether you come to them with fragments of an idea and they say 'we like this, but have you considered a different shape for it?' What's the conversation you were having with them?

AF: In both cases it was completely different. So, the first one, they approached me. At that time, I was very concerned with stuff that didn't happen in theatres, street games and audio experiences and such like. They approached me and said we're doing an off-site season because The Arches is going to be shut, do you want to do something, come up with an idea. That was dauntingly vast, and I don't know if I should admit this but I was like I quite fancy having a car so I thought if I can build a car into the budget of the show then I would just have a car so that's how I kind of thought about the idea of making a show that happened in a car. I'd also always been interested in cars since a young age and was interested in the idea of the car as a sort of emblem. I think it was quite influenced by Adam Curtis as well who I'd just discovered at that time and the idea of using this figure of the car as a way of telling a sort of story of America. That's how that came about, they just said make something and then I had to think what it was and narrow it down. *Lookout* was a project that I'd come up with as a proposal for another festival, In Between Time, for an open call that did for new work which I think ended up being given to Pete McMaster with the show 23 I want to say.

SG: 27.

AF: 27. I'd been shortlisted, so I wrote this proposal. I was getting to this point where I was like I don't even know whether I am interested in being an artist any more, no one seems interested in what I have to offer, and then I was invited by Battersea Arts Centre and by Metal in Southend to go and work with young people with both of them on two different projects and I absolutely loved it. It immediately clicked. As far back as Edinburgh I ran the kids drama club on a Sunday morning at The Bedlam and my mum's a secondary school teacher, so maybe that's it. But anyway, it all clicked, and I was like okay, I've done these

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projects with these people working with kids and I loved it, I want to make something that's my own with young people. And so, I'd kind of pitched this for IBT and it was shortlisted, but they weren't interested. LJ emailed me and was like we're doing Behaviour Festival and it's got an ecological framework, are there any shows you know by other artists, which often happened, we had a very close relationship where I'd say this Forest Fringe person would be great, or this person would be great. So, I sent them a list of artists and shows that I thought might be relevant and just at the bottom I said I came up with this idea by the way and sent them the proposal that I'd sent to IBT, and LJ came back and was like I love this, we should do it, so we did it on a micro-budget working with a school in the Gorbals. We did a very rough, early version of it, but it was well-received enough that my partner Beckie and I then applied for money from the Arts Council to remake it as a larger show.

SG: Great. The bit of history at this point I suppose is that a year or a few years after that, I can't remember what year *Lookout* was part of Behaviour, but obviously The Arches was forced to close.

AF: I think it was this year because it was 2015.

SG: That would've been that year then.

AF: It got its licence pulled no more than a couple of weeks after *Lookout* happened. Interestingly, *Lookout* also happened on the first day of performances, which was the day after the general election so you can imagine with a Tory majority what the atmosphere was like in Glasgow that day. It was bleak. I remember Jackie coming and she'd been in tears most of the day and it was this experience with this young person was the one thing that got her through the day. That was pretty full on. That was the beginning of everything. If 2016 was bad, 2015 was the midwife of 2016.

SG: I've been recounting this memory to other people when I've been talking about this moment. My last memory of The Arches as it was, was going in to help another artist clear out their set. I helped Ishbel McFarlane clear out the set of her show. She'd had the Platform 19 award and had her show on as part of Behaviour and so we were going in to clear out all of her stuff, all of her set as men with very large vans were taking away all of the hire gear, all of the chairs. The closest thing I've experienced is a house clearing after a death in the family and that's so absurd to compare the closure of a venue to the intimate

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death of an actual person but the atmosphere, the tone and the emotional charge of the space...

AF: I had that twice. In 2011 when Forest Café lost the building in Edinburgh, the whole venue had to be cleared because it was being handed back to the administrators the day after Forest Fringe finished so it did feel like that. It was just us and The Forest Café team had to clear everything out of there and just leave it on the street. That was heart-breaking, and then The Arches as well. The last thing that I experienced there was... Aaron Wright curated a performance night. It was amazing, there was FK Alexander and David Hoyle, Lucy McCormick and people like that performed.

SG: That was Queer Behaviour, the club night, which I was at so there's a chance that we saw each other. It was The Arches, so perhaps not [laughs]. The last thing I wanted to ask you about is, the closure of The Arches is one of the things that instigated the new festival in Scotland, Take Me Somewhere, which was run in its first year by Jackie and has since been taken over by LJ working now with an expanded team. There was a series of artist-led projects in the gap between, one which you were involved in or led, the Imaginary Festival project. I'm wary of many things, I'm wary of the cycle of collapse and renewal or of structures vanishing and new ones cropping up. I think Take Me Somewhere has offered a different set of opportunities than The Arches' festivals did, but what we have lost in Glasgow is the physical space of the building.

AF: Yes, absolutely.

SG: I guess to finish off, what is your sense of the wider ecology of performance in Scotland, maybe as it relates to the rest of the UK. I know that obviously your career, your work has seen you work a lot in Scotland and in the UK as well as travelling internationally. I'm wondering whether that's sort of a necessity if you're going to make a career in this domain of work.

AF: I think so, yes. It's interesting. So, there's a chapter in the book that Maddy Costa and I wrote recently. No one has emailed me to ask so it's either very obvious or not obvious at all, but one of the artists is completely made up, they are a character that I've invented as a way of both talking about this thread of imaginary work that I think is kind of woven through this era from myself, Ant Hampton, Tim Etchells, but also as a way of talking about

disappearance and resilience. Spoiler alert, Stephanie something I think I called the artist, all the performances that I describe in the chapter take place in venues that either no longer present performance or have disappeared completely. So, we begin at the ICA. The first performance I describe of this person who is made up is at the ICA and then we go to National Review of Live Art, Green Room and so on and we end at The Arches. There's The Arnolfini, Leeds Met Studio and Gallery. I do think that one of the stories of this post-economic crash period from 2007 onwards, is the absolute devastation of that bricks and mortar infrastructure for live art in this country. The burden has to be carried increasingly by festivals like Take Me Somewhere and Fierce and In Between Time, by artist-run projects that are precarious and often involve various kinds of exploitation or self-exploitation like Forest Fringe, like] performancespace [, like BUZZCUT, and that's a significant loss. Beginning with the ICA, Ekow Eshun saying that performance is no longer relevant and ending with The Arches being shut for completely different reasons. It does feel like increasingly there is no infrastructure to support the kind of work that I make in this country. The Arches commissioned the two most important shows in my career and The Arches doesn't exist anymore. Although Take Me Somewhere is great and Forest Fringe has worked with Take Me Somewhere, it's a different entity and as you say, I think it's about community. Shunt is another one that's mentioned in this chapter. The Arches and Shunt as well as being architecturally similar, they were hubs for a community, they were a space where communities could gather. I always knew that if I was in Glasgow, I'd come to The Arches and sit in the café, and you'd bump into Jackie or LJ, and I think you really miss that. I think for a young artist in particular you miss that. I've spoken to young artists who have asked where do I find my community, both my peers and those people who are a bit older than me who I can learn from, in the same way that Debbie and I learned from people around Shunt: Tassos Stevens, Lucy Ellinson, Gemma Brockis.

And especially places like The Arches where you might have someone like Adrian [Howells], you might also have someone like Kieran Hurley or Gary McNair or Nic Green, you know, where a diversity of approaches and practices are meeting and exchanging. I don't know, that's not really an answer to your question, but it feels like that's a big narrative of this period both in Scotland and across the UK, the kind of withdrawal of infrastructure and the carrying of these art forms by these much more ephemeral or occasional or precarious

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organisations, much more marginal organisations that don't have the same civic visibility and the same gravity for a community.

SG: Yes, and then when organisations like The Arches or Shunt go away, even when other venues or other festivals sort of step forward to programme work that would otherwise have been catered for in those spaces, they don't always or perhaps rarely create the kinds of spaces for community that you're talking about. They might go 'okay well our studio space or our upstairs space, that's the one which we'll more frequently programme live art or experimental work in'. That's good because it means that those artists continue to present their work, but as you say, that doesn't necessarily come along with the other infrastructural dynamics which are to do with bricks and mortar but are also to do with community at the same time.

AF: Yes, absolutely. I think the capacity to make art and being an artist to feel habitual and everyday rather than something that you can only do very occasionally. When I was young in London, I didn't know a lot of people I only knew Debbie and she lived on the other side of town. But I would go to Shunt two or three times a week and just hang out there. I'm saying that as a straight, white, cis man, the case is even more extreme for people who find themselves marginalised for other reasons. Where is the place where you can go to when you feel you'll find your artistic and your social community? That can serve as a foundation for everything that's going to come later? Yeah. It's a real challenge.