

Live Art in Scotland: Craig McCorquodale

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Stephen Greer (SG): For the last two weeks I've been starting these conversations in the same way and that's been inviting people to talk about their first memories, or first encounters, with performance and with performance art. I've been saying I'm really wary of neat little origin stories, but I do like the idea of first impressions or first encounters, or the memory of them, even if it wasn't the first one, but what's that first encounter so maybe we can start there.

Craig McCorquodale (CM): Yes, that would be brilliant. So I was thinking about this and I remember, I think it was probably around 2015, so I'm 23 right so [in] 2015 I would have been 17 and I went to see *Purposeless Movements* by Birds of Paradise at Tramway and I don't even know if now I would refer to that as live art. I think it's probably, well it's theatre I suppose, but it definitely, at that moment, was the most experimental piece of work I'd seen. I really remember being confused and captivated and just interested in how essentially we're just watching bodies kind of suffer, or go through real time and space. I was really struck by how this wasn't a narrative thing, this was about people and about time and about images, which I suppose was striking for me. I remember after that going home and I suppose trying to immerse myself in whatever this thing was. I found the work of Jérôme Bel and you know, not to contribute towards the legend around Jérôme Bel because he is actually an increasingly flawed human being, but there is something about his work in that initial moment where he offers us the circumstances, or the space, in which to watch

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bodies. That was really a starting inquiry for me around the ways that live art and performance can present bodies for spectatorship, or voyeurism or something, and actually the ways that that can be super confronting. He does this thing that I now try to do a lot, where it's about the frame that we construct around things, I suppose. The kind of stagecraft around human experience or real life.

SG: There are so many things I want to pick up on there. Maybe there is that sense of the invitation to witness or spectate bodies. I'm conscious that both with *Birds of Paradise* and with Jérôme Bel, we're talking about particular kinds of bodies and maybe bodies which are not always privileged or given space on conventional stages, or on professional stages. We're talking about non-professional performers and we're talking about performers with disabilities.

CM: Yes, totally. Actually Jérôme Bel's work, it's *Disabled Theatre* that I'm thinking about most, but so many people have massive problems with that work because of the questions it poses, I guess. It is just about watching these bodies; it can feel problematic or too difficult for people I suppose. There are a couple of other things I was thinking about in terms of those initial moments. At this time I was in sixth year of school and, this is so funny to talk to people about this now, I was writing my dissertation about Adrian Howells and it was just after his death. I really remember writing this and I was exploring his work around accelerated intimacy and one to one performance, but I was really writing about it from the perspective of someone who, I suppose in a similar way to the Jérôme Bel, the legend around this thing or the myth perhaps around this thing. I kind of was equating the death of Adrian Howells with the death of *The Arches* and the death of one-to-one performance. [laughter] I suppose I was being quite heavy-handed with it all, but I suppose I mentioned that because I feel really aware that I was a student, a young guy, interested in his work at the time where loads of my peers now and loads of my friends now [had] lost a pal. Also, I think about Adrian and think about *The Arches* in that type of way, where for me, they're both myth and loads of my peers have gone through both of those things, which is quite interesting.

SG: And particularly thinking about myths as being really recent as well, that something might have a mythic status in our [contemporary] lives or in a discourse around our practice.

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So The Arches closed in 2015, six years ago now. What was it that drew you to Adrian's work? Was it that exploration of intimacy?

CM: Yes. Well I think it was it was his exploration of intimacy in the context of one to one performances because at the time, I think I was interested in art making that was so far away from my traditional understanding that I grew up with, I suppose. I was really interested in how performance can be anything, how it can be a one-to-one exchange with another person, how it can be an action on the street. I remember really loving the documentation around *Foot Washing for the Sole* and feeling like he had a real kind of elegance in his performance quality. It was just quite fascinating for me at the time, which is interesting because I don't even feel too connected to one-to-one performances these days. That sort of started me on a bit of a journey. Then I got in touch with Lucy Gaizely at the time, who now is my best pal and my collaborator, who continually pokes fun at me for my naïve ways of working as an S6 pupil. Then I joined CPP [Contemporary Performance Practice at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland] and learned about the seminal works of Forced Entertainment, The Wooster Group, Goat Island, Station House Opera and then from there, went on a bit of a solo journey [by] myself just learning. Specifically, I was really interested in - and still am actually - in the body-based 70s practice around Chris Burden, Marina Abramović and Joseph Beuys, those sort of works. I think that that as an impulse I suppose for live art, about it being [about] something that is risked, is still really present in my work and in my thoughts around it all.

SG: Okay. Again, I want to pick up a few different threads. I'm also realising that maybe there's sort of a question that I should be asking that I'm not, and it is about that first encounter with theatre before we had that first encounter with performance art. I think about how the first stuff that I saw was probably pantomimes in church halls or in school halls and things like that. That's what shaped my understanding of what performance theatre might be. I don't know if that was your sort of first encounter as well?

CM: Yes, for sure. I remember going to the panto and seeing The Krankies at The Pavilion when I was really young. They'd given me sweets, I suppose in anticipation of me having to endure the panto, but I just really loved it. My Gran always tells this story where I was rejecting the sweets and wanting to look at The Krankies. I don't know but it's funny isn't it?

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Because we could analyse things like church hall performances or school plays being performance in the way that we might talk about it, amateurish thing around it.

SG: I have this private theory, and it's not especially original one, that for a phenomenally large number of people, certainly in the UK, that their first encounter with performance probably was pantomime or related to pantomime. That it's one of their first strong memories of going to the theatre if they were fortunate to be taken by a parent, or by a grandparent, or by a friend of the family.

CM: It's interesting because panto in itself is probably a lot more dynamic and engaged than you know, a Chekhov play or something. It breaks down the relationship between performer and audience, or it's satirical, or it's dealing with issues.

SG: So it then becomes quite, not ironic, but [people can] go from that to what is then actually a far more conservative rendering of theatre. As you say, in the model of a well-made play, which you then kind of break away from when you then might discover performance or live art. I was really interested in you kind of talking then about the various people who encountered through CPP and maybe through your own wider study. Some of those people you've talked about I know are artists or groups who've had repeated links with Glasgow, people like Goat Island and Forced Entertainment. And then there is a generation of artists who [can feel like] properly canonical figures, who are more at historical distance, people like Joseph Buoys. Do you have a sense of working within, or in response to, particular traditions?

CM: Yes, I think I do actually. I think that is something that's always felt really present with me. I think style moves on doesn't it? It sits within its historical circumstances as you were saying earlier. I think as a student studying this work, but also I maybe want to add that as someone that genuinely loves this thing and I really do feel like it's my greatest passion. I feel like it's a kind of weird situation where my work is my hobby now so I need to take up crafting or something. I've always been interested in really immersing myself in specific kind of historical genres or movements, not to necessarily replicate them, but to kind of pick out the things that might still be important or fundamental to performance. So I might not want to be bloodletting for example, but I might have a real sense of bodies being risked in time

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and space, or of enduring something, or going through something real where the audience can fundamentally change the direction of the work. I always feel like it's a bit of a process of connecting or of trying to appropriate different forms or genres that have come before, to find something that might feel relevant for now. I also think, and maybe we can talk more about this later, but in the context of the work that I really love making and want to make that involves people that aren't artists, I feel a real tendency to move towards the kind of high risk situation of performance art and live art [and] to then connect that to social practice because I feel that that's a sort of response to my frustrations with some of the kind of expected aesthetics of that work, if that makes sense.

SG: Okay. Well maybe it would be great time to talk about it, because that concept of risk, I was really interested in asking about that next. Partly because the way you were describing it, it did sound like something that was informed by a sense of literal bodily risk as you've mentioned [in the work of performance] artists who do engage in bloodletting but it sounds as though it wasn't limited to that. That you have a maybe more expanded sense of what risk in performance or in live art might involve.

CM: Sure. I think that we often fall victim to a singular understanding of what risk looks like. Maybe it's something that is more connected to bloodletting, or that gun to the head type of thing. But actually, I suppose as I've got more experienced in processes, I feel sometimes that the most risky actions are the ones with the most potential to fall apart in the live moment. I think about working with Ian Johnston for example, with Lucy [Gaizely] and Gary [Gardiner], who has complex learning disabilities. Essentially, he just might dance to a Kylie track for a few minutes but that moment is super risky, because he can't be choreographed on. He is completely responsive to the energy that he's receiving from the audience, in order to go on the journey where he can transcend himself. I kind of have been trying consciously to follow that line of thought and understand risk as something that's not just.. teenagers running around hormonal and naked. But, Steve, I am also interested in that! [laughter]

SG: [Laughs]

CM: That's the kind of double-edged [quality of that].

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SG: It's interesting though that it's risk in the sense of.. it is something that maybe has to be anticipated but it's not something that is a problem to be managed. It's a quality of liveness, or a kind of potential or potentiality. I'm not sure what the right words would be to describe it.

CM: I think it's also about who is engaged in an action and what are the kind of semiotics or cultural understanding of this person's body and how is that risked in that moment. A lot of the work I've done, and I'm really interested in, is with children. In some ways, maybe it's a contentious thing to say, but in some ways children are one of the only minorities where it's still legally inscribed that they can be oppressed. It's like we understand them as half human beings or kind of not yet fully formed citizens, which is consolidated in the law because they don't have the right to vote, for example. If you see children doing certain things or I suppose performing in certain ways, just as they are, then it can be really confronting for the audience or it can maybe generate new understandings of their role in society. So, in that sense I feel like risk is fundamental in performance because it can jar people and heightened states of consciousness might then change the assumption of that individual.

SG: It also sounds like you're recognising that what counts as risk or what's perceived as risky is unevenly distributed if you like. Children as a particularly broad class, but then thinking maybe about adults with learning disabilities, and maybe more specifically, about other kinds of identity like, I guess, queer identity. That there are certain forms of risk which accrue to being in the world.

CM: Yes and to what extent performance is a space to, and this is a genuine question I have actually, to what extent performance or live art is a space to offer an elsewhere, you know? To offer a utopian vision of something that acknowledges the risks that individuals face in society and therefore has to create a safety around the presentation of that. Or, actually, what I might be more inclined to believe, that live art is actually space to present complication and trouble and risk, and present back something that we've accepted as being normal in society and to kind of present the nightmare of it, in a way, if that makes sense.

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SG: Maybe we can pick up the thread of that by thinking about some of the [practices involved]. I think you've talked about happenings, or sited actions, or public interventions. They are performance works or performance actions which are taking place quite explicitly in public spaces or in nontheatrical spaces so crossing outside of the presumed safe space of the stage and that's an idea I'd want to problematise anyway, but they are works which seem to taking place in the public domain. Maybe we could just chat a bit about that choice, about the desire to work in nontheatrical public spaces. What's at stake there for you?

CM: I suppose I always think about my work as kind of being a way for us to obfuscate things that the audience might already know, if that makes sense. I feel the need to lean into the complexity or contradiction of being alive because I actually do feel that increasingly, we're dictating an oversimplified understanding of things. I feel like we are not engaging with difference, we don't really have dialogue anymore in the Twitter kind of culture, especially in the last year. I suppose I would resist instrumenting too much morality upon the artwork. Which makes me really excited about working in the social sphere. I'm quite inspired by Joseph Beuys's social sculpture understandings and I picked that up from the artist, Milo Rau as well who is currently working with all of that content in the National Theatre in Ghent. What is that? It's like an expanded concept of art making where it has the potential to transform society, I suppose, which is a mega ambition. But it also acknowledges how it's an extremely limited endeavour at the same time, which I think is the absolute field of performance. I'm interested in working with 'unlikely collaborators', I would maybe refer to them as. So people who don't self identify as an artist, but who have something fundamentally and viscerally to offer the artwork. I'll just say that I feel really frustrated that the assumption with working with these artists or these non-professional artists, is that it's outreach or that it's relegated to a creative learning department. It's funny because of course, participatory work has made massive advancements in the last couple of decades, but I do still feel like it sits outwith a festival headliner or a kind of live art understanding [of the work]. You might disagree or agree with that. I know I do feel the need sometimes to speak about that as being live art, rather than participatory, relational performance or something.

SG: So if you're doing something which has a socially engaged dimension to it, that in some frames or in some festival practices, that there's a distinction being made between

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“proper”, live art and this live art which is sort of in the social work department, to put it really reductively.

CM: Totally. Which also connects to our conversation about a hierarchal understanding of risk. Someone might be engaged in a twelve-hour action like being a piece of mud and that’s like, you know there we are, we’re going to have a beer and watch that. Suddenly a group of children doing something which I understand to be equally as provocative and the stakes are probably higher, but it’s something that maybe sits at the back of the programme. It’s quite sad that I don’t feel that we’ve necessarily moved on too much from that yet. I think about the work of Santiago Sierra for example, where he tattoos a line on sex worker’s backs in a gallery for hours, or gets people to move concrete blocks around. It’s confusing because I suppose I don’t understand people to be the most kind of problematic, interesting, troublesome materiality. Just to pick up what you’re saying about happenings. I mean obviously that comes from Allan Kaprow in the 60s and he was constructing all of these dynamic unfixed provocations. I like to use that quite playfully, I think, to give a context around smaller, more research based or process led actions that I might have done at some point to change its perception. A lot of live art is about the documentation, about the trace of something, and often about the story that was told around it in a way, so I do like to use [happenings] as a broad header to talk about smaller works.

SG: Okay. So it sounds like there is a knowing invocation of a particular tradition of work, but it’s also a more specific practice of making [your performance actions] intelligible in the context of the other stuff that you’re doing?

CM: Yes, I think so. And also, I think I really like to go on quite long processes as well because my understanding, in order to transcend an expectation of a typical way of viewing non-professional performers in order to present something that is more dynamic or troublesome. It does take time. It takes trust, it takes time. At the minute I’m engaged in this quite long process of trying to find a way to collaborate with male construction workers to build performance. I might have an understanding that that will result in a piece of work in maybe a year or two. But there are so many different happenings that can be found on the way. Suddenly the presence of a camera or a reconfiguration of a specific space

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becomes an artwork. It might or might not have an audience, on a construction site for example.

SG: Yes. I was just going to ask that, about the potential tensions between working in that way and thinking about the professional shape, spaces and places for presentation. If you were engaged in that sort of longer-term project, where there isn't a fixed sense of a product in place, when you then want to or need to share that work in festival settings, what's the act of translation or transposition there? My question is maybe in relationship to this project, how does that factor into your thinking or into your working as an artist? Is there part of your head which is thinking 'this is all very well and good but there is a festival coming up', or is it less pragmatic than that? I'm always interested in the pragmatic quality of arts practice.

CM: Yeah I think that there's a massive conversation around function and form, or aesthetic and being embodied in the context, for example. I feel that in this specific inquiry, that is to do with working with construction workers, I approached this too when I was making my degree show, this kind of unearthed qualities of masculinity that might exist in those spaces. To have a conversation about obfuscating male identities in the construction sector, for example. That comes from my family, it's been in our family for one hundred years. It's been passed down from son to son. I was thinking about ways I could infiltrate those spaces. They have a massive number of male suicides in the construction sector. Those are the kind of gender politics that I was approaching this inquiry with. It's this interesting thing isn't it, when you work in a social context, your inquiry is ruptured by the reality of working in that way? Now, that is totally still a quality of this inquiry but, increasingly, I feel that the work is about finding a negotiation or collaboration between artists and society, or self and other. I think that my instinct is that if you're embedded in a certain place with people, you can definitely create artwork that might look more like a piece of theatre or a piece of performance. It just feels like there's so many interesting things that could happen on the way that feel equally part of the process. I guess I'm thinking that live art at the minute as presentation and production process, if that makes sense. It's something that has many different situations and facets. Performance is a process of doing rather than a kind of final singular moment.

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SG: Yes, so maybe what we're talking about is an art practice that isn't forced to choose between process or product.

CM: Yes. And also how the way of finding the form is also content as well. I think that what's so brilliant about this project for me is that everything is potentially content. The gap between me, or the gap between art in society, is super fertile and raises lots of questions about the problem of solidarity, or the impossibility of transcending something or doing something different. It's fascinating. And actually, maybe just to connect this to the Happening discussion that we were having, is that the methodology that I'm working with in this inquiry is from the Artist Placement Group. They use the incidental person methodology, where an artist would undertake a residency with local industries. For example, furniture shops, construction workers, and they would be salaried as a worker in that context, but they would be the same but different. They would do the work, they would build the relationships, but they would always push towards an elsewhere or something. They would be kind of a playful artistic intervention, which I feel makes sense in the context of working on a construction site.

SG: Yes. It's kind of an artist residency model, which is quite different from the conventional one, which is often 'here is a gallery space' or 'here is a workshop space' and one is in residency in what might be an existing institution, rather than being in residency in a given social or a work environment.

CM: I think it all comes back to the kind of fundamentals of live art which is about questioning where and when and who can be involved in art making.

SG: Maybe this is a good point to pick up on some of the collaborations [in your work]. Quite a few of your works are pieces of solo performance, but it feels like there is really substantial.. maybe the greater part of your practice is collaborative or is relational. I know that you particularly work with 21Common who we've already mentioned, Lucy, and also with Mammalian Diving Reflex, so maybe we could just chat about those relationships and how they feed your practice, where you are I guess, sometimes a collaborator, sometimes lead artist, sometimes working in some other capacity. What's the place of that kind of dynamic in your work?

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CM: Yes. I suppose I've been super privileged actually in that I have two established companies that I collaborate with regularly and feel a strong sense of mentorship from. I've been working with Lucy and Gary for around three years now on projects and we have really similar impulses and really similar understandings of art making and its potential. It's the same with Mammalian. I'd say those companies both exist in a kind of expanded social practice, kind of dance or theatre or site specific type of type of thing and I feel really privileged that I've been able to become embedded in those two organisations as an emerging artist. I feel like I'm constantly learning about different processes, different ways of production, different ways of presentation. Something that they both do that's really interesting, I think, is that they have a model that they work with that essentially tours and changes in different locations. I've been super lucky to tour to different places in an international context with them and there is something really interesting about the way that they build a model, or they build a kind of parameter, or a circumstance for a piece of work. Then it changes from location to location. Sarah Hopfinger actually talks about this thing that I'm sure you're aware of. She talks about the rewilding processes of bison as being the erection of fences to enable the transgression of those fences. It's kind of like containers to then enable disruption, or something like that, which I often think about when I think about this kind of touring model of art making or social practice, where essentially the markers of the work remained the same, the aesthetic or scenography remained the same, but the content changes based off of local people or different places. I think this is a super exciting way of working and a way of constantly rediscovering an inquiry and rupturing itself.

SG: It's something that strikes me is a really exciting way of working, and also one that demands a particular level of continuous commitment and work. There is a sort of desirability to a show, where you go 'okay, I've worked on it, it's done. I can turn it up, I can show it and then I can go and lie down' [laughs] whereas we're talking about a form of practice which, as you've described it, both offers and requires in the same gesture this continuous engagement with the space and the place and the community in which it is staged.

CM: I think that really connects to the live art tendency to continually rediscover itself, or to be different every night. I'd say that maybe traditional theatre is quite concerned with

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hitting the motions in the same way. It does appreciate the possibilities of liveness for sure, but I'd say that there is something fundamental about live art's potential to rupture itself or to actually seek some sort of transcendence for the audience and for the performer, which for me is quite exciting when you work in a social context. It's interesting because, Mammalian especially I'm thinking of, well, 21Common and Mammalian both work with unusual collaborators, or they have an inquiry that then they find people to speak to in an interesting way. It's this other kind of assumption about social realm artwork, it's not just like we're all sitting around a table being democratic, making all the decisions together. There is an understanding that there is a difference between the lead artist constructing the parameters in something, and then the collaborators fulfilling those parameters and collaborating in an ethical way. But it is a singular inquiry if that makes sense.

SG: I'm just so interested in that. Maybe we could pick up that thread in the context of a particular project. I know that one of the one of the Mammalian shows you worked on was *All The Sex I've Ever Had*. I think I saw a touring version of this at The Arches - when it was still open - as part of the Wellcome Sexology festival, which is a kind of long weekend of material and it's obviously toured and appeared in lots of other places and if my notes are right, I think you were involved in a later version in 2019, I'm going to say in Ghent maybe? If you're able to describe your involvement in that process? When you are going into a space in a place where there is a mix of existing relationships between maybe a local festival production team but also a whole series of new encounters which result from artists coming into communities of which they are not a part, perhaps.

CM: Yes, for sure and that's such a good example because it's been performed so many times in many different places. I started working on the project before I'd seen it at all so it's this continual process of finding itself or finding its most current articulation, which is really nice. When we were working on that in Ghent, we were there for four or five weeks and it's a really kind of massive process where, essentially it's super simple the pillars of the work are there, it's just the long table, UN-style long table and six people over the age of 65 kind of gleaning their experiences to us. It's so interesting because we had quite long interviews with each performer, maybe five-hour interviews with each performer to kind of go through the history of their life. We started with the day they were born, so the oldest guy we were working with was ninety-six, so he was born in the 20s or something, and we go through

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every single year they were alive and get this massive archive of their life. Then it goes through different iterations of script writing and we share that and then get back to them. I think something like that is interesting, where the artist can offer these kind of silent pillars of work but then the content is completely reliant on people who are coming to the work, or encountering it for the first time, which is really beautiful I think. And the way that a programmer can programme that work, but then we'll see a completely different version of it.

SG: So that's a work where, as you described it, there's a kind of framework, there's a dramaturgy, and then it gets animated or populated, however you want to describe it, by the biographies of the people. When you were working with the performers, was there ever a dynamic where they wanted to kind of push against that template or against that framework? Or is that just part of the process, that the template itself always bends or stretches?

CM: I think that is totally part of the process, that the template bends. I think actually to be honest it's really empowering for people who are encountering this process and who are involved in the production of it, to have that template. I think that otherwise, well these six individuals that were working with the first time, I think they really appreciate some type of template. Or we might show them some images of previous productions and they can see themselves in four weeks' time if that makes sense. There's real marker points and that process does really work to fully empower the people that we're working with to be vulnerable essentially. That's what's so beautiful about the work is that they just engage in an hour and a half of their whole life and their vulnerabilities. I actually don't know if we would get to that point if the structure was a lot more loose and it was a lot more like, 'okay guys here we are in a room, let's figure out what's possible between all twelve of us'. I think that in all my experiences of working with non-professional artists it is super empowering for them and also just such a necessity to have some markers or structures that you're having to hit or having to having to fill.

SG: I guess there is also a kind of ethical dimension as well to being able to communicate that this is what we're asking of you and this is what we're inviting of you. Even if the finesse or the detail that doesn't become clear until you encounter the process, at the

outset you have a sense of expectations. I'm interested there about what's at stake in the process where, let me think about this, where you're sharing... I'm just remembering how much pleasure and joy that was in the work, while also recognising that there was a real mix of personalities amongst the performers. Some people who it felt, as an audience member, that they took great pleasure in being able to tell these stories and perhaps they'd always been sort of the kind of person who would share. There were other people it felt, again as an audience member, for whom there was a real act of disclosure and testimony and witnessing which was only facilitated by the frame of this work and that they wouldn't share the details of their sex lives in any other circumstance.

CM: Totally. I think that there are some people in my experience, you know a couple of collaborators entered that project having a totally planned out version of how their story was going to be told. Then we got to interview and they realise that they don't necessarily get to decide the whole arc of their own narrative, because of course, we all want to present our lives in certain ways. I think the thing about it that is really beautiful, and maybe this connects to a larger kind of ambition I have for my work, is that it moves beyond representation, it's actually real. It makes the representation itself real. This is a real situation and there is nothing more beautiful. I think one of the most beautiful moments that I had in the whole performance was watching this woman called Juliet who was in her late 70s, just kind of walk out onto the stage and feel the impact of telling her story to a really large audience. In Ghent it's a massive theatre as well. I just think there's something really beautiful about being acknowledged as vital in your own community, or being witnessed and seen. I think it's really striking.

SG: That's lovely. It's so interesting to think that that kind of structured offer is empowering, is more empowering or differently empowering than just an open offer might be. That's maybe slightly counter-intuitive, that if I allow people greater agency in making decisions this will therefore be more empowering. That's often a really good premise start from, but it's not necessarily the case. It's just making me think about those really kind of complex questions of how this body of practice is then having to negotiate consent and agency, both of the participants but also of you as an artist, if the work is leading to somewhere that you didn't initially want to explore.

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CM: Well completely. I do think that we get stuck that on conversations around agency and empowerment when it comes to working with people. I sometimes, in my experience working with an institution who might have a lot of bureaucratic health and safety concerns around working with people, I feel like it functions as a process of othering actually sometimes. Sometimes if people are too concerned about the agency of a non-professional performer, I feel like presumes that they don't have agency themselves to stay no to consent, to be involved in something that might present their bodies in a different way. I wonder if in the UK, we're a little bit stuck there. But what you're saying about this work sometimes having a tendency to go somewhere else, I remember in Ghent there was an interesting situation where we were hearing a lot of the stories of this guy and he was being quite misogynistic and it was clear that he had had quite a lot of, I suppose without disclosing any like specific details about that thing, it was interesting thinking about the sex he was having in the 30s and the 40s because it didn't feel appropriate. It felt inappropriate and it felt like it was quite exploitative or something. So we were having conversations about to what extent is it our job as artists to present this as it is and to offer him up as he is so the audience can view him in a multi-layered, multiplicitous sort of situation. Or, to what extent do we have the job of making him lovable and loved. It's still a question I have. How do you present people, or even how do you present yourself, as being flawed, problematic and deeply unlikeable in some situations, but how do you foreground a real sense of generosity and love so that that person can be safe and be held?

SG: Yes. It's making me then think of Adrian's work again, of both literal and figurative registers of how do you hold someone or how do you hold the space for someone. I was also remembering that one of the dynamics that Adrian I think talked about in an interview was the willingness of people to say 'yes' regardless of what he was asking or inviting them to do. I think he said that he had to work quite consciously, and perhaps work quite hard, to make sure that people who participated in his one-to-one work didn't just go along with it for the sake of the art. I wish he was still around for many reasons, but I'd be interested to know if that was a particular dynamic with British audiences or whether that was something he encountered everywhere he went.

CM: Yes. That's so interesting isn't it. I think that his point is that, for sure, people do say yes. I mean, of course, there are some factors that we need to unpick around to what extent

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it's going along with the art. I think one thing that I'm really learning about working in the social context, is the fundamental generosity of other human beings and strangers, and how people are willing to do things with you and how easily trust can be made. Mammalian talk about social acupuncture as the needling and poking of social dynamics that then affects larger organs and contributes towards what Darren [O'Donnell] calls phase shifts in society. I think that's just it. You can't really get to the place of transcendence, performance, all this stuff, without having initial awkwardness or without having some level of negotiation.

SG: But also taking yes seriously.

CM: Yes, for sure.

SG: We touched on this a little bit, sort of indirectly. Knowing the details of where you studied and trained and also the companies that you've worked with and the other artists that you've worked with, I suppose maybe just to wrap up our conversation, I'm also interested in your sense of the broader field in Scotland and the spaces and places are supporting new interdisciplinary work. I'm conscious that I said at the start of this that there's this myth of The Arches as a space that was there and is no longer there, but that we've also seen the emergence of other things like Take Me Somewhere. I know that you were involved with 21Common and their show that was there. It was just to invite your thoughts about the broader sector, where there are spaces and places.

CM: Yes, sure. The things you mentioned, I would say BUZZCUT, Take Me Somewhere, some corners of NTS are really opening for artist development which feels exciting. It's hard for me to comment on what The Arches was like of course, because I wasn't there.

SG: Sure.

CM: I don't want to again perpetuate the myth that it was a totally utopian space where artists could try out something and be presented and get funding. But I do feel, even though I wasn't there, I do know that we're still feeling the consequences of the loss of a truly experimental DIY space, or a meeting point actually, a hub where we can see each other or try things out more regularly. I'm super energised by things like Take Me Somewhere and BUZZCUT. Even, this isn't in Scotland necessarily, but things like Battersea Arts Centre or

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GIFT Festival, or lots of different organisations down south. I suppose I think about places like Imagine as being quite exciting for the work that I'm making, or god, where else, Dance Base. These significant, or regularly funded, organisations in Scotland that feel like they definitely have open arms to emerging artists. But of course, that's limited. I feel like I would love to have something that might resemble another building that feels infrastructural or that we could have regular in person events. Because of course, Take Me Somewhere was brilliant because it is high quality, international live art that's been really elevated in its aesthetic, but it's also work that has ambitions to be on the touring circuit. Don't get me wrong, I would love to present there in the next few years for sure, and beyond that touring circuit, but I also think there's something missing at the minute that is a space to fail. And I worry about that actually because I feel like you learn so much in the live moment and you learn so much when you can invite an audience to witness something. But for lots of reasons, I worry about the space for failure these days. I think that we don't have organisations or buildings that facilitate kind of scratch DIY work that could fail or be the first iteration of something. But to be honest, Steve I also think a bit about the place we're at at the minute in terms of, I don't know, the political climate or the kind of discussions that we're having around representation, or safety. I worry generally a little bit about of course, preface this by saying that this is coming from a limited perspective of a white man, right, but I do worry about the space that there is to fail because I don't that audiences in our community are necessarily as generous to witness something go wrong or to witness something collapse.

SG: Maybe this links back to that conversation we had about risk, recognising the right to fail, or the way that failure is perceived [is] distributed unevenly.

CM: Not to make any dramatic claims, but to what extent is some of the principles about live art offence, or about confrontation, or provocation? Those things I'm sure definitely still will exist and they will exist in my work. I don't know. I hope you hear what I'm trying to say, I feel like maybe there are systems of the model, or systems of morality, or of this false kind of binary of good/bad that might exist in Twittersphere [laughs]. I don't know.

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SG: I mean one dynamic that I've been thinking about is that when there are limited spaces for doing the kind of risk taking which may be developmental or generative that you are talking about, when there are limited spaces for that, it feels like the criteria for judging success or failure become far more closed or far more polarised.

CM: Exactly.

SG: The critical or the social landscape in which the work is understood, the (small c) conservative quality of that, both reflects and feeds into the small number of opportunities. I've been thinking, where do you where do you intervene, where do you break that cycle, that sort of feedback loop? The only other thing that I wanted to ask about, and I'm keeping my eye on the time as I'm trying to keep my promise of saying that I would chat to people for no more than an hour, is really to ask about future plans. I know that you were awarded the Jerwood Arts Live Work Fund, that you're one of the people who was awarded it, and [I'm interested to know] if there are specific projects that are coming out of that. Is that the project you were talking about earlier on, about masculinity and construction spaces?

CM: Yes. It's quite nice to connect that to your previous question around spaces or what is the infrastructure around, or the development process of art making. I've been thinking loads recently about performance as a construction site and that's come directly, of course, from me being embedded in a real-life construction site. I do think there's something quite interesting or, there's something really fertile in thinking about performance as a construction site where we can see beyond the surface of things, where things happen in process, things can change. It feels like a really interesting articulation of theatre or of, probably live art more generally, and I often have this image in my mind of a kind of changing, fluid, evolving venue that is just a construction site or is kind of like a piece of land where artists can come and change the site and make form and things happen. I don't know if that's metaphorical space or if it's a real space. With Jerwood, what's brilliant about this award is that I feel really trusted to kind of go and do some things and to figure some things out without any outcome. It's completely freely given to me to support my practice for the next couple of years. So in terms of what I'm actually doing with it, I am beginning to undertake these kind of small artist residencies on construction sites to collaborate with some male construction workers. At the minute, that's more around building spaces

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together, so building structures or forms for some type of action to happen and tentatively of introducing performance in there, I suppose, and interviewing men about the material processes of construction. I'm interested in things like scaffolding, or welding, joining two metals together through high heat, but there are lots of metaphors that I'm finding in there. I'm hoping that this will result in a piece of work, in either a site specific piece of work, or a construction site in the theatre that will explore the building of worlds and male identity. I'm becoming a little bit sceptical of how live art at the minute has a tendency to be issue based, if you hear what I'm saying. I'm really interested in this inquiry but about gender and it will inevitably be a texture of the work, but I don't know, I maybe feel quite connected to the more fundamental aspects of performance making that are about liveness, time and space, materiality and people, rather than being about something. Right now, I'm just experimenting with form and hopefully, I mean who knows, it might not happen, it might be an absolute mess and these construction workers will be like fuck this, you fancy artist. Then I'll be like, just get that to camera [laughs]. It's been something I've been working on for two years now, so it is really rich and I feel really connected to it, I just need to be open about the form.

SG: Brilliant. And so great that the nature of Jerwood's support is such that though the project might result in a performance of performances, that that's not part of the offer [of support]. There's no demand connected to it.

CM: Totally. Yes, and at the point of deciding this is what's being made, I would probably just get in contact with another venue, or be supported through them to find a presenter. For now, it's a lot more broad strokes. I think it's just giving me all these kind of ideas around performance as a collision site, or a construction site, or a negotiation. It feels like going back to those basics. It feels really important.