

## Live Art in Scotland: Adam York Gregory and Gillian Lees

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Stephen Greer (SG): There are lots of places that we could start, but I have been asking the same question over the last few weeks, or over the last ten days, and that's been asking people the same question. I've been asking people about their first encounters with performance, or performance art, or live art, knowing that memory is always a constructed thing and that it's not as neat as an origin story and, in fact, I'm really suspicious of origin stories. But I do like the idea of first impressions even if they are ones that we are constructing at a later date, so maybe we just start there.

Adam York Gregory (AYG): Do you want to go first?

Gillian Lees (GL): I think mine probably happened about ten years before you, so chronologically... [laughs].

AYG: It is difficult though. I think I was doing it before I knew that it was live art.

GL: Actually, that's a really good point. Let's start there.

AYG: I didn't really know much about live art until we started collaborating really in an official sense. I come from a visual arts background and before that, the sciences. I'm a biochemist, that's what I should be. As a teenager, I lived in Lancaster, and there wasn't particularly much going on in town and so we would boot together, we would hire a space, and we would do things with that space. That would include the decoration of it, it would

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include the curation of what happened in that space and, by today's standard, pretty much everything that was going on in there would be classified under some sort of live art pretext or context. We had the world championship gurner in there one night. I don't know if you remember him, he was on a Bonjela advert once. He was in there and it was just a crowd of maybe sixty people just screaming the word gurning and this guy stood in the middle of the room with a horse's bridle thing on.

GL: Oh my god.

AYG: I think as teenagers we naturally fell into this kind of space where we would make and play and entertain ourselves, I guess. It came out of a pure need for entertainment, but we certainly weren't doing it under any kind of academic or even thinking, it was more a reflex, I guess.

GL: Don't you feel like that was maybe borne out of what was happening in the sort of popular culture at the time. So, you have things like Eurotrash and all that kind of thing, TFI Friday where people make themselves sick.

AYG: The Hopefuls.

GL: Yes, yes that was it. Just really obscure things that just seem really off the wall. You talk about decorating the walls with meat.

AYG: Yes, that happened [laughs].

GL: Those things in that context seem really kind of normal for the 90s.

AYG: Yes.

GL: That's the kind of stuff people were doing in the 90s. For me anyway, growing up in Falkirk, that was telly fodder. I went to Falkirk Tech, you know, my understanding of performance was wildly not that. I wouldn't have contextualised it as that as a teenager, but now I look back and think it sits really neatly with Falkirk sevens and all the coke heads at the time, the ladettes.

AYG: There is something about the materials that were available to us and the spaces that were available to us, you know. The function rooms of bars and cricket clubs. We ended up in a cricket club one night as a venue. Interestingly, Andy Abbott, his band played one of those nights.

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GL: Did they? Weird. Anyway, you digress.

AYG: That was back then. I disappeared off for over a decade, became a visual artist and then it was much later on, while working for Gillian's theatre company Proto-type as a visual artist that we started talking about what I guess would become our collaboration. I wasn't really aware that this world of live art was a viable and possible venue for creating. I guess I came to that much later, that was about 2013.

GL: Yes, I think so. And actually, for me, my journey started way before that, but in terms of our collaboration, I think our casual conversations whilst being on tour together for a totally different theatrical undertaking were about really odd things that I hadn't really ever considered would inform a performative practice. Things like paperweight, the grammage of paper. We were having some really obscure and niche conversations that were really fulfilling that felt really left field and not useful in terms of my practice in any way, because my practice at that point had returned to being more theatre based. That ended up being the premise of our interest together: concrete and paper and pencils.

AYG: Materiality.

GL: But in terms of engaging with live art, I think I was kind of spoiled. We were discussing this earlier. In retrospect you recognise how spoiled you were. I studied at Falkirk Tech for a year, the Polytechnic, which I hated. It was acting and performance and then I attended what was CTP at the RSAMD and I was taught by Grace Surman and Gary Winters of Lone Twin and as human beings and as artists they kind of blew my mind because I hadn't encountered those kinds of multidisciplinary practices before. Grace on paper was a choreographer, but when you witnessed her work there was movement in it, but it was incredibly performative. I guess the seminal performance for me, in setting my career and my understanding of performance, was Lone Twin's *On Everest* and it was supposed to be at the CCA but I think it was being renovated at the time, so it was at the McLellan Galleries on Sauchiehall Street in 2000. Until that point, I'd seen a year's worth of theatre. There wasn't much theatre happening in Falkirk and it really, it still sits with me. What you're saying about entering a space, the smell of that space. Walking into a space and witnessing action already happening before I sat in my seat, that really blew my mind because that told me as an audience member for the first time ever, this isn't about me. These people have been doing something in here without me being here, which means they're doing it for another

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reason potentially. There was something about agency, about them doing something for them, not for my benefit as an audience member and I hadn't encountered that in performance before and the smell of two sweating men in a room, which I didn't encounter again until another piece by Franco B a lot later. But just being able to smell humans in a space, because they'd inhabited it for about five hours before anyone got there, and they've been undertaking this task. That merging of a theatrical telling of something by one man, while another one is literally doing a thing. He's not performing walking, he's actually walking. That blew my mind that hybrid of something incredibly conceptual and incredibly theatrical, and you starting to really cheer for someone who is literally just walking in a gallery space. You're really behind him and I think that set in motion for me something about duration and endurance and action and what it is to just undertake an action and have it witnessed, as opposed to attempting to entertain people. That really determined my entire practice that performance, I think. It's stuck with me, all of their work really has. That and *Ghost Dance* but in particular that one. Sorry I went on a bit there. [Laughs].

SG: That's lovely. It's interesting thinking about how we can follow that thread through your practice together. The notion of actions really happening and also happening in a way which doesn't involve any kind of illusion, the suspension of disbelief or artifice. You're not being asked to pretend. Maybe we'll come back to Lone Twin because you are still being asked to engage in a lot of complex acts of imagination.

GL: Yes, that's true.

SG: At least that's how I've experienced their work but it's not which is about pretence.

AYG: In our work *Present Tense*, the one with the mouse traps, I mean that's a piece that is retired because you're no longer scared of mouse traps.

GL: I mean I'm scared of mouse traps, I'm just not as scared of mouse traps.

SG: Let's talk about that as a work and also as a way into discussing recurring interests in your work that are to do with risk, failure and perfection. Work where you move through a space setting, I guess several hundred wooden mouse traps until you're penned into the corner of the room.

GL: Yes. This started off, which we realise now is a bit of a trend for us, where we have this concept and then it's about making that an actuality and recognising what we've set

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ourselves up for. When we get into a space to attempt to design it, I didn't think I was capable of doing it because I was so afraid of touching them and moving them once they've been set that I thought I can't retain my cool to perform this whilst also inherently being terrified. It took weeks to get over my fear of the materiality of the object.

AYG: There was a point where we'd written a proposal for BUZZCUT that we were going to do this, before we'd even thought of how we would do it. We got two mouse traps and we decided that to perform that you would need to know what it would feel like should you get caught on one. We needed to know whether it would actually do any damage. So, we filmed ourselves doing it. We sat there at the kitchen table with a gin each and a set mousetrap and put our hands on it.

GL: Fucking hell. That's actually what we submitted as our application. Just a film of us both putting our hands on mousetraps. Eventually you said you just need to get caught in one so you know what the high end is because we can't have you not doing it because of the fear of what might happen.

SG: The way you're describing it, or the reason why you stopped doing it, to me suggests that the fear or some kind of anxiety is a necessary component of the work, in you never mind the audience.

GL: Yes, and I think that's a really salient point and laterally I realise that I was performing setting mouse traps and obviously, I was really setting them. I now know with mouse traps, or with our ones which are a few years old, I can tell when they're shifting, I can stand on one and know it's not going to go off or know when I brush that one it's definitely going to go off, because you hear them, and you become really familiar with the mechanisms. I felt like I was performing being afraid and that's disingenuous and futile because that's not what the work is about. We had to shelve it.

AYG: The whole idea was that we could equate the physical spring-loaded tension in one mouse trap, which I think is about 4.2 joules of energy and we could look at that in a space as it was multiplied. We'd get the sequential increase of physical tension, and we can see how that relates to physical performance and the audience. We had this hypothesis that the more mouse traps there are, the more tension there'd be, but it turns out that's not

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necessarily the case. Tension rises until something goes off and then it resets and then it starts building again. There's a moment of relief when it goes off.

GL: It dissipates for one minute and actually people gave really audible responses to it, that kind of relief laughter that everything's okay and then immediate silence again. If you put a child in the space that really changed things.

AYG: That was terrifying.

GL: Because adults can hold themselves back, but children don't. There were a few occasions where children came for me or towards the edge of the traps and the collective concern from the audience was something that was notable as well. Like who is going to get to that kid first and me thinking well it's not going to be me [Laughs].

AYG: For that first Buzzcut, one of the things that was really lovely and that we hadn't been anticipating, we were given the upstairs room, the billiard room. We'd been there while it was quiet, and I'd taken a lot of measurements. We do a lot of maths, so we know that we'll fit into a space and that the access was fine. Then the day of the performance, there was a disco below us and it was moving up and down and it's like, we have not figured this out, this was not part of the plan.

GL: I forgot that yes. All of the mechanisms started to jump, and you could hear the mechanisms like vrrm vrrm. Everyone in the room started whispering oh my god, oh my god because some of them started to go off and I thought I don't know how I'm going to get through this.

AYG: But that moment where the situation of a work suddenly becomes really dominant, I really enjoy that.

GL: I did too because it was a really beautiful moment for me to connect with the audience, of fuck. It was clear to them that I hadn't anticipated this would happen, so it was like a next-level anxiety. It really added to the work and my own personal anxiety.

SG: It feels like there is a shift there in that moment, or maybe a durational process, there's a commitment to the task and the nature of that commitment becomes legible or becomes felt differently. I'm interested in the different articulations of task-based action in some of

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your works together. I think *Constants and Variables* was that also presented at Buzzcut?

Maybe it was presented at Tramway and *Tempting Failure*?

AYG: And Chicago

GL: And Boston.

SG: That's one where there is a clear task of transporting ink. Can you talk to me about how the process or the image of that work came together because I think this work, like a number of different works, seem to have a sculptural dramaturgy to them. I don't know if that's the right language to use but it's clearly a task at the centre of it and in a way, it seems like the task is set up to produce an image.

GL: Yes.

AYG: Let's start at the end and work back.

GL: [Laughs]

AYG: I'm really keen that, particularly with any kind of work of any duration, that somebody could walk in at any point and read the layout so that they could watch the performance at once and see empty bottles at one side and full bottles at the other and both be able to see backwards of how long this has gone on for and then extrapolate forward and see how long this might go on for. With the mouse traps, it's laid out sequentially but if you were to walk in at the four hundredth, you know that those have all been laid out like that, one at a time. I think we started that with *Constants and Variables*, that idea that diagrammatically, you can see the whole process at any given slice. If you took a picture, you'd be able to work out what was going on. That piece is also kind of characteristic in that we set it up as oppositional for us. From my point of view as a visual artist, I wanted there to be black ink on this paper dress. I want a visual to emerge. And for you as a performer, you're after perfection in performance, which is not to spill any ink.

GL: Yes.

AYG: So, there's a tension between us and this has been played out, I think at Tramway that was the longest you've ever gone without spilling any of it. After about twenty minutes I'm sat there fuming because I'm thinking you could get away with this.

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GL: I think I had done about three full vials before I spilled any. That's really frustrating to me because the ink dries on the curve of the spoon and starts to create a lip so it's really hard to get it out.

AYG: You are set up to fail.

GL: I am. Sisyphean task absolutely.

SG: For you, what's the appeal of engaging with perfection and failure like that? Particularly if you're creating conditions where it's inevitable.

GL: I think it's just the hope that you will evolve as a performer to become even better or more familiar with those materials. I, generally speaking, know what my physical abilities or capabilities are. Then you're dealing with these bloody materials that, as you describe, much like whisky, ink has legs, it's literally trying to climb out of the glass or the container that it's in. It's this organic matter. The longer that you work with it, the longer that you start to understand what it will do, and you can act accordingly in advance of the thing that you know it's going to do. I know it's going to dry, so I know that I'm going to start catching drips on the back of my hand for example. Or I know that if I start to spoon it around sideways, that it will circumnavigate the lip that it's created. The longer you spend with the material, and that's really important to me, that's about mastering a material which is another evolution of my ability to be better at something.

AYG: For me, there's also a distinction between the first and the others. The first time we do a performance, we don't rehearse. If there's any experimentation in the performance I, do it elsewhere.

GL: You do the maths.

AYG: And then present it back to be performed. So that first time that we do it we don't know if it's going to happen, there's always an if and then it becomes a question of when and that's what's really exciting. I know you're going to spill that ink, I have no idea when you're going to spill that ink and how that changes the performance. There are examples where you've spilled it on pretty much the first spoonful and then seeing that dejection and knowing that you've got another four hours knowing that you've already failed something and how you're going to deal with that. It changes failure from a quantitative process to a qualitative and back again. That process I find really interesting as an observer.



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GL: This kind of performance I don't like to think of as being exclusionary or selfish, but as a performer, with durational work it's difficult because you reach boredom and I think you will always be bored at some point during a durational performance or at least I do, and it's about learning for yourself how to overcome as opposed to circumnavigate it. Similarly, with the actual failure of something, it's about learning about you as a person to deal with failure. It's not something that many people cope well with and so to start a performance having fucked it up already is a really difficult thing to do and to overcome, so it's teaching you more about yourself. I like that.

SG: It feels like there's a conjuring trick that's involved there, knowing that there's a mouse trap that will go off or ink that will spill, even knowing that you are still putting it off for as long as possible. There's an act of commitment there which involves you recognising that part of the necessity of the work is things coming undone but still committing to it anyway.

GL: There's something very human about that. I think that's kind of an important thing. I hope people read that in our work because I think it's an important facet of it, to fuck up and how human that is.

AYG: We talk about schadenfreude a lot. People do want to see you get caught in the mousetrap and then they don't and then they do.

GL: It's the Lone Twin thing, it's the I really want to see you finish this long walk, but also, imagine you didn't, how would that go down. People really will you to fail and then they really will you to succeed. It's quite a dichotomy to witness of people.

SG: When you're developing work of this kind, does that question of the audience form part of the conversation or do you begin with the image or the materials and then you learn what the audience will be once you start presenting it. I know some artists very early on are imagining or positioning versions of the audience in their heads and that's a central part of their practice, whereas others don't.

GL: I think because we consider ourselves audience members, well we are always at other people's work.

AYG: But I am always at work.

GL: You are literally a durational observer. I think it's a bit like well what do you want to see? What is interesting to you? If it's interesting to you, there's a high chance it's interesting to at least one other person. [Laughs]

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AYG: That notion of it being sculptural and very obvious, I think if I can't see something from the back of the room where I'm stood, I'm not going to expect anyone else to want to see it either. I guess we do think about how it looks, how it appears.

GL: It's much more intrinsic I think than let's consider the audience. It's inherent in the work.

AYG: But there are things that we do that never make it to an audience because they're probably not interesting to an audience, so we tend to make short experiments for ourselves in a very similar fashion as if we were making a piece of work, but they never become work, they just answer a question.

GL: And they scratch an itch. That's true. I think when we set to task about making a work, well it's difficult for us to name a starting point because I think everything that we make is borne out of continual conversing. We're married, we live together. There is no real separation between our daily conversations and the evolution of a piece of work to a certain extent. That sounds a bit trite doesn't it. [Laughs].

AYG: When we were in the back of a car being driven to Boston by our host there, they asked us how we make and I said oh we just argue a lot, but that is the truth, we do argue. Usually when we're arguing we're making something. It's you saying one thing, me saying another and we're trying to prove it.

GL: We are very similar in terms of what we appreciate and enjoy and find stimulating. We're generally saying very similar things from a visual arts perspective and from a performative, more choreographic perspective. We're using different languages to say the same thing and arguing about it and then going, oh it's the same thing.

AYG: The practical application, particularly with durational work, I'm thinking very much about the tableau, the image of the work.

GL: And I'm thinking, practically I can't do that.

AYG: You're going to need to go to the toilet at some point and I'm like no you do not. [Laughs].

SG: [Laughs].

GL: But what if I do and you're like, just don't. [Laughs].

AYG: But those are really interesting tensions for me because it does mean that we have to come to some sort of accord, some sort of answer.

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GL: What is nice in those back and forths is that we do have quite set roles effectively. There's a real hybrid and crossover. For example, Adam's instinct is for the design of the work and to think about it semiotically. With *Full Stop*, which is about running at a wall, my brain immediately goes, well how can I visually make that go further than me hitting a wall? The fabric of what I'm wearing has to carry, my hair has to swing, what am I going to wear, what's the weight of that fabric going to have to be? This is more akin to your world, but is something that I consider, I guess because it's on my body. Likewise, you're thinking about, as an audience member, what is visually stimulating to see in movement. How are you going to run? There's a lot of crossover.

SG: *Full Stop* is a really interesting work for me and I don't know how you situate it in terms of that broader body of live art which is interested in physical risk. I don't think I ever saw *Full Stop* when it was at Buzzcut, but in reading about it, there is a heritage as I'm sure you well know of performance art and live work made by women which has this act of possible self-violence in it. Do you see yourself and your work, whether in this instance or in other works, as speaking back and forth against those traditions or is that something you're aware of and it's just there as part of the backdrop or the landscape of where you're making work?

GL: If I'm honest, it's probably the latter.

AYG: Yes.

GL: It certainly wasn't the crux of my reasoning for wanting to do it.

AYG: It's interesting. A lot of our work tends to get read through various different lenses that may or may not be correct, or certainly there are assumptions about what we were thinking. With *Constants and Variables*, the first thing that we tend to get asked is, shouldn't you use red ink because it's more like blood.

GL and AYG: Why?

AYG: It's not material I use, it's not material you use. Why would we do that? Again, with *Present Tense* the idea of a woman backing herself into a corner with mouse traps, we understood how that could be read.

GL: We've been told that that performance is anti-feminist. We've been advised.

AYG: Often the position that I take, because I'm stood at the back of the room, supposedly as a designer or an observer that I'm forcing Gillian to do these acts and I can understand that as a reading. The reason that I'm not there being the one doing this is because I'm an inarticulate performer. Gillian is physically more capable than I am, which is why our

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collaboration works in this way. It is not anti-feminist for you to be doing this any more than I think it would be feminist to say you are doing it. That's what you're good at and I'm not.

GL: Gender, for us, doesn't really come into it. The reason that I'm wearing a long flowing skirt in *Present Tense* isn't to highlight femininity in any way. I made the outfit so I wanted the dress to be designed to skim over the top of the mechanisms so when I move past them it's ding, ding, ding and you can hear the fabric brushing and, especially for anyone sitting close enough to hear, it's an extra little nudge of anxiety. It's not about looking like a damsel in distress in your long skirt or you look really balletic.

AYG: I'm not saying that those readings aren't valid.

GL: No, they're valid.

AYG: They weren't intentional.

GL: Exactly, yes.

AYG: With *Full Stop*. one of the weirdest bits for me was, after you'd finished and walked back behind that partition, the number of men who got up and started running at a wall to prove they could do it quicker. That was not an anticipated outcome.

GL: Wasn't it?

AYG: Well, okay we might have suggested that it might happen, but I didn't think that it would. They saw it as a competition rather than a performance.

GL: And a competition with me, not with themselves.

AYG: The whole premise of that work was to see how you would mediate harm versus performance.

GL: Exactly, yes.

AYG: That notion of if you would be the best you get through that.

GL: If I could be the fastest, I could be, I'm more likely to damage myself on the wall than if I took it slower and didn't hit quite a great speed.

AYG: That's a piece we'll never do again.

GL: We knew that before we did it. I had to run at a wall full force, full impact to see what it did to my hands. I knew it wasn't going to be pleasant and I knew there was a really high chance that I could fracture my wrists. I've got images of my hands after. For about three weeks my palms were black because they were bleeding inside. That's interesting because work sort of pertaining to the body as site has never been something that's part of my practice before.

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AYG: Another weird thing that happened to me in that performance was I got booed. I've never been booed before.

GL: Oh yes, you did get booed!

AYG: I was in the position of basically registering the speed and you cheated, and you jumped through to register a higher speed and I just said that doesn't count and people booed me.

GL: [Laughs].

SG: Do you think that was also partly to do with it being Buzzcut, as a particular kind of space of performance?

GL: I think it's a mixture between that and the setting up of something that apparently, although in a performative context, is an athletic pursuit or a sporting pursuit.

AYG: It was in a sports hall, wasn't it.

GL: It was in a really tiny sports hall in Govan.

AYG: It did feel like for a second that I was doing pantomime and I found that very odd.

GL: Beautifully, the acoustic of that room – it's got that weird floor that makes trainers squeak – was lovely because the squeak was the only real sort of audio accompaniment.

AYG: Your feet hitting the floor and then the squeak.

GL: Then the thump of the wall, apart from the booing.

SG: It's interesting, that's making me think about the real breadth of possible tone in your work. I'm thinking about the nervous laughter of people in response to the mouse traps possibly going off. The images are really still and sculptural and beautiful, but there is also a sense of humour sometimes in my reading of these processes of images which is to do with maybe a knowingness of what you're doing. Maybe that's to do with how we respond to risk, there is a kind of laughter response.

GL: I think that's maybe heightened by me if I'm being honest. I find it very difficult not to communicate with an audience, even if it's not verbally. I don't like to pretend they're not there. If someone sneezes, I'm going to bless them. Children like to interrupt our work a lot and I'm fine with that because children are curious. If adults want to ask a question, come on over. Children ask why are you doing this? In Boston we were doing Constants and Variables and this kid, he was about five wasn't he, asking what are you doing? I said I'm just trying to see if I can get the ink from these bottles into these bottles without spilling it. And he went, ahhh you're doing a really great job and then ran back out. I like when those

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engagements happen because it's demystifying this notional, high-brow, because our work can seem really sterile and clinical because it is well-designed. I'd like to think of it as being well-designed. Therefore, I think people's immediate response can be one of I don't understand, or that's not for me, or just feeling like there might be a set of rules around engaging with it. It's nice to smile at people when they come in the room if I happen to be looking at them. I think that sort of potential for shared humour or shared relief.

AYG: You are the funniest person I know.

GL: Oh my god, please remove that.

AYG: [Laughs].

SG: But it's interesting, there's something maybe about a certain kind of aesthetic minimalism that gets read as solemnity.

GL: Yes, yes.

AYG: This is a thing that both of us constantly battle, I was going to say battle against but it's not really a battle. As artists, I think we're very clinical modernists. As humans, as people, we're very easy going.

GL: We are modernists.

AYG: I think that our artistic output is not necessarily us. I understand that some people, what you see on stage is a reflection of their personality.

GL: In identity driven performance.

AYG: Yes. Whereas our personality is something that we desperately try to strip away to some extent.

GL: It's really important to us that our work could remove me and put another performer in. Of course, it would vary because of that person's physical attributes and abilities, but ultimately the work would still be the same. We strive to make work that isn't identity driven. It's not about Gillian performing this task, it's about the task being undertaken and how Gillian does it.

AYG: You're the person who injects the humour into it.

GL: Well, that's what I offer that task but what might Steve offer that task if he were doing it. The task remains the same, the ability to recognise the duration from the ephemera across the floor remains the same, it's just how it's being undertaken that shifts with the individual. That's important to me.

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SG: Maybe we're talking about the design or the dramaturgy of the encounters or situations, which is making me rethink slightly how I was understanding the participatory work. I'm taking the time where you invited people to name or donate times of the day or night that were special to them or just had some kind of association that they could name. I know that became the basis of the second part of the project where digital watches were set to that time.

GL: That's right.

SG: That was a situation which is perhaps quite different as a sonic sculpture from these other works that we've been talking about. Maybe you can share with me the choices for that as well. Was that part of Take Me Somewhere?

AYG: It was.

GL: I think that first and foremost that was about scale for us. That was about creating a sculpture that was larger than any of the other sculptures that we had created.

AYG: The idea of this 1,140-watch megastructure that would be tidal almost. Time is always a material that we use. Obviously within the durational or even task-based performance, we're using time as a very physical presence in what we do. It's all about change and the subtleties of that. We had the idea of doing the watches first, the idea of making this thing, but it was also an experiment for us of pre-contextualisation of a performance.

GL: Yes, I mean not to hark back to my training, but I studied under Jason E Bowman, what an incredible man. We were talking about this earlier where you encounter someone as a teenager and you're like oh yeah great, and then about thirty years later, you're like oh what a genius that guy was! Jason's socially engaged practice was another thing that really shifted the lens for me in terms of what is possible and what is interesting for the community. This guy buys gold from a pawn shop and has a tooth cast and put into his own skull as a sort of totem of a community that he's been working with. That blows my mind. I guess that notion of socially engaged practice is something that's really interesting to us. The idea of being community artists versus artists in a community or the other way round. We would rather be artists in a community than community artists, partially because the former is suggestive of something that might be a bit outdated now. It's about being artists in a community and again, demystifying,

AYG: We talked about the idea of not mythologising our beginnings as artists or anything, but I think there is a real seminal point for me, when we started working together, I was still

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living in Lancaster, and I was desperate for some of my work with Gillian to be shown in Lancaster. I approached a producer there who said no, the people of Lancaster aren't interested in that sort of thing. It was winding to hear somebody say that, mostly because I've always felt that I'm the people of Lancaster. I'm interested in this, this would be the sort of thing that teenage me would've been really interested in but wasn't exposed to. What a strange thing to say that these people that I've lived with wouldn't be interested in that sort of work because I know that they totally would be. That moment where you say, what is actually happening here? I think with *Taking The Time* was that if we talk to people before we do a durational performance, before we make the sculpture. If we say we're thinking about time and why it's important to us and then somehow manage to let them inside of that conversation that when they're stood there looking at the sculpture, that they're aware of what we were thinking of, what our intent was, but also their own relationship to that. Whether it's because there's a watch that's going to go off at their time or that they know the alarm that they're hearing must be important to somebody for any myriad of reasons. We use our parents often as our yard sticks. My dad will do the classic, oh Tracey Emin's *My Bed* what's that all about? If I can get him to understand why we're doing something and why we think it's important, then I know that that's probably a valid reason for us doing it. Or at least a valid reason for us to be able to explain it.

GL: And similarly, I had taken my mum to GOMA a few years back and there was this amazing sculpture of what looked like an arc and a thread and a really heavy brass ball and of course I'm getting quite close to it, not touching it because I recognise that you're not allowed to as most people do, but I blew on it to see if it would tilt because I wasn't sure if that was a thread or whether it was a solid rod, and my mum said did it move and I said no, but I don't know if I blew on it hard enough, so she walked up to it and she went to approach it and the docent in the gallery came charging over, get away you're not allowed to touch it. My mum's response was to be absolutely humiliated and leave immediately and hasn't returned to GOMA since because she just felt that she didn't understand the rules. There's a woman that will never engage with public art again. It's about saying well there aren't any rules, the rule is you experience time, and so do I so let's have a brief conversation about something that is universal, that you are just as much of an expert in as I am. I'm not purporting to be the artist that understands all about time more than the



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average person. That universality. Generally, we work with materials that most people have an understanding of.

AYG: That's another formative thing for me. Back in my days as a scientist I had an artist come and visit us and I'm not going to name names, but they work with grass an awful lot. Their opening to their talk was, scientists don't quite understand photosynthesis and there was a back row of all of us and we were just looking at each other like hell we don't.

GL: Oh wow.

AYG: But it was that moment that an artist proposed to have a deeper understanding than the scientists over something that is quite well understood because they had some sort of sensual or spiritual understanding of it that scientists wouldn't have. We spend a lot of time looking at the science but that notion that we could be some sort of uber expert just because we use it, whereas actually most people have got a general understanding of time. We got to take that piece back to Lancaster, which was wonderful because I got to show it somewhere where I was told very distinctly, nobody would understand this. At eleven o'clock in the morning after a twenty-four-hour performance, a whole primary school turns up.

GL: It was amazing.

AYG: It was like, there we go, they understand.

GL: We spent some time with these amazing children at that primary school in Lancaster and they were so excited to see all of these objects en masse and that's another thing that we forget, multiples of objects is something that we work with an awful lot, but just seeing the awe and the wealth of sound emanating from these objects that they all understood because they all either had one or they'd seen one.

AYG: I think it was really important for us that we don't compromise that modernist, clinical nature of our work just because we're working with a community. In that case, the output of it was beautifully laid out, structured, very neat and tidy, clinical, but we had a classroom full of kids that were totally engaged in that and non-threatened by it. The interaction with the work was very human, whereas the actual display of the work was very sculptural. I think that's important that accessibility to us is not dumbing down. It's more about contextualising and allowing openings for people to interact with it.

SG: It's interesting thinking about the perception of that producer in Lancaster that there isn't an audience for this work here. I'm thinking about the counter, or the mirror image of

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it, which is the assumption that Glasgow is good for live art and is better for live art than in Edinburgh or in other places in Scotland. I guess maybe the last thing to ask about, is about your sense of those broader spaces and places for live art, or the kind of work you're interested in making in Scotland in knowing that you've worked with quite a few of the organisations and spaces which have links to this kind of work, working with Tramway, Take Me Somewhere, The Arches and with Buzzcut. I wanted to ask you about your sense of that landscape knowing that you work in an inter-disciplinary fashion, that you are drawing on the visual arts and on performance traditions. I don't know if there are other festivals out there which you look at and go okay, that's next on our shopping list, that's another opportunity.

GL: I think the assumption is that you look bigger or wider and actually, I feel like we've gone kind of micro. We've found places that maybe aren't as well known or not quite known for supporting or hosting live art.

AYG: I think one of the formative things for us when we started our first collaboration, we needed to make a piece of film and I went to my local gallery in Lancaster and asked if we could borrow their empty space for three hours and they said, yes of course you can, and then they proceeded to give me a bill for their wedding rates for that space. It was silly, it was like £300. It was more than we had. Whereas you then immediately asked The Arches. I think that's one of the things that I think when we talk about Glasgow and live art. What's always been really present in my mind is how generous people have been in terms of giving us the space to do things. In some cases, it's like we can't give you money, but we can give you a room for the day.

GL: The Pipe Factory. There's an amazing, what would we call him, producer, curator I don't know.

AYG: Human's good.

GL: Human yes, called Stephen Sheriff who works at The Pipe Factory but also now Doors Open Day festival and has just been such a massive supporter of our work and of multi-disciplinary artists across Glasgow. He works with a number of different people, choreographers. I guess also The Work Room has been really seminal in supporting the development of our collaborative practice. I think BUZZCUT opened up at a really important time. I was lucky enough to show three works across my tenure at the National Review of Live Art and I don't think anything could ever replace it. What's brilliant about Glasgow is

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that when something falls, there's not a land grab it's that there's a recognition that a space existed where something really important used to exist and what are the possibilities now, as opposed to great, now I can do my thing. I feel like BUZZCUT happened at the right moment and with the right intention. As a foundation for a festival that was a great place for BUZZCUT to springboard. It's been certainly great for our collaborative practice.

AYG: It was good as an audience member as well.

GL: Yes, it's brilliant to see the other work.

AYG: One of the things I enjoyed was the really strange and quite rare mix. The thing I love about live art is also one of my main criticisms of it, which is the barrier to entry is zero. So, stuff can be wildly terrible and wildly brilliant at the same time. I think BUZZCUT really very cleverly took the line of academic work and very experiential work and was able to put it all under one umbrella. There were works that you watch and you're like wow, this is probably not great, but I'm enjoying it. I think that really broad palette was really instrumental in informing me and teaching me about what live art could be and possibly is.

GL: I think as an artist BUZZCUT also makes one sharpen their teeth a little bit, literally because of where it's placed. You've got kids roaming around Govan and coming into Pearce Institute and being like, I don't know if I can phrase this in a recording [laughs], da fuck's this cunt daein? I think it was Kris Canavan dragging a block of ice through his tongue piercing and somebody just said oh it's a political protest and contextualised the work and he went, oh right mad bastard. [Laughs] But when else is that kid going to experience that kind of art, probably not other than Govan. I actually feel like that kind of work is more accepted out of the city because people are interested in things, they're just interested. I don't mean that to be demeaning, like oh they've got nothing else, so they'll grab anything. I just think there is a general interest for trying anything out. Lyth Arts Centre in Caithness, where my mother is from, that's seen a huge shift in its programming since Charlotte [Mountford] and Tom [Barnes] [were made Co-Artistic Directors]. It had been an arts centre that was run really successfully by a gentleman called William [Wilson]. It was built by him and run by him for decades and then he felt he needed to get some young blood in there, so he got Charlotte and Tom to take over as co-artistic directors and they are incredibly keen to support not only theatre and theatre for young people, but also some quite out-there live art. They're interested in durational performance and that is because they recognise that their

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audiences are interested people. That's another one that's on our list. We do like it up there.

AYG: Abroad. We've got Tempting Failure down in Croydon. These people have all fed back into the culture back up here. TJ Bacon. We do a lot of work in Stockton.

GL: At ARC in Stockton, which is actually a theatre, but again, huge proponents of supporting live art. We're about to go and finish what we should've done last March, we are now doing the performative twenty-four hour durational of setting the watches for *Taking The Time*. We had our bags packed in the hall and Boris said nobody's going anywhere last year so we're making a return to that. There's a lot of crossover and support. I think GIFT is hugely influential, Fierce Festival in Birmingham has been great, Transform in Leeds. There's a through line, there are always through lines, and I think that is often read or mis-read as cliques being cliquey but actually what it is is a demonstration of a very emboldened community.

AYG: Yes, that's another thing. You hear this criticism that the only audience for live art is live artists. I don't know why that's such a criticism, it's like people are so moved by watching a performance that they go and decide to make their own performance.

GL: Isn't that the best thing.

AYG: It's like watching [a punk band] and going, I'm going to be in a punk band. That's exactly the point of it and I think it can be read as very cliquey and very insular, but actually I think it's very open and it's very inspiring in that way. If you are interested in live art, then you are probably going to engage with it not just as an audience member but as somebody who makes and contributes to that scene.

GL: The barriers to access are zero so get involved. Good sales pitch well done.

AYG: On behalf of the live art tourist board.

SG and GL: [Laughs]

AYG: We need you, point finger at camera.

GL: Exactly.