

Live Art in Scotland: Claire Cunningham

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Stephen Greer (SG): For the last few weeks, I've been starting these conversations by thinking about people's first encounters with performance. Although I'm really wary of neat origin stories, I am interested in first encounters and first impressions. I also know that in your case, you came into dance and choreography from a background as a singer. Maybe we start there, with both of those things: the question of first impressions, but also that particular background.

Claire Cunningham (CC): Yes, it's tricky trying to remember, I don't feel that oh I saw this thing! For some reason when I was very young, I wanted to sing, and I knew I wanted to be a singer. Even though I was very shy, and it was out of character, that seemed to be the thing. At a certain stage, I knew I wanted to try to be a professional singer and I went and studied music. I think my first issue was that I couldn't work out how you worked in the business. I wanted to sing but I didn't know how to work, and it was very cliquey. It was classical music that I wanted to go to, and I found that the environment wasn't very friendly. I had a strange and unexpected, unintentional shift into theatre. I had this idea that I wanted to have some sort of involvement in how I could help disabled people to consider music as a career, having not really engaged with any other disabled people growing up. My decision partly also for singing was quite related to my internal ableism I felt. I felt that singing was something that my physicality and my disability didn't affect. It was about people not looking at my body and wanting to be heard. I think there was also a desire to be elegant

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and beautiful that I felt I could achieve in singing that I couldn't relate to having anything to do with my physical form. So, I think there was definitely this strange relationship with singing and not really encountering other disabled people. I came out of university with a side thought that people should be able to consider this as a career, not just as therapy and that was still the relationship that existed with disability and music, for example. I encountered a company called Sounds of Progress and they were working in Glasgow, and they trained disabled individuals to become musicians. They did a lot of drumming workshops, but they also did professional theatre projects and the reason that they worked in theatre was because their director, who was a non-disabled musician, that was his experience, he was an MD in theatre. He had been part of Wildcat. The first people that I met working in Scotland were from Wildcat environment. I was working with Tina Anderson who was Dave Anderson's wife and therefore met Davie Anderson quite young and Gordon Dougall, and then onto people like George Drennan. The very first performance I was in was directed by Gerry Mulgrew from Communicado and this was him coming back after Communicado had broken apart. I had this very odd journey in that my first work in theatre was potentially with one of the most well-known and respected theatre directors that existed in Scotland at that time. Also, Gerry was very experimental and working in devised theatre and I'd never encountered anything like that. There are so many of those experiences with Sounds of Progress that lay a foundation for me in working in devised performance. Everything was made around and made from the people that existed in whatever the company was. It wasn't, we're going to do this play and we'll fit people into characters, it was all driven from the reality of who people were and what they could do. There are things that have stayed with me from that. I learned some really basic stagecraft with them, things that are quite vital still. For example, the segue between scenes potentially being as important, if not more important than the scenes. We really worked on the transitions. Early on we had audiences with a lot of disabled people, people with learning disabilities, people with very complex needs, so we were working with audiences that had bodies that moved, that made sounds and we had guide dogs in the auditorium. I think there were a lot of things there that have been very formative.

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SG: It sounds like that work was taking place in conventional theatre spaces, it's that distance from, or problematising a lot of the assumed norms for audience behaviour or theatre space in relation to different audiences.

CC: We were making traditional shows in a lot of ways, but they were musical theatre. Things that I learned from working with Gerry were very simple things. For example, learning that if you put some text across, or above, or alongside, some very simple action and it's carefully and cleanly done, you don't need to do very much. I also learned about sharing space and presence with other performers. From an early age, I noticed that I was really interested in this idea of what might get called presence. When it was someone else's focal moment on stage, I became really interested in what that state was that I needed to be in to be alongside that and not drawing focus and being present with what's happening. I became very obsessed with awareness that if I change my focus, then that potentially does something to an audience's focus. Everything that you do on a stage has potential meaning. Somebody will see it and potentially ascribe something to it. A lot of things I can feel from that time I really absorbed quite subconsciously, and they are still important to me. These ideas of what it is to be present.

SG: Maybe it's something that's clear in retrospect. Was that the start of the thread towards dance or choreographic practice, that growing sense of an embodied presence on stage? Or, was there a far more mundane connection with another artist or person who pointed you in the direction of dance?

CC: The shift into the more physical and choreographic world and practice, it's hard to trace the order that things came about, but there was a very mercenary realisation that I wasn't going to make a living purely as a singer. The other important thing is that I was working part-time in the administration of that company, so I learned arts administration for six years with them, which is absolutely also vital in the fact that I've been able to have a career since, particularly when I began to apply for funding post-Sounds of Progress. I couldn't have had the career I've had if I hadn't gained all of that admin experience with SoP. There was a point where I was getting stuck behind the desk, and I knew that I wanted to perform. I had no intention ever of making work, I had no interest in dance or anything like that, but I knew I wanted to perform, and I realised that I needed to be more versatile as a performer. So, I began to look at other ways that I could expand my performing skills and one of the

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directions that I ended up going in, was learning aerial skills. One of the people that was quite important was Kally Lloyd-Jones who had the Company Chordelia and now runs The [Byre Theatre]. Kally is one of my first mentors and she offered me personal and physical training in beginning to really look at my body and think about how it worked and how it was working in relation to conventional aerial training. There are definitely people there who have had that effect and Kally was important in that very early journey into working in movement. I realised that I wanted to expand my skills and accidentally ended up in dance through the aerial. The aerial took me into dance and to working with the American choreographer, Jess Curtis. Although, my colleague Linda Payne, who was my best friend at the time, was a dancer and really was the first person to see and encourage a potential. I think I was sceptical because she was my best friend. [Laughs] When I encountered Kally and Jess Curtis, there was a very different relationship. It was really working with Jess Curtis, he kindled a real curiosity in working in movement and the ways that I was working with the crutches especially that I then got very obsessed with. That work happened in England with a company called Blue Eyed Soul Dance Company. I came back to Scotland, and I had dinner with Rosina Bonsu, and this is a really clear memory of the Creative Scotland awards which existed back then. I had also crossed paths with Bill Shannon who was an American dancer on crutches. I had seen Bill dance and he came to Scotland. He was at Theatre Workshop for the Edinburgh Fringe, and they did the Degenerate festival. There was an extraordinary mix of work that they programmed for that and that was when I saw Bill. He was like nobody else I'd ever seen. I kind of saw Bill and felt like this somebody who had created their own art form. It felt so bespoke what he was doing. He had his own technique and he had named it and categorised it and he was dancing on crutches. That was years earlier. Having seen Bill, although I didn't want to dance, it meant that years later when I did, I knew that thing existed and if I hadn't seen Bill, I don't think that would have happened. That was sort of shift and Rosina was the person who encouraged me to apply for the Creative Scotland award. The reason I applied for that was because I looked at the judging panel. I had no intention of ever getting it, I was completely unknown, I had no experience in dance. They were very much looking at people to shift art form and I looked at it and there were people like Steve Slater on the panel. I applied very specifically because I thought, if I let these people know that I'm thinking of leaving Sounds of Progress and I want to move on, then

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these are some people that if I'm on their radar then they might offer me some work and Steve did. Steve said to me that they could offer me a little residency.

SG: So, Steve Slater was based at Tramway at that point.

CC: Yes. He offered me my first residency. I had no idea of anything about making work really. I freaked out and didn't take it because I thought I wouldn't know what to do. I had no idea what a residency was and what I would do in a studio on my own. He was probably the first person who offered something like that. I can also trace very vividly Steve's programming. I began to shift from being in SoP and really only seeing very traditional theatre and plays and couldn't really relate to going to dance, I just felt so alienated and stupid that I didn't understand it and there must be something to understand in it. I went to see some of the Belgian work, and I particularly remember the company Victoria that became Campo. A lot of that work really changed things for me. I shifted from wanting to be a singer to being a performer and not just a singer or an actor. There was something about the versatility of these performers and the worlds that they created that definitely changed something. That did something very particular for me as a performer in terms of aspiration and development.

SG: It's interesting, knowing something about the later works that you've made, a few different strands feel like they're coming clearer for me there. One of which is to do with aerial practice, one of which is knowing Jess Curtis – is that contact improvisation? Is that the domain of practice there?

CC: It's one of his main practices. He trained in modern dance. He also comes from circus; from the San Francisco community performance, quite political, anarchic, street work; and working with Contraband and Core which were these quite famous companies in the city with very improvisatory practices. There is a lot from him that I took in terms of the contact, but also being introduced to working in improvisation and devising from that way of working. When I was working with Gerry, I was still very much a performer and didn't really quite know what role I was having in generating. With Jess, there was definitely a shift into the six members of the ensemble, you are actively creating the show through doing long improvisations. That became a whole learning experience in making work and material that I learned with Jess.

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SG: In that practice, in that work, was there a sort of autobiographical or a semi-autobiographical dimension to it? Was that part of the discussion of that way of working? I'm sort of thinking that you might explicitly talk about autobiography, but you also might register that just by treating bodies and what you bring to a room with specificity. You might work autobiographically without calling it that.

CC: The two very first pieces that I did with Sounds of Progress were very much generated from biography. I still remember being taken into a room by Gerry Mulgrew and he said I just want to interview you; we've been making monologues by talking to all of the cast. And I said, but there's nothing interesting about me. And he said oh we'll see, don't worry about that. It was just a chat and from that conversation, he created this monologue. Again, I think that, on its basic level provided something foundational to me. I learned that we are all interesting. We might not believe that we're interesting, but we are. When I started to make work, I chose to really work from autobiography because that was where I felt safe. I felt like I didn't have any right or authority to try and comment on anything out with myself. I didn't have confidence in that and so I chose to work from autobiography. I think the first three pieces, *Evolution*, *Mobile*, *Ménage à Trois*, they were all very much autobiographical. That was kind of all I knew how to do at that time. I also somehow felt like I knew how to work with autobiography in a way that still left it reasonably open. Or I could work out how to open space or text that still left space for other people to identify or recognise what the question was, or what the thing that I was trying to work out for myself was and what it meant to share that. There was definitely a shift. After *Ménage à Trois*, I wanted to try to find a way to make work that isn't just about myself anymore and how do I connect to other people's stories. There was a shift then into what became *Guide Gods* but actually transited through a piece called *Pink Mist* that The Arches commissioned as part of their Auteurs scheme. I created a work-in-progress that was called *Pink Mist* that was based on going to Cambodia and interviewing landmine survivors. That way of working, of interviewing people and building material based on sitting one-to-one and having conversations, that then fed into how *Guide Gods* was made and really marked a shift in the way that I work. Quite often now my work is based on the research of what it is to have a one-to-one encounter and that then forms the material. *Thank You Very Much* was based on sending my performers to go and have one-to-one encounters with tribute artists. What do they remember, what do they

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take from that encounter, rather than me dictating. Obviously, I select certain things from that as well, but it was kind of me saying what if I give this was of working to my performers, what do they bring back. Something about this is autobiography, it's still built on people's personal stories and things, but is somehow a way of opening it out a bit more and less about me. I remember asking Keith Hennessy, who I knew through Jess Curtis because they were all part of that San Francisco group, how do I make *Pink Mist* not about me. He said, well it will always be a bit about you, you're the thread that feeds it together. That was where *Guide Gods* began to be. That was also when I started working with Luke Pell, which has been a hugely important relationship since. There was something about Keith's advice that you are the thread that connects these people together. They might never meet each other, but you are the thread that connects them. With *Guide Gods* for example, having absolute crisis in the first version I ended up with thirty-five hours of interview material to make an hour-long show and ten days from opening, I had no show. I couldn't find it because there were so many words. You'll be familiar with this situation! I couldn't work out what to pick, what should be in and what should be out. Luke was like okay, don't use any words for two days, switch off all the words. His advice that it's in you, all of those words and all of those stories are now in you and what stays with you is what's important. What comes back that you remember and that you hang onto, those are the things that matter to you and what's in that is what makes it your work. That way of thinking, me becoming a kind of filter for other people's experiences, and gradually learning that the connections that I make are what makes the work original to me. I might make odd connections between Elvis impersonators and physiotherapy, that's probably quite a specific thing, but that's what makes it mine. I'm the person that makes that weird connection, but I can open it out so that it hopefully makes sense to other people. [Laughs].

SG: There is a sense that you are an artist who is in the process, you're not a neutral vessel for passing these stories to an audience. You are present. There are lots of different threads that I really want to pick up. I'm going to come back to Luke because I had a conversation with Luke the other day. I'm interested in that decision in thinking about *Thank You Very Much*, your more recent work, and the process involved, the performers going out and working with tribute artists and that that was the dynamic. It wasn't a work where you went away and watched documentary footage of Elvis performing. What you were interested in

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was the work of these tribute artists and perhaps the dynamic there is passionate attachment rather than imitation. I was really interested in that work with imitators and with tribute artists rather than the first-hand source material although I'm sure that did factor in at some point during the process. Do you recall where that impulse came from?

CC: Yes, it's quite hard to trace exactly when things shifted. I know that it started from this interest in things I could recognise in Elvis's movement that feel like they have a sort of crip aesthetic. There was something there that I wanted to acknowledge and maybe even reclaim and speak to, the qualities of how he moved and why that was seen as provocative and sensational. There were resonances there, something in the idea that moving in a particular way is disruptive to the norm and freaks people out and that was before I even understood all of the racial implications. He's moving like black people and therefore that's disturbing to white America. It's one thing that I began to understand. Going from *Guide Gods* I understood that it really needs to be about being in a room with somebody and my way researching really shifted. *Give Me a Reason to Live* was an awful lot of looking at paintings, looking at print, or being in museums and learning about the world of Bosch and reading and watching stuff. There was something about the shift with *Guide Gods* that I began to understand that it is about live human beings and being live with somebody, and what happens in that moment of being with somebody. I think *Guide Gods* taught me also that thing of trust. You were trying to talk to people about something that was potentially quite risky for them, whether that was to open up about their faith, or to open up about their disability or their relationship to disability. There was so much I learned during that process about trust and responsibility and what it meant to be live in a room with somebody that I realised that this really mattered to me. Watching Elvis on film didn't really do it for me. I wanted to know how it felt to watch people move like that. What does it do to the people who want to go and witness that and what is that world that they're in? When I met the tribute artists, I went to the festival in Wales, and I began to be very interested in the difference between impersonation and tribute because some of them would use different terminology and felt quite strongly. Some of them didn't care what they were called. I began to wonder if there was something around whether there is a distinction between impersonation and tribute. In my first research for the piece, I ran quite a controversial exercise with my performers, who were all artists with cerebral palsy, and I asked them all

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to go and make some material to be cerebral palsy impersonators and it caused some concerns and some conversations in the room and some choices, which was all welcome. I couldn't quite explain but I was like I know I need to do this, but I don't quite know why. The next day I came in and it was like, oh, if I'd asked you to be cerebral palsy tribute acts, I feel that something different would have happened. All the material that people generated was very derogatory and caricatur-ish of how non-disabled people perceive them when I asked them to impersonate it. But if I'd asked them to be cerebral palsy tribute artists, I feel like they would've done something very different. I understood there was a sense of love and attention that was in the idea of tribute that felt very different to impersonation. A lot of that really spoke to me in terms of working with disabled people and understanding the beauty, the knowledge and the skill that are in the bodies and the minds and not the superficial or what is mimicked and read and how much is missed between those two and what people really know of their own bodies.

SG: That's calling attention, for me, to the other dimension of crip aesthetics or of crip politics that a lot of it may be like a queer aesthetics or queer politics. It's quite consciously antagonistic and acerbic and there's a lot of joy and pleasure in that. But then, there's also this reparative quality which is about celebrating the pleasure of certain bodies and ways of being in the world, which is sometimes quite hard to make room for when you're doing the acerbic thing. The idea of tribute is making me think about that dynamic differently.

CC: With *Guide Gods* I had this situation of oh, I don't really know any people that practice religion. I suddenly realised that I was coming into it with very similar discrimination, attitudes and stereotypes that people have towards disability and sort of recognising my hypocrisy and acknowledging my hypocrisy when I go into Elvis-tribute land and realising I have this snobbishness and remove from this. There was a recognition of similar experience in sitting down with these guys who are very wary because they get ridiculed and are misunderstood and written off as being silly and irrelevant. They had a wariness, why do you want to know about me, what are you going to use this for and am I going to be misrepresented. It was like oh god, yes, I recognise that. All the journalists that come and ask, could you just jump about for a bit on your crutches for a photo and it's like, no, because that's not what I do. You would hear the same things from people from completely disparate experiences. Sitting down with these guys and interviewing them, they were

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lovely. I enjoyed their company. It was the same thing with *Guide Gods*, I could learn how to respect what somebody believed in if I gave my time and attention to them, even if it was something I didn't believe in myself. It was exactly the same with these tribute artists. I might not want to do this thing that you're doing, or go to the degree that you're going to, but if I sit and really understand why this means what it does to you, then I can respect it and respect the amount of work that goes into it as a performer. There was a shared understanding of how much work goes into making a show and learning something.

SG: I'm interested in where *The Way You Look (at me) Tonight* sits in that because I'm conscious of it as a work that was maybe part of a series which moved away from proscenium arch to more personal interactions, quite literal interactions and maybe the context for that, in my head at least, is sort of in the domain of live art. Quite a lot of participatory and one-to-one work, but also a consciousness of how a lot of that work can be fairly inconsiderate to its audience and to disabled audience members, or at least designed without their presence in mind. That work, which does involve you coming into physical contact with audience members, where did that project come from?

CC: There's a thing that I do when I'm beginning to think about making whatever the next work is. I have this history of almost making lists of where I've become comfortable, where have I become comfortable as a maker and as a performer, or what frightens me. Consciously, the next work speaks to those things. For example, *Guide Gods* was the beginning of me trying to get out of a proscenium arch. I was like I'm really comfortable. I'd finally become comfortable with people looking at my body and that needed to happen in a proscenium arch, you out there and me here and I've prepared this thing and you're going to just sit quietly out there and I'm going to keep control and do this thing from start to finish. [Laughs] I wanted to learn how to let go of that need to be quite as separate, to learn how to bring an audience closer because that frightens me, how to not have somewhere to hide so I can't turn upstage or run into the wings, to learn how to talk. I've always been in this sort of Jekyll and Hyde thing where there's the onstage quite confident Claire and then there's the offstage more shy and not very sure what the fuck they're doing, not very comfortable socially, although I think I probably project as if I am but not really. I'm quite hermit-y. These are sort of extremes, either very public or very private. It's always been work to try and find the person between these, how do I bring that together. *Guide Gods*

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was a step towards talking to an audience more like this, more like the person I am off-stage. How can I learn to do that and a conscious choice to try and do that, to make a show that allows me to do that. *Thank You Very Much* was again a choice to keep going in that I really want to learn how to let go of setting material quite as firmly. I want to see if I can be a bit more improvisatory with an audience. I want to learn how to talk more casually, and it coincided with an interest in working again with Jess. He's really the only person that I feel the most comfortable to dance with, the person that I trust most with my body to move and dance with. Also, he's a brilliant improviser, he's very comfortable on stage improvising. If I'm going to go down that route, it makes sense to do that with somebody that I know can totally hold me on stage. If I lose it, I know without a doubt that Jess can carry it and carry me and what it is to have that trust and collaboration with somebody in that way. Jess is also somebody that I knew historically, had brought out material from me that I wouldn't have found otherwise. I'd made *Guide Gods* and *Give Me a Reason to Live* and I was quite exhausted by what I'd put out and pulled out of myself. I wanted to take the pressure off myself and create a work in which I could share. There is someone else on stage who can take some of that weight and some of that devising responsibility, it's not me having to make it. I'm always working with collaborators, but there's a much more shared responsibility. Also just knowing how incredibly good Jess is, but also quite laid back. Between the pair of us we're sometimes too laid back. There were lots of things about that that were also practical, I wanted a work that didn't need a rehearsal, that I almost just turn up and do and that was a conscious choice. We made very little rehearsal to stage that work. There were some really practical things about something that felt safe and warm and spoke to the things that we were both really interested in at the time. It's amazing, that piece ended up feeling like one of the safest, warmest places in the world to be in and it still is. I had met a number of my collaborators through Jess, for example Matthias Herrmann, who does a lot of the sound and music for my work. These people have become part of what a Claire Cunningham project piece/world is. It's very much Matthias, it's Luke. Jess and I both enjoy bringing people that we love together and people that we think will love each other. There's an incredible joy in compiling a group of people that you think will get on so well and will spark so much creativity between them. I learned that with that Jess, what it is to put a team together. To do the work that we do, we're doing it because we want to do it and we love it, and it should be an enjoyable thing to do. It should be people that you want

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to spend time with, and you care about. That is really where things start from. *Thank You Very Much* was also built that way. First and foremost, I just want to put together a group of people who will love each other and will look after each other and will really enjoy being and working with each other.

SG: That explicit focus on care. I know that in the last few years, or maybe more recently than that, there is a strand of your practice that is to do with the choreography of care and the very conscious question of what takes care of performers, or an audience, or yourself as an artist. It sounds as though that that conscious focus has absolutely grown out of these collaborative relationships, not that you haven't always valued them, but you've come to maybe recognise the particular significance of those relationships.

CC: I think particularly the last couple of years. I'm really trying to learn to recognise that much more as well. There's a real problem and issue with being perceived as a solo performer. It was something that a colleague of mine, Sandra Alland, also pointed out, that the UK art scene is very built around this idea of the elevated solo artist. The singular artist, or you're a company, but individuals are elevated and there is this sense of representing everything, or this responsibility. Things go out as Claire Cunningham and it's sort of perceived that it's all me and it really has never been all me. I mean, dear god, if it was just me the work would be appalling. [Laughs]. It's so much about what happens when these extraordinary people meet with my strange ponderings and suggestions, and the thing that I'm beginning to mould goes somewhere else that I could never take the work. In recent years, partly also through talking with Luke, there's this recognition that the work is really a constellation of people almost. The work is coming from and informed by or shaped by my curiosity and my aesthetic and my attention and fascination but is so informed by the histories of working with different people and the relationships with people like Luke and Jess and Nadja, who is my producer, people like Julia Watts Belser who is a theologian that I've been talking with a lot recently. It's really not solo work in any way. As projects get bigger, the teams also get bigger. The genesis of ideas is not clear cut to be coming from one person. They're really an amalgamation of different people's influence and knowledge passing through me from other people in a lot of ways. Trying to understand what's come from me and what's come from other people was sometimes quite tricky. It's also tricky to make sure that you're not appropriating something from somebody else and you're not

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neglecting somebody's contribution. That's something I'm still trying to learn. I've undoubtedly made mistakes and not appropriately acknowledged people's input at times. I think that's where this idea of care comes from. That being another aspect, tracking that care of collaborators and care of the legacy of knowledge as it comes through.

SG: I'm conscious of how the aura of the solo artist is something that permeates so many fields of performance but feels especially part of the discourse of live art and especially part of the discourse of dance actually. The attentiveness towards these models of care and collaboration feels significant to me precisely because they sit within those traditions where, regardless of what happens in a room, the way it gets written about or the way that it's reviewed –

CC: Yes exactly, the public face of it. That's where it can get quite tricky.

SG: Maybe this is too big a question and we'll have to pick it up again. Maybe this was to do with the sort of work that Steve Slater was programming at Tramway when you were developing this practice, this body of work that we've been talking about. What kind of work were you looking at literally or figuratively sideways across the room and seeing in the spaces of live art in places like the National Review of Live Art, practice you were seeing that's not the kind of work you want to make, but where you see other fellow travellers, for want of a better metaphor?

CC: I think those Victoria performances were definitely very influential for me. As somebody that has this aspiration to be in an ensemble, groups like Forced Entertainment, sort of go—it must be amazing to have a group of collaborators. There was a big group, it wasn't Goat Island because I never got to see them.

SG: Black Market International?

CC: Yes, I think that was it. I saw them doing one big improv and just thinking wow, it must be amazing to have people that you can work with in that way. I'm somebody who wants to work that way, but I'm not very good at that. Although I'm talking about not being a solo artist and I'm a collaborator, I'm also a very specific type of collaborator. I'm also very stubborn about my thing [laughs]. I'm good at collaborating in certain ways and I'm also really not a collaborator in other ways. The collaborations I've done have very much been on my terms and my proposition and people coming to collaborate. That's maybe a

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distinction that's important. I'm not very skilled at being able to collaborate into other people's concepts or in that more open way of coming in and democratically creating something. I think I would love to be able to let go of my ego sufficiently but sadly I don't think I am. Then I realise that that is what I do have with Jess, that degree of that way of working and that was partly what appealed to me in going back to work with Jess. There are things like that that sort of stay in my mind. I'm often drawn to work that is about performance. Forced Entertainment and I love Wendy Houston's work that is incredibly clever in terms of what it's observing about the act of performing. I really love work that is about the act of performing because I think I am intrinsically interested. I'm not so much interested in dancing, what I'm interested in is performing and the act of performance as something to examine. I love work that is doing that. I don't make work like that, but it does inform my attention and awareness of how the work is experienced. For me, there is a real shift that happened by beginning to go and see live art, or what was being considered live art. I was working with Jess on that ensemble work, and he wanted to create something that could exist partly as installation and be explored as installation work for long periods of time, and also could shift form into a theatre show and could move between those forms. I found the process terrifying and horrific while I was in it and on reflection two years later, I realised this is what I'm interested in. Now I'm fascinated by this as a maker. I got so much from that, but also beginning to go and see live art work. There was a whole bunch of things that I started to recognise and really respect about live art work in terms of the rigour in the work that I felt like I wasn't experiencing in a lot of dance work or sometimes drama or other performance work. Somebody might be doing something very specific in a live art work, but the rigour that has gone into that choice and the honing of that one thing, the consideration of the space and how people will meet with it. Not all work, but with a lot of work that was what I was starting to really notice. There was this sense of choice and agency. It began to make sense to me that it was more about witnessing than audience, and relationship to time and what that meant to shift audiences to a different relationship to time. I think that changed my way of making work, but also was really resonating with a lot of the crip politics that I was starting to engage with. What is crip time and live art that might be about a durational performance, and you can come and go. That might be quite common in live art. From a crip perspective, to bring that into more traditional performance venues or environments is really empowering. It changes things and breaks things. All the

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formality of the show will be this long, and you have to sit here quietly, and you can't leave because if you leave, you're a disruption, all of that etiquette that fucks a lot of people up! [laughs]. There were lots of things about going to live art events that were difficult from a disability politic as well. You just expect everyone to stand quite often or sit on a concrete floor. There's no sign language, there's no captioning, no consideration of how you get into the venue. For me also, that was where BUZZCUT were extraordinary. One thing I should say is, I only went to the last two years of the NRLA because I was terrified to go. I wouldn't dare go to it. The language, the brochures, I felt it was inaccessible for me and I didn't understand it. I didn't know what would happen if I went through those doors and that was terrifying for me as a disabled person, as a small person, as a woman and so I didn't go for most of its life. I only really built up the courage to go in the last two years. Whereas something like BUZZCUT came along and over the first couple of years they had a desire to acknowledge who wasn't there and speak to that. I remember when they first started and they made these little films that were like when you come out of the tube station, you turn left and then this is what you'll see and then you cross here. From an access point, they talked to people. But even more than that, they were like when you arrive, there'll be a desk with the box office and there'll be different types of performance and some of them are like a theatre performance with a big audience in a room and you all sit and watch the stage for forty minutes. Some things are a one-to-one performance. And I was like if the NRLA had done that, I would've gone a decade earlier. What to expect, what might happen, it took all of the fear and the elite mysticism away, without destroying any of the mystery around the magic that the work can do. I feel very sad and I'm not blaming the NRLA, it's also my responsibility to have gone or not, but I just didn't dare go. Partly I felt like I wasn't cool enough to go if I'm being brutally honest. I had a real issue around who went to those things and who was in the know and certain communities, which was about creating safe spaces for those communities but also felt a bit like you didn't know how to break into those. An awful lot shifted in my practice I think after that, not that I engaged with tons of live art work. There was so much that made sense to me and that I began to absorb into my practice and my way of making work.

SG: Maybe that's exactly what, later in the Summer, we should pick that up again. That thread of BUZZCUT is a really interesting one. I've already spoken to Rosana and I'm going to

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speak to Karl, who I think was really at the heart of a lot of the access work that BUZZCUT has done.

CC: Absolutely. There's so much that was about the personalities of Nick, Rosana and Karl that was so warm and welcoming and felt quite different for me to go into that festival that the NRLA felt quite hard to engage with. It was so much about that sense of coming to you. It's also inevitably about scale and about timing and generationally, when we encounter people. There was definitely something extraordinary that happened in the Glasgow scene with Nick, Rosana and Karl and BUZZCUT and something about that thing that began to break across genres with that generation of artists out of CCP that stayed in Glasgow. Something really interesting shifted in the Glasgow scene with that because a lot of those students stayed here.