

Live Art in Scotland: Ross Birrell

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Stephen Greer (SG): I'm talking to a wide range of artists and practitioners working in different fields and different disciplines, but I've been beginning a lot of these conversations by asking people about their first encounters with performance or performance art and how it's fed into their life or their practice. Even though I'm suspicious of origin stories, I am interested in first impressions or early encounters, so maybe we can start there.

Ross Birrell (RB): Yes. It's a good question. I'm struggling to identify a particular encounter which would be classified in a live art or performance art vein because my principal encounter in that field was photographic documentation. Prior to an encounter with what I came to know as a tradition of conceptual performance, live art, or site-specific art, I was really a teenager going to the Citz, going to the theatre, and I was really interested in Oscar Wilde. I didn't want to be an actor, but I was interested in design and direction and the overall staging. So, that's what led me to study theatre studies, a combination of that and reading plays by Ibsen and Strindberg. Partly because I'm very lazy and a novel was quite a long written form and poetry was also out of interest, with poetry it wasn't like it asked you to do something immediate whereas a playscript asked you to direct it in your head. In order to understand it not simply as speaking voices, for example a script by Ibsen or Strindberg, you had to direct it, you had to block it and understand the characters. The same line could be said several ways. The same applies to poetry of course. My interest was really from the sense of wanting to stage things, wanting to put things on and to direct something.

That was not simply in a live capacity, but also in a mediated capacity. I was also taking photography at high school and so I was interested in the mediated framing of an image on screen or in print. I suppose the sense of a performative dynamic was making a pilgrimage to see Peter Brook's production of *Mahabharata* in 1988. For three nights on the trot they'd taken the bus from the west end to the southside to be in the theatre for two or three hours at a stretch, and rather than going for the full seven-hour one, I went for the three nights on the trot so that you could drink just after it [laughs]. It was that sense of the dedication and the event. That transformed theatre into an event and taking that time in a durational performance sense meant you had a slightly different experience of the notion of a live encounter. It certainly wasn't popular culture, the digestibility of something into thirty-minute or one-hour blocks. It was stretching your ability to remain focussed, but also to just go with it. That was an education. When I started to recognise why I wasn't fitting in in the theatre studies department even though I was interested in Brecht and Nartold and those were the barometers of political practice from my perspective, it was the second-handness of experiencing live art and looking at the images that had been imprinted on history and the shared history that somebody had archived, it was almost that sense of performance that was meant to be in a book rather than on the stage, because it couldn't possibly travel beyond the thirty people who might have seen in passing by on the street. Somebody had taken the trouble to go along with a camera, so part of the audience was the documentation of it. It was performance art for documentation that I got interested in, not uncritically, but certainly that was an attraction that there was another kind of way to make work. Obvious candidates come to mind: Chris Burden, Joseph Beuys, Roselee Goldberg's book is one of the touchstones, but the real motivation came from Allan Kaprow. The *Calling* piece is spread across a couple of days. It's in Grand Central Station and then it's on the street. People are wrapped in muslin or bandages in Grand Central Station, then people are wrapped in tinfoil in the back of a station wagon, then you make a phone call to let it ring and then follow a set of instructions to go to the forest the next day and reverse the roles of the participants. That sort of elaborate, directed, but there are also elements of chance because you don't know who the audience are going to be, it is public, and it is site-specific. It has got a score, but not a script in a sense. That led me to Fluxus performance and the sense of an events score, so a kind of mediated distance because you could perform it but so could someone else. At that point, you are quite far from the Citz and even from

Peter Brook and the *Mahabharata*. Not to detract from the absolute philosophical craftsmanship of the actor on stage being able to enthrall and keep an audience and maintain that. I think I went through a stage of disparaging it, maybe we all do. It was really a sense of where it wasn't. Then you discover the distinctions that are drawn by somebody like Schechner in terms of the constructed character performing in a theatrical mode, and the identity formation of that character to the task-orientated, performative rather than theatrical performance. It was navigating those elements, and this is post-rationalisation, to map out distinct different territories and I would perhaps put myself in that geography. In the late eighties and early nineties, I was doing my undergraduate and PhD at the University of Glasgow in the Theatre Studies department. I did literature eventually as an undergraduate and then went back to theatre studies and film and tv for the PhD with Claude Schumacher who had edited the Artaud text, which is why I was interested in working with Claude. I think I exasperated him more than anything else [laughs] because I didn't do any work. The principal problem was idleness. At that time, I also started to teach at Glasgow School of Art and that became a second education. That was moving a couple of miles along the road to the Mac, but it was a very different tradition of visual and conceptual performance. Just before we pressed record, we were talking about the history of site-specific live art in Scotland being eclipsed by the theatre history of Scotland or painting and then conceptual art, and the dominance of painting. So, you've got this theatre world and then the art school world, but visual and conceptual performance borrows from both traditions and hasn't had the same level of applause and scrutiny. In terms of introductions, because I was interested in performance, I started an elective short course on performance at the art school and there were early conversations about potential postgraduate courses between the University of Glasgow, the Art School, and the RSAMD which is now the Conservatoire, which I don't think amounted to anything. I think Donna Rutherford was an AHRB research fellow who was involved in those discussions, with Alistair Mackinnon. My interest was really in the site-specific nature of it because it was related to a sculptural tradition and political intervention. I was really interested in the notion of the active artist in intervention in a particular site and context which borrows from environmental art at Glasgow School of Art where one of the mandates is that the context is half the work. That sense of, if the street is your context, what aspect of the street?

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SG: I was going to ask you when you had started working at GSA if it had been in the context of environmental art with folk like David Harding. I don't know if Sam Ainsley was around at that point.

RB: I wasn't employed by Sculpture and Environmental Art although I did teach in the course on occasion as a visiting tutor. I was employed in the Historical and Critical Studies department but that was a combination of specialists from fine art, design history, and poetry, and I was more theatre. My approach and my interests were those which dovetailed with the environmental art approach and conceptual performance, but also some of the ludic nature of that conceptual performance that was coming out of environmental art. Peter McCaughey invited me to do some teaching in environmental art around the mapping project which was a site initiation project that had you work through and investigate the immediate milieu of the art school environment. Sam Ainsley was running the MFA at that point and David was still Head of Sculpture and Environmental Art. It wasn't until after David had retired that I started working with David and we've collaborated now for fifteen years. Sam was Head of the MFA and John Calcutt was teaching into it a couple of days a week before he became Head. Sam certainly was very generous with her time and her support. When curators were coming in, even though I wasn't on the MFA, Sam would always show my work and put it under their nose or invite me to come and do a presentation along with the students because she was interested in what I was up to. That's kind of institutional, but there were also friendships. For example, Roddy Hunter, I don't know if you've spoken to Roddy, but he would be an important person to speak to in this context. He was far more actively engaged in a consistent way than me. He left Scotland but he is back in Scotland now. Roddy was the year below me in Theatre Studies. We weren't friends at university. He was quite a tall, distinctive chap and quite self-regarding shall we say. He won't mind me saying that [laughs]. He was in a band and stuff like that. He was in the mould of Test Department and Laibach, where it was music and performance and video and that combination. It was something that I recognised but it wasn't my thing. Roddy and I and a couple of people from Sculpture and Environmental Art like Russell McEwan and [Louise Brown], and Roddy's partner at the time also, Julie Bacon, we all collaborated on a few things. In retrospect, it was Alastair MacLennan-meets-Joseph Beuys, and saturated symbolism, "po-faced performance art" as we called it. It was closer to what I was thinking

of, but it didn't contain enough detachment and humour, so I quickly broke out of that and did my own thing. It was an important creative conversation amongst practitioners who were involved in a growing circuit of live art and visual performance nationally and internationally. Its main home was the Third Eye Centre, which became the CCA, rather than the theatre studios. It was very much something that presented itself "at war with theatre" in a very aggressive way in that it wasn't "acting". I shared some of that for a while, but there were other friends down the line like Graham Eatough and David Greig [and Alan Wilkins], and I had reservations about some things but then you start working together and you're borrowing languages left, right, and centre. It's an impurity not a purity, "get over it", you know. I think when you're starting out, it's important to find out what you're against. The more I researched it, the more I found self-evident contradictions in positions that people were adopting, [for example, in the "purity" of a space]. It was one of the technicians at the CCA [the late Bob Pringle] when we were doing a studio piece and I was saying, "no, no we're not using any artificial lights and I switched on the lights and I think Bob Pringle said I can switch them on from up here or on the deck as well, so it's like where does the deck begin and end? So that notion of authenticity and stringency is gone. It was like okay, let's rethink this.

SG: It's interesting that context of the Third Eye and Bob Pringle who was there for many years and the National Review of Live Art coming to the Third Eye with Nikki Millican at that period in 1989 and Glasgow 1990. What's your recollection of Third Eye around that period? You said that the scene was sort of concentrated there, what do you remember of it? Do you remember it as a space or a community of folk?

RB: I wasn't so much a devotee of attending things. I think it was Tramway rather than CCA, attending things. Third Eye. I remember not so much I think there was Forced Entertainment, it was Alastair MacLennan, there are things I remember seeing, but I wasn't really following the programme in that dedicated fashion whereas I think somebody like Roddy was quite attuned to that. Scena Plastyczna from Poland. There were lots of things. From memory, maybe when it went to Tramway rather than CCA, some of the stuff at CCA pre-dated my engagement. The Arches was also an important venue in this conversation. I can't remember if it went to the Arches or Tramway. There were a few main venues. I think I saw a few exhibitions and I was really interested in the gallery spaces as well, not to the

same degree as the theatre spaces, but it was less to do with the programme and more to do with the community because the Third Eye and in the early days at the CCA before it was renovated, was really like a community space, because it was so close to the Art School. I would have to look out all of the old programmes to see what I attended. This is where I was a bit vague about my actual level of knowledge and participation because people like Roddy and Russell [and Louise] were really attuned and engaged as practitioners and attenders and I think they already knew that that was their milieu. I was still a bit detached and at the fringes of it. I didn't really have that performance confidence. I would be aware of the importance of Nikki Millican and David was on the board for many years. It was important moment in the calendar, but it was still an official festival and I thought 'I'll never have anything to do with this, why would I be on this?' It was like the Fringe festival in Edinburgh, I thought I'll never put anything on. I'll go and see a few things. That says more about me than it does about the quality of the festival. It says more about my qualities as a scholar and an engaged citizen of my craft. In other venues later I remember being a bit more engaged and going over to Ricky Demarco's programmes. Talking of the Edinburgh festival, when Ricky Demarco got people over, he would try and go as well. Trying to think, maybe Scena Plastyczna was actually at Demarco's rather than at National Review. Roddy would know [laughs]. Some of the things that I did see might have been through Roddy's recommendation. There was a sense of an aesthetic. I was predisposed to, or more interested in, a much more integrated environmental performance that became more like an installation. One of the things that I was interested in of course, was the sculptural dynamic of staging a space, so going back to theatre studies. One of the reasons I was interested, which was a kind of through-line, was in my first year of theatre studies I think Claude gave a lecture on Artaud and Grotowski and it was seeing Artaud in terms of the excessive demands of the Theatre of Cruelty. Looking at the slides of Grotowski and the main actor that he worked with Ryszard Cieslak, there were these images of a cavernous Polish cellar with metal hospital beds and the audience sitting on the beds. That was like a model, that's what I'm interested in. It was much more that kind of performative installation, but it was a black and white photograph projected on a lecture theatre wall. It's not the script in Polish, you don't understand what's happening, you're just attracted to the visual nature of the performance. That was a kind of through-line that drew the threads of the undergraduate theatre interest to performative installation and the integration of the

audience into the space and so on. There was a particular Polish element that travelled into the postgrad because I went to Grotowski's archive northwest of Kraków. Grotowski had already died. The notion of poor theatre and the stripping back to get to the voice and the body. I did workshops with Eugenio Barba who had worked with Grotowski. It's the one where they build the concentration camp, *Akropolis*. I was interested in following that tradition in relationship to what poor theatre might mean, not simply in terms of stripping down the theatrical apparatus and going back to the Bob Pringle question of authenticity, but also what that might mean in a political, economic sense in Scotland. The sense of deprivation and then a political agency of poor culture. I was trying to map that position and that's what overlaid the sense of the performing in the street with no apparatus.

SG: It's sort of unmediated.

RB: Yes, you've got no lights, you've got no recourse to a stage. I went from Grotowski to Eugenio Barba to Augusto Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed. I was trying to find a political perspective on theatre, and he did the invisible theatre, but he still had a Brechtian dynamic to it where there was a narrative with antagonisms. What I was interested in was much more opaque and oblique than that. There may be a solitary figure where it was indeterminate what their status or motivation or action was. It was more of a questioning. In that sense, it's a question mark, not that I want to invoke George Wyllie. I was interested in the notion of intervention and intervening where it's not specified what you're intervening within. That's how I came up with the figure of the envoy, but the envoy with an unspecified gesture, end, and meaning, so it couldn't be captured within any narrative arc. These were performative gestures which had some kind of utopianism performed at specific sites across the globe. They were photographed or videoed and the documentation became the work. All these stripping away, but with some sort of political agency remaining. The budget was always a fiver, borrowed cameras. One of the things about Grotowski is it's theatre as research, theatre as investigation, as an enquiry into the limits on what humans can experience and sustain. In Eugenio Barba, one of the most memorable things was looking at the vocal resonance which Grotowski outlines. I'd seen it in a book, but I'd never heard it, watching one of the performers go through the body as a vocal resonator. Just knowing what a body can do.

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SG: I know that some of your work is engaged with classical musical forms, has been underlying that practice?

RB: I was always in bands and never put the things together. I think where bands have been really successful, it's because they've blended their art and their music. I was trying to work out what I was interested in. The two things came back together through collaborating with David Harding because he was interested in singing and music. We made a couple of films together and it didn't happen immediately, and then we worked with a Polish curator called Adam Szymczyk. It made sense because I had a long-term interest in Poland. Incidentally, the house I live in now used to be lived in by my old tutor at university who taught me Polish culture for a year, Donald Pirie. I had two tutors who died of AIDS in the early nineties, Alasdair Cameron and Donald Pirie. An important part of the history of theatre and culture in Scotland was Alasdair Cameron for theatre, and also Donald Pirie because he was one of the advisors on the Polish Realities exhibition at Third Eye. He did the catalogue. Anyway, when I met Adam and he mentioned Poland we struck up a conversation and it's kept going now for almost fifteen years. He was doing an exhibition in Rome and he invited me to respond to [the context of the cemetery in Rome because we couldn't construct anything] and I thought maybe I can make a piece of music because they couldn't build anything. It had to be temporary and ephemeral, but not a construction, so that began a route back to music and it grew and grew. It was that sense of the move back towards something live rather than it simply being mediated in a photograph. Because it was musical you could capture it in film, but you can't feel it so much, so the live recital of music and still having some ability to score it, and that's how I got interested in developing and working with musicians. That's become a more important part. That and horses for some reason.

SG: [Laughs]

RB: That's learning a new language. It's about learning from the conceptual art side of things and then knowledge of practitioners within those folds and knowledge of practitioners within the folds of theatre, looking at the folds of contemporary classical music and trying to educate myself. It was a kind of class-based thing, because I was not supposed to know this stuff, I was excluded from this cultural history. One might not be able to afford to go to the theatre, but the Citizens Theatre had a policy of cheap seats so there was a sense that you didn't feel excluded from that, but definitely I would never have gone to a classical music

concert when I was growing up. Never. It was trying to educate myself in a language which I didn't know and wasn't supposed to know. Then by accident, more recently working with improvisors and starting to learn about the history of improvised music. It's very difficult to proclaim a political urgency here, you're looking at classical music and working with eighteenth-century instruments in an elitist art form but you're trying to fold some political urgency. With improvisational music there is an overlap between that and libertarian politics. Free improvisation and anarchism are a kind of easy mapping exercise to do of that tradition. So, I would organise concerts as artworks, but the audience couldn't know it was an artwork, it's a classical music concert but it's a composition by an artist to have these things in this place. It's a material like any other, it's a clay like anything else. I'm kind of still in awe of people who actually train for seventeen years on the cello and that's what they do and they're the person I can go to if I want to collaborate on a project that requires somebody to be an expert. That sense that you know what you're doing, but I never know what I'm doing. That kind of proceeding through ignorance and not knowing.

SG: What you're describing is also a particular kind of compositional strategy which is about trying to bring different registers of artistic practice, and maybe also the documentation, into conversation with each other in the context of different kinds of publicness. It's interesting the thread of documentation or photography that runs through a lot of this. One of the things that caught my eye was the *Streetworks* exhibition that you were involved in at Street Level Gallery. I'm interested in that particular exhibition, but also in the wider ecology and the spaces and places in Scotland which are supporting and programming and curating this kind of work. The independent gallery space is something that I'd be interested in touching on, but also things like Glasgow International. Maybe we just start with the specific example of *Streetworks* because that feels like another thread that's running through here.

RB: Yes, when I was talking about interventions that's what I was interested in. A lot of the work that I was looking at was documentation of site-specific performances and they were in New York, in Santa Fe, or Poland, they were in Vienna with the Actionists with someone like Günter Brus walking through the street painted in white paint. There are people in Scotland or the UK and internationally still working in this, is there merit in trying to bring this together and have a festival or an exhibition, but not just have an exhibition of documentation but use that as a kind of catalyst to have a festival and to bring together

practitioners from who might have a more art school practice and those who might have more of a theatre or dance background. I think it was Javier Flores Blanquet, a Brazilian artist, who was wrapped up in muslin and barbed wire at the threshold of the gallery. There's that sense of the tension between the street and the gallery space, to preserve that tension as an active tension. You know, entering a gallery is at your own risk, you can be scarred. There was that sense that the street had political agency. In terms of the events of the festival, practitioners like MacLennan and Andre Stitt, and Tara Babel, the viscerality of those was evident because the police stopped them. Julie Laffin's performance was stopped. Alastair MacLennan's was stopped but the other ones were interrupted. Maybe rightly so on grounds of health and safety, you could say that, but it's that sense of the activity which is not sanctioned, and which appears to disrupt. In terms of photographic documentation, it was partly because I had my own catalogue of stuff and quite honestly, I think a lot of it is lost, I have no idea where it is. I was trying to find stuff. I've got other people's work but not my own. One of the things that I do think contributes to the lack of history, is that we didn't have a budget to do justice to that history at the time. I think Malcolm and I talked about archiving and scanning everything, but we moved onto another project and it got shelved. After a while it's maybe too late and it's gone and you forget, and that's the problem. Part of it is either you remain true to the ephemerality of the event, and it doesn't matter that it's forgotten, its point is to be forgotten because it was only ephemeral. But then the other side of it is that's a disservice to the event and to history. Part of that sense of memorialising the event, the fleeting and the contingent, goes back to Douglas Gordon's *Proof*, which is the piece which says 'mute' and the dates of the civic uprisings. I think it's the station at Glasgow Green that was knocked down. They weren't involved in the exhibition, but there were other practitioners like Ross Sinclair and other artists of that generation that were involved in a more performative basis. In the early days of the CCA, Ross's installation *Real Life Rocky Mountain* brought performance and sculptural intervention, installation / performance and music, that was all wrapped up in that project. They were kind of mainstay in the gallery visual art circuit. He did a lot of site work, but not a lot of work in terms of live interventions in public place. We were doing a lot of that with students in the second year Environmental Art course. I made that title, *Streetworks*, not even realising that it was the title of a work by Vito Acconci, so the exhibition itself had a history that I wasn't aware of. I do think there is a bit of work to be done to contextualise it,

but in order to do that one needs to access the archive, and in order to access the archive, it needs to be found or retrieved. I think Malcolm did scan everything so it will exist somewhere. I'd have to go back and dig out the flyers to remember who was in it. We made a video documentation as well. Tom O'Sullivan and Joanne Tatham had a piece in it. It was quite modest. One of the things about Street Level is its next-door neighbour is Transmission and its upstairs neighbour is the print studio. It's that nexus of artist-led, it was before The Modern Institute, it was before the commercialisation of the Glasgow art scene. In terms of its positioning, it was positioning itself as a critical art practice. Even though it was documentation, it wasn't documentation because it had the visibility of the YBAs to be photographed. It wasn't about that sense of the photogenic, it was the photographic and the shittier the better [laughs]. It wasn't about the quality. That wasn't Malcolm's attraction to it either. I'm not a curator, it wasn't my profession, so I think I just moved onto the next thing. I think the budget only ran so far. There was lots of stuff of variable quality, but that was an important position for practice to have. I can't even remember when it was, '96 or '98, something like that. I was moving away from my own site-specific work in recognition that the gallery was also an important place where I wanted to work, both inside and outside. I wasn't taking a position of rejection, I was interested in the dialectic, not in the commercial sense as a gallery space. It wasn't the black box of the theatre studio I was interested in; it was the white cube of the gallery space and that sense of framing and enframing. You are framing that an event has occurred and it's the residue of the event. It was that kind of thing that I'm interested in. That dialogue with documentation, with the process, and with the residue of the process goes back to Arte Povera and its reincarnations in people like Simon Starling who was prevalent in terms of conceptualised performative engagement materials, and Douglas Gordon and Christine Borland.

SG: It feels like the artist-led environments in which that work is being made, the artist-led quality of those gallery spaces, is significant. There are traces of it in the conversations that I'm having. Maybe that's what set them aside from other art spaces whether they were white boxes or black boxes in the city, the fact that they were artist-led was what distinguished them.

RB: Absolutely, in terms of the history of those institutions because Third Eye/CCA were City Council venues led by curators / directors. Even National Review of Live Art, Nikki Millican

was the curator/director saying yea or nae to things. Malcolm is in artist, always was an artist, he was on the Transmission committee before going on to Street Level and had an engagement with Events Space before that. His ethos was similar to that, and Transmission was committee-led. I was never in Transmission committee. There was a moment where I became very close to the committee in terms of friendships, but I didn't really show at Transmission. I wasn't part of the 'clique'. Cliques exist of course. That ethos was democratic and political. Even though the work maybe didn't look the same, there were certain elements. You could argue there are certain structural alignments between someone like Ross Sinclair, who is a friend of mine, who is not much older than myself, but in whose *20 Years of Real Life* project there is a constant and a variable which is the environment in which it is found. The envoy project that I was doing was similarly durational and site-specific. The envoy is always the same, it's just different contexts. There are elements of that but it doesn't look the same, but maybe there are photographic documents and the 'event-and-document' as a process, a strategy or a tactic, but with very different tonalities to the works. When we talk, there is a shared political imperative or ethos about the rationale or the urgency and why you would make that work. Somebody like Ross has a much closer engagement with Transmission and that generation of Glasgow and YBA generation, he's much more engaged and involved in it than I ever was. There were still differences and divergences and clusters of oppositions within that and rightly so. One of the things I did find kind of odd, there were these moments where artists who came from the art school tradition, when they started to engage with performance, what they were really interested in was theatre. They were really interested in the inauthentic, the fabricated, the constructed, the acting, and the script. I thought that was interesting, the way that people's trajectories went in these directions because you go to what you don't know in a way. It's much more interesting to do what you're not taught and what you don't know. You would recognise that in a younger generation of people five or six years younger coming through and trying to tell you about Artaud and you going, 'I did that twenty years ago, fuck off'.

SG: [Laughs].

RB: Those are interesting trajectories. With individual trajectories it's very difficult to generalise and call them tendencies. But maybe there was a cluster of people, I'm not going

to remember names unfortunately. I can visualise them, like Rose Thomas, she did a collaboration with Steve Bottoms, who used to teach in the theatre department of Glasgow University, and Sophie McPherson, I can't remember her name. They were all interested in theatre, and I was like that's the very thing that I hated and wanted to get away from [laughs]. We haven't talked about the Modernist debate about Fried and art being at war with theatre and the distinctions of the disciplines, the patrolling of the boundaries of disciplines. The rejection of theatre because it introduces an audience, but minimalist sculpture activates the audience because it doesn't do anything and it needs the audience to walk around it to give it an active agency. It was that element of sculptural form that I was interested in, which I thought was an escape from theatre was the very thing Fried criticised as being theatrical. I think these attempts at distinctions do tend to run into the sand after a while. That's not to say there aren't qualitative differences.

SG: It feels more like directions of travel, or attractions, or resonances. I find some of the narrative histories of the development of both performance and visual art in Scotland frustrating because it feels like there is this opposition which is set up between figurative and conceptual, or representational versus abstract.

RB: Yes, it's in fine art as well.

SG: Those terms might accurately describe different traditions, but in terms of how those traditions intersected or the dynamics in which they might relate, opposition doesn't seem to give an interesting or an accurate account.

RB: Yes, absolutely. I think one of the areas where that has been most fruitfully mined is between Graham Fagen and Graham Eatough. You can see what they're doing differently, where their contributions are being made, but initially and after a while you can't tell the difference. Graham Eatough has continued to collaborate with artists, he's worked with Stephen Sutcliffe on films and scripts. I like to say that I was a pioneer because we did do a collaborate performance back in '96, as Group 3. I was never the hugest fan of Suspect Culture because it was 'theatre'. You get over the prejudice because, actually, it's extremely well crafted and well written and I was much more interested in those collaborations that David Greig did with Graham than his own standalone plays. I thought they were better in collaboration with Suspect Culture and the ensemble of actors that were involved there. He's probably a better director now because of it. I think it is that sense that you can take

from everywhere, take what you need, that's important. And not to construct artificial walls. I think that did reflect back on the educational establishments where they're divided because the Conservatoire and the University and the art school are less than three miles away, but the students don't know each other. They find each other when they need to, less so now in Covid times of course. When I delivered lectures at the University when I was doing a PhD, I would show slides of Chris Burden and I'd say he's not *acting* nails going into his hand, they *are* in his hand. He's not *pretending* that he could get electrocuted or acting that he could get shot. That visceral distinction, that's where there is a very different distinction. It's not to say that there are no differences and distinctions between theatre, sculpture, and installation, these are very different. When I went to the art school, I would take slides of Grotowski. You're trying to show the different traditions to the different students and, in the process, you're trying to educate yourself. When I ran the first course in performance at the art school - not a practical course but a theoretical, historical course - you could tell the students to go to events such as the National Review of Live Art, when Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez Pena were performing, William Pope L was also involved that year and the Black Radical Performance book had come out as well. You could start to say well there's not just Glasgow, there's London, there's New York, there is a whole circuit growing. Live Art Magazine was coming out. There was a vitality to it. Again, I was not really in 'the circuit'. My engagement with it wasn't sustained over time. I became much more distanced from it. If you have a conversation with Roddy, he's much more networked into that. He does international festivals, engage with the characters, the figures, whereas I was always a little bit more distant from it. But yeah, I don't know if any of that helps [laughs].

SG: That's all perfect. It very much helps.