

What we have done

1 The Archive

In July 2012, the BBC *Imagine* series screened *The Grit and The Glamour*, in which Alan Yentob traced the evolution of the city's art scene in the 1990s and its continued success - the 'Glasgow Miracle' described by Hans Ulrich Obrist after a visit to the city in the mid-1990s.

The film attempted to cover a broad swathe of activity from 1990 to the present and predictably was forced to simplify its story. Following well-trodden paths *Imagine* outlined the formation of the department of Environmental Art within the wider Glasgow School of Art and traced the rise of a generation which included Douglas Gordon, David Shrigley, Martin Boyce, Simon Starling and Christine Borland. The implication of the programme's structure was that the previous decades were not deemed as worthy of scrutiny. They were not 'miraculous'.

It's unfair to put too much weight of expectation on one documentary. The makers faced an impossible task within the confines of 80 minutes and Alan Yentob clearly connected with his subject enthusiastically and conveyed a sense of the early 1990s to an audience beyond Scotland. Within Glasgow, however, it reinforced the myth-making that was already obscuring the work of previous decades and even the variety of work that took place during and since the rise of that generation in the 90s.

One reason why the impulse to generate these myths is so strong may lie in the relative lack of historical awareness around Scottish contemporary art activity since 1945. Unlike large cities such as London, Paris, Berlin

or New York, who can all look back on a continuous engagement with avant-garde art from the beginning of the 20th century, Glasgow's emergence as a viable generator of contemporary is very recent. Similarly across Scotland, the consensus was that to be successful in the 1950s and 1960s it was necessary to move to a recognised centre, mainly London. If an artist chose to remain in Scotland then that choice came with an acknowledgement that it would be much more difficult to capture the world's attention.

That situation only began to change in the 1970s and it was in the 1990s that internet, cheaper air travel and global communication established a series of previously 'marginal' cities in Europe and America as sustainable hubs for arts communities. Today, maybe for the first time, there are several generations of internationally successful artists living in Glasgow from example. To have artists in their 20s through to artists in their 50s working in the same community establishes a fragile continuity that is still a novelty.

The drive to create that community has meant always looking forward, making the next event or exhibition happen, constantly building an infrastructure. Until recently, the history of this activity was not a priority. Key events and landmark moments were held in communal memory, an oral history that lends itself to mythmaking and narrative distortion. The various participants were preserving their shared experience and memories but they had little access to the history of any events they hadn't experienced directly. The art world is always fond of mythmaking but in a community where there is no clear sense of the past it becomes a vital process.

This issue is equally acute within the institutions in Glasgow. Working within the limits of scarce resources, each organisation tends to complete a particular project and quickly move on to the next one. Many of the key sites in the city's contemporary art infrastructure are also relatively recent: Third Eye Centre, Wasps and The Print Studio in the 1970s; Transmission Gallery in the 1980s; Tramway and CCA in the 1990s (and the commercial galleries are later again..). Given the scarcity of resources, staff in such organisations tend to be young and to move on to other posts quite quickly. This also means that the history of an organisation is difficult to establish and it essentially lacks a core sense of identity.

For CCA, this question was particularly vexed. The materials that might constitute an archive for the organisation were scattered across the city, several caches being kept, unsorted, in the Mitchell Library and others in rented storage space. Also in the Mitchell Library there was an enigmatic series of boxes from the Third Eye Centre, an organisation that had first created an arts centre on the premises now occupied by CCA and which had run from 1975 to 1991. The Third Eye Centre had generated many legends as an early platform for the comedian Billy Connolly and the haunt of writers and artists such as Alasdair Gray, John Byrne and Liz Lohead. It was much loved in the city and, by default, there was always a lingering resentment of the CCA as the organisation that replaced it after its' hasty demise.

In reality, there was no clear history of the basics of either organisation. It was impossible to list the exhibitions or events that had taken place from 1975 to the present. It wasn't just a question of chronology, it was also difficult to state who had worked in either organisation and what thinking

had led to the foundation of the Third Eye Centre and subsequently to the CCA.

In 2012 an AHRC grant was awarded to Glasgow School of Art to work collaboratively with CCA on the archives of both art centres and it was possible to assemble the various caches of material and begin to index them. It quickly became apparent that the two organisations had been formed with very different aims and objectives. CCA, founded in the wake of Glasgow's year as City of Culture in 1990, appeared designed to focus primarily on visual arts and to provide a platform for artists within the international art world. The Third Eye Centre, in contrast, grew out of a heady brew of '60s Arts Lab thinking, the spiritual teachings of Indian guru, Sri Chinmoy, the therapeutic communities of Maxwell Jones and a 1970s commitment to community and public art.

One of the most remarkable impacts of the AHRC funding was to enable the digitisation of nearly 150 video reels that had remained unseen since the 1970s. Within the space of a few months, the work was completed and a unique record of the arts centre's activities in the 1970s unfolded with startling immediacy. The tapes covered a wide spectrum of events – musical performances, poetry readings, live art, dance, and exhibition installations. Just as valuable, however, were the tapes inspired by a community art ethos which documented the radically changing landscape of 1970s Glasgow; the centre's early involvement with prison reform in Barlinnie Special Unit; and records of social events as diverse as a typical wedding or a gospel meeting in a marquee.

The breadth of this material was undoubtedly due to the interests of the founder of the Third Eye Centre, Tom McGrath. He was a Scot who previously taken that inevitable journey to London in the 1960s where he

encountered the end of the beat scene and became, as editor of *International Times*, an important force in the psychedelic revolution. Returning to Glasgow at the end of the 1960s, he brought with him a network of countercultural links and a new informal approach to the arts.

He soon became linked to the Scottish Arts Council and was invited to run a makeshift arts space in a Macintosh-designed house in Blythswood Square. The activities of this early space had always been obscure and relegated to the margins of the city's art history until the archive began to reveal the extent of the work McGrath carried out there from 1973 to 1975 when he opened the Third Eye Centre nearby.

In a statement entitled 'What we have done, what we are going to do' published as part of a broadsheet announcing the opening of the centre in May 1975 he summarises the work achieved while in Blythswood Square as follows:

Over the past two years we have run a series of events in different venues in Glasgow ranging from the big concerts – Mahavishnu, Miles Davis, Duke Ellington – to the series of international Poetry Readings (Allan Ginsburg, Adrian Mitchell, Earl Birnie, Mike Horowitz) and the Cantilena Baroque music recitals at Blythswood Square. We have run theatre (The Cage, The People Show, Cricot theatre group from Poland) and films (Art in Revolution, Odile Redon) and our Blythswood premises had a series of folk nights, organised by the Tradition Folk Club, featuring major artists in that field (Boys of the Lough, Martin Carthy, Ewan McColl, Peggy Seeger). At the other musical extreme, we presented programmes by Morton Feldman, Steve Lacey, Derek Bailey, Ray Russell and the Sonic Arts Union. The performance artists Roland Miller and Shirley Cameron also visited Blythswood Square and artist Mark Boyle was resident there while his exhibition was showing at the Kelvin Hall. The Blythswood Square premises also provided rehearsal space and a meeting room and photo-copying facilities for many different groups in the city. And the place and its staff acted as an information centre on the arts. Video and

sound-recording equipment was made available to artists and community groups working in the Glasgow area.

McGrath's final comment in that account mentions video and sound-recording equipment and this was to be of vital importance. He had bought a video camera in March 1973 after a visit to the Rotterdam Arts Foundation. There he saw a community-oriented video centre called Lijnbaancentrum, in which the public were encouraged to use their video equipment and facilities. After his return to Scotland he wrote to the Foundation's director, Felix Valk, saying of his visit 'I learned a tremendous amount from it all, and will probably be taking over some of your ideas in total...I am getting a basic video unit within the next two weeks and will be able to make and play back ½" black and white material.'

He acknowledges the novelty of the medium in Scotland while foreseeing the likely developments the camera will bring, 'Will you be interested in tapes in exchange once we get things going here? It really is a completely new field here, and none of the artists have used video before, so it will probably take some time before we start producing our own art video, but we should soon be able to produce video records of poetry readings, art events and the like...'

That documentation began almost immediately. Some of the earliest tapes show McGrath filming his family who at this time were still living in Inverallochy and there are many fragmentary, and historically valuable, glimpses of life in the Blythswood Square offices as everyone tries to get to grips with the new camera. There quickly follows a torrent of recordings documenting the programme outlined above in the broadsheet. Poets and musicians such as Allen Ginsberg, Adrian Mitchell, Mike Horovitz, Ted Berrigan, Julius Eastman and the Brotherhood of Breath

have all survived on tape, as well as a tantalizing twenty minutes of Tadeusz Kantor's Cricot 2 Theatre Group in what must have been one of the earliest performances in the Old Fruitmarket.

As McGrath predicted, these tapes were primarily documentation of performances but they gave him currency with which to swap and deal in the emerging world of video art. In exchange for copies of these performances, he was able to access tapes from the Netherlands, Germany, and the USA. His contacts in London, of course, also played a vital role. John 'Hoppy' Hopkins, a photographer who had become heavily involved in video with Sue Hall suggested a consultancy on video and its distribution:

Yeah we got some information and wd be pleased to lay it on you. Best face to face armed with info rather than by letter or phone. If you got bread we cd use it what about a return trip to nether Scotland and 1 days pay for yrs truly maybe incl overnite accom and everythingsd be lovely.

As Third Eye became increasingly involved in the medium, McGrath became more knowledgeable and at ease with the networks and structures it was engendering. The Centre also became known as an important platform for video art, so much so that by 1976 it was hosting an important exhibition entitled *Video (Towards Defining an aesthetic)*.

McGrath though maintained a focus on the documentary aspects of video. By 1975 he was joined by Jak Milroy and Tom Busby, who also worked as technicians in the centre. Milroy took the camera further afield and filmed a series of interviews across the still near-feudal Isle of Arran. Busby concentrated on Garnethill, the multi-racial area surrounding the arts centre, interviewing residents and setting up a vox-pop booth in the

gallery where visitors could use the camera to tape their own statements (perhaps echoing the Lijnbaancentrum's ethos).

These tapes are particularly important in how they manifest the various strands of thought that were woven together in the conception of a new 'centre' in the city. Third Eye Centre was given its name in tribute to the spiritual leader, Sri Chinmoy, whose followers at that time included Tom McGrath and his wife. From the perspective of the guru, the centre was a 'divine enterprise' and the vegetarian café, run by Maureen McGrath, was a means to provide clear practical goals for the centre's team, bonding them through shared labour.

Equally, Tom McGrath was building on his experiences in London where he would have seen both Jim Hayne's Covent Garden Arts Lab and the expanded programme of Better Books. His own editorship of *International Times* had demonstrated how a lively scene could quickly develop around an activated hub and his visit to Rotterdam Arts Foundation had confirmed that perception. Third Eye was a gathering point and focus, then, for an emerging counterculture in Glasgow. As an 'arts centre' it was also exploring the possibilities of mixed media and the increasing overlap of art forms that had surfaced in the sixties.

A third important strand of thought that contributed to McGrath's conception of a 'centre' lies in the activities around Barlinnie Special Unit and the pioneering psychiatrist Maxwell Jones' ideas on therapeutic communities. Within this context, McGrath and others were challenging the confines of art within the gallery and within a limited community of thought. This approach also acknowledged the rise of 'community art' in Britain and this is reflected in the documents that were created or collected as the formation of Third Eye was being c

onsidered.

2 The exhibition

Assessing the video material it was clear that it immediately brought to life the early days of the arts centre and the energy that generated all of the work over the following decades. As moving image and documentation it was easily accessible to a wide audience and visually demonstrated the aims and objectives of the Third Eye Centre. It seemed clear that it should be the basis for an exhibition around the archive project.

Importantly, the nature of early video meant that the shots were rough and only on rare occasions were edited live at the time of shooting. Most of the footage we had simply erupted into life, moved in and out of focus, stopped abruptly or was cut short. Some of the earliest material where Tom McGrath and others were learning to use the camera was comprised of a series of brief snippets filmed in the street or the offices in Blythswood Square.

Besides the contingent nature of the footage, it was clear that many tapes were mislabelled or unidentified. This was ideal in terms of the exhibition. Rather than presenting a polished and closed history of the foundation of the Third Eye Centre, we could present a raw, unfinished snapshot of the archival process. In doing so, we were able to ask the public for their help in identifying the various events and the participants recorded on the tapes. We hoped this would lessen our institutional authority and open the material to the audience, enabling them to contribute to the process.

The tapes were show in their original raw state on eight cube monitors placed on our industrial-style staging units that acted as makeshift tables

rather than plinths. Entitled *What we have done, what we are about to do* the exhibition opened at CCA in Glasgow on 18th August and ran until 15 September. It was divided into three parts. The first was a room presenting two vitrines, both filled with ephemera and archival documentation of Third Eye Centre in Glasgow roughly spanning its early days from c1973 - 1980. The second room, the main gallery, was filled with the monitors and one large wall projection, displaying 125 videos of performances and documentary material from the Centre over the same historical period.

In the final gallery we asked two Glasgow based artists, Rebecca Wilcox and Oliver Pitt, to construct a loose project around the responses of contemporary artists to the idea of the archive. With the artist Rob Churm, Wilcox and Pitt had created a project during the Glasgow International Festival in April called *Prawn's Pee*. Located in the old Daily Record building in the city centre, they had used the idea of a newspaper to invite a variety of artists to submit work which formed the basis of daily limited editions of hand printed paper works or other formats such as flexidisks.

The openness of that structure and its emphasis on contemporary production was attractive within the context of an archival exhibition where there was always a danger of nostalgia or of the past seeming irrelevant to contemporary practice. Although the lead-in time was far shorter than that for the Glasgow International exhibition, Wilcox and Pitt quickly established a set of contributors who variously either produced work for the gallery setting at its opening or added works to the exhibition throughout its run. With up to 15 artists, including at least two collective groups, this was a real achievement in itself but the two organisers also worked with the project research assistant Carrie Skinner

to introduce many of the artists to the Third Eye and CCA archives. As a result, many of the artists engaged actively with specific elements of the archive. Mother Tongue, a curatorial project initiated by Tiffany Boyle & Jessica Carden, researched and redisplayed several works that remained in the archive by Maud Sulter and Oladélé Ajiboyé Bamgboyé, stating that

The selection of their work from the archive is intended to highlight not only that their contribution has been omitted from the grand 'Glasgow Miracle' narrative, but most importantly, the whiteness of the 'miracle'. An essay will be released mid-show investigating the socio-political conditions under which the 'miracle' formed, and the selected artists' positions as a result.

In a similar spirit, the artist Sam Bellacosa explored the lacunae and discontinuities of the archive, searching for information that would help clarify the hazy period of activity between the demise of the Third Eye Centre and the opening of CCA.

Others such as the singer and artist, Momus, reappropriated an Ivor Cutler album recorded live at the Third Eye in 1977 (*Life in a Scotch Sitting Room, Vol. 2*). Reworking digitally re-assembled tracks and adding his own impersonations of Cutler, Momus created what he describes as 'factitious versions of Cutler's tales: false memories of false memories, as it were'.

In several instances, the artistic engagement with the archive led to live events such as a reading by the poet Tom Leonard who is documented twice in the archive video material. Dominic Paterson's research on a late 80s installation by Derek Jarman also led to a screening of some of Jarman's early 1970s super-8 footage, newly digitized by James Mackay and the Luma Foundation.

Overall, the project room complemented the archive galleries, bringing a new energy to the exhibition, involving the present artistic community and creating a series of new art works. In terms of audience engagement it drew in the artists peers who may not have been initially as attracted to the historical aspects of the exhibition. Conversely, the older audience who came to see the 1970s footage found it easy to transition into the contemporary presentations.

There was a marked increase in older audiences for *What we have done* and talking directly to the visitors it was clear that for many it was a return to the CCA/Third Eye space after a long gap. The CCA's rejection of the earlier organisation's community values had alienated them in the 1990s. What this underlined was the importance of the original venue as a meeting place as much as an exhibition space. Unexpectedly, there was a palpable sense of goodwill towards the CCA today for having organized a show that recognized the contribution of the Third Eye Centre.

Beyond this anecdotal engagement there was also a much more intense dialogue initiated by audience members and participants in the original 1970s videos who came forward to identify themselves. The 1970s footage had been the focus of a short television news piece which selected clips that highlighted the Third Eye audiences and asked people to come forward if they recognized anyone. The piece and its continued presence on BBC iplayer had a sustained impact throughout the exhibition. Each day there was a regular spate of enquiries or comments from visitors and new contributions to the archive also were donated. I met all of the visitors who wanted to discuss the exhibition in detail and frequently this resulted in interviews ranging from one to two hours. One audience member from the 1970s not only recognized her schoolgirl

friends in the vox pop videos but identified her grandmother, mother and father in one of Tom Busby's interviews.

Many of the original staff from the Third Eye Centre also came forward, prompted first by the news piece and later by word of mouth among that particular generation. Interviewing each of them as they watched the footage unlocked sometimes very detailed memories of the organization and helped us identify events, people and situations while initiating a new oral history dimension to the older material.

This process was very positive not only for the participants who came forward but also for the CCA staff who became more aware of that exhibition audience as part of the work. Visitors could often point to themselves in the videos or explain that they were present at the event documented in the films. The visitors ownership of the material was evident in a way that was unique to this exhibition.

Stepping back from the audience involvement, it also is becoming clear that the exhibition has made a generation visible again within the history of artistic activity in Glasgow and across Scotland. The immediacy of video plays a large role in this but equally the medium reveals a different kind of history. The still photographs that have defined the 1970s in Glasgow previously had the effect of freezing a certain history in place. Video, with all its' imperfections and loose boundaries defrosts the past and suggests other things were happening that also need to be recognized.

The exhibition was simply a raw starting point for the archival process. It has demonstrated, though, that the real value of the material lies in the activity generated around it. Audience dialogue and participation, new understandings of the the city's history and the creation of new art works

are all tangible benefits. The longer term challenge lies in finding a means to make the archive accessible and active over time.

Coda

The project room included works by Sam Bellacosa, Amelia Bywater, Romany Dear, Dexter Sinister, Robert Hetherington, MOMU, Mother Tongue, David Osbaldeston, Dominic Paterson, Oliver Pitt, Julia Scott, Laura Smith, Sarah Tripp, Radio Tuesday (with Marc Baines), and Rebecca Wilcox.

The exhibition was followed by a series of presentations on the wider subjects of archives and contemporary art including talks by Marysia Lewandowska (artist), Adam Lockhart (archivist, Rewind), Claire Staunton (director, Flat Time House), and David Toop (writer and musician).