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Alexandra-Maria Colta; María Vélez-Serna

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## Between scenes: Glasgow's alternative film spaces in the 1990s

Alexandra-Maria Colta & María A. Vélez-Serna

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**Keywords:** alternative film cultures, cultural scenes, culture-led urban regeneration, festivalisation, grassroots creativity

### Introduction<sup>[1]</sup>

In the final decades of the twentieth century, the 'creative city' dominated cultural policy in Western Europe and provided a blueprint for the assimilation of grassroots and independent artistic practices.[2] In the United Kingdom, the emergence of Glasgow as a hub for visual arts and music in the 1990s became a widely studied model of culture-led regeneration. The so-called 'Glasgow miracle' has been typified by an array of Turner Prize nominations and victories for locally-based artists such as Douglas Gordon, Christine Borland, Martin Creed, Duncan Campbell, and most recently, Charlotte Prodger. Many of these artists referenced cinematic tropes and experimented with video installation and projection. However, comparatively little attention has been paid to film culture in Glasgow during this period. Alternative practices of film exhibition shared spaces and participants with the arts and music scenes, and were part of a network infrastructure. DIY traditions thrived in the interstices of a cultural funding landscape that was moving towards festivalisation on the back of the success of Glasgow's year as European City of Culture in 1990.

Art, music, performance, and film festivals became spaces where urban culture was produced and contested. We use a case study of New Visions Experimental Film and Video Festival, running biennially in Glasgow in 1992, 1994 and 1996, to explore the sites, practices, and framings of alternative film

exhibition, artists' moving image and new media, in relation to this process of 'festivalisation'.<sup>[3]</sup> Unravelling a fragment of history that is mostly absent from official archives and mainstream narratives, this article presents grassroots film and video festivals as spaces of dissent that gradually became assimilated into the festival boom that continued beyond the 1990s. This history is reconstructed through archival research and the analysis of internal documents, festival ephemera (promotional materials, interviews, reviews), interviews, and conversations with key people of the scene at the time, such as: John Williamson, who was a music promoter and venue manager; Marlies Pfeifer, former programme coordinator of Goethe Institut in Glasgow; and Paula Larkin, former co-ordinator of New Visions.

## **Grassroots creativity in the European City of Culture**

Glasgow is fertile ground for the study of urban history and cultural policy. Over the space of a hundred years it went from a world-leading centre of heavy industry with a population of over a million to a decaying patchwork of tenements and warehouses with half the population, and over a quarter of them unemployed by 1988.<sup>[4]</sup> And then, or so the story goes, Glasgow's fortunes changed: the tenements were scrubbed clean for the Garden Festival in 1988, the central shopping precinct was cleared of cars and of non-shopping folk, and service sector jobs replaced those lost in heavy industry. It became possible to be a successful and well-connected artist or cultural entrepreneur in a city with lower rents than London, and Glasgow became a hub of the art world. By the mid-1990s, London curators had started to pay attention to the work of some Glasgow-based artists. After Douglas Gordon's Turner prize in 1996, Tate curator Hans Ulrich Obrist described the local blooming of contemporary art as 'the Glasgow miracle'.<sup>[5]</sup> This mythologisation was always contentious, and has been challenged by new archival projects.<sup>[6]</sup> These 'materials for alternative histories' have helped make visible the 'mixture of timing, chance and group dynamic' that powered the miracle narrative, but they also reveal the exclusions and distortions of its legacy.<sup>[7]</sup>

Imbricated with a story of urban transformation, the 'miracle' narrative risks ignoring the deep inequality that marks the city.<sup>[8]</sup> Indeed, the other phrase associated with the city's name is the 'Glasgow effect', a term coined by public health scholars exploring the causes of low life expectancy in parts

of the city and pointing at social deprivation and relative poverty as contributing factors.[9] Glasgow's post-industrial history has been studied and theorised extensively, as an early test case for Thatcherite approaches to urban regeneration. The city had entered the 1980s with a Labour-controlled council expected to address the causes of widespread deprivation, voter apathy, and a poor external image, while facing a sharp decline in tax revenue due to the engineered depopulation of the city in the preceding decades.[10] The ideology of urban regeneration fuelled by capital investment (in the form of privatisation) offered in the 'creative economy' a second chance for deindustrialised cities. The emblematic moment in Glasgow's transformation was its nomination as European City of Culture (ECoC) for the year 1990.

ECoC was a big deal in Glasgow. The previous cities to hold the title, created in 1985, had been Athens, Florence, Amsterdam, Berlin, and Paris; Glasgow was the first 'post-industrial' city to be named, and its tenure has since become a template for others, such as Liverpool, which held the title in 2008 and which also used culture-led regeneration strategies.[11] The scale of the project was often expressed in numbers: '3,649 events involving 1,066 organisations, costing over £50 million, 40% coming from public funds', according to Tessa Jackson, Head of Visual Arts.[12] The objectives of Glasgow's year as ECoC were to improve the city's image in order to attract inward investment and tourism, and even critics acknowledge that this was achieved.[13] But, as the militant writers' group Workers' City argued in the lead-up to 1990, the benefits failed to 'trickle down', instead exacerbating social injustice.[14] At the same time, however, many artists and cultural workers who were critical of ECoC's spectacle and bureaucracy also seized the funding opportunities it did afford.[15] This created paradoxes like Women in Profile, an organisation set up 'in anticipation of their exclusion from the "official" celebrations', obtaining funding from Glasgow District Council to open and run Womanhouse, a community centre in a disused tenement.[16] Taking projects outside institutional spaces was one way to mediate such contradictions.

## Site-specificity

The political edge of art practices at the time was connected to site-specificity, an approach that had a stronghold in Glasgow School of Art's flourishing Environmental Art Department. Founded by Sam Ainsley and David Harding in 1985, the Department's influence had persuaded many contemporary

artists of the premise that ‘context is half the work’.[17] By 1991, some artists were declaring that site-specificity had become an empty formula rather than a resistance to the art market. This was particularly worrying due to the neoliberal enthusiasm for strategies of ‘place-making’, which directed funds to site-specific work and rewarded its more instrumental forms. The late 1980s and 1990s were pivotal years for the reinvention of Glasgow in alignment with neoliberal cultural policy. However, as Boyle et al argue, ‘actually existing’ deployments of neoliberal doctrine are more complex and hybrid, ‘with local path dependencies and entangled with local agendas’.[18] On the ground, Glasgow’s cultural landscape was made up of disparate tangles of DIY and institutional, autonomous and top-down activity. Its characteristic formation was the Artist-Run Initiative (ARI), ‘inclusive associations, founded by early-career artists who had no capital and no wealthy patrons’.[19] This situation both required and permitted distinctive uses of space, venturing beyond established, institutional venues.

Glasgow’s DIY approach to place was not confined to the visual arts. Music and theatre promoters also roamed the city, with initiatives such as Mayfest which took events out into residential neighbourhoods. As organiser John Williamson recalls, this example proved to music promoters ‘that you could do things that weren’t in a student union, weren’t in a tacky nightclub, and weren’t in a pub somewhere’.[20] Williamson had started programming films alongside music events for the New Music World conference in 1994. The following year he organised Ten Day Weekend, a festival during which music-related features were screened in pubs, gig venues, and other spaces that had ‘a clear identity and a community based around them’.[21] The choice of non-theatrical venues was justified by the intention to reach sub-cultural audiences, so the attraction of these one-off events must be understood in relation to the more permanent uses of those spaces that sustained communities.

One of these key sites was Transmission gallery, which had been established in 1983 ‘by art school graduates who were dissatisfied with the lack of exhibition spaces’.[22] and was (still is) run by an unpaid committee of artists. Transmission was one of the nodes in a network of places for informal socialisation, which also included bars, clubs, and gig venues. These were the same spaces that nurtured the emergence of an internationally recognised music scene in Glasgow from the 1970s onwards, with its own network of musician-run studios and live venues.[23] The small size of the city and the

relative lack of resources threw together different communities. In her detailed, comprehensive account of the Glasgow art scene, *Social Sculpture*, Sarah Lowndes explains how musicians, artists, writers, DJs, and activists shared the same spaces, went to each other's gigs, and maintained a vibrant subcultural scene with little or no external funding or commercial interest. As John Williamson remembers it, 'all the people merged into one another, you'd know people from gigs who were artists [...] there were all these intersecting and overlapping scenes'.[24] Artists like Ross Sinclair, who played drums in the indie band the Soup Dragons, showed that the skills and networks of DIY music making were also productive in the art world.[25] To the extent that we can talk about a distinctive moment of significance for Glasgow-based artists, this is then inseparable from what was going on in music and theatre.

Across these scenes, artists and independent promoters had been creating autonomous responses to the lack of infrastructure. Located within a few blocks in the city centre, Transmission gallery, the Tron theatre, and the 13<sup>th</sup> Note bar and music venue allowed participants and audiences to circulate and to amplify their activities. Galleries hosted gigs, bars exhibited visual arts, and fundraisers were organised jointly in these socially contiguous and spatially adjacent venues. These 'spaces of assembly' pulled together the cultural phenomena that constitute scenes.[26] Together with 'the casual meeting in the local supermarket or laundrette'[27] that could take place in Glasgow's dense city centre, these encounters and infrastructures produced a unique junction. Glasgow's art scene has been represented as 'the ideal image of a friendly and socially connected artistic community rooted in collective, collaborative work'.[28] While this picture no doubt flattens out nuance and conflict, it highlights the role of informal networks and shared spaces in nurturing cultural production. Crossing boundaries between scenes was a matter of habit and necessity, as much as a creative choice.

## **Festivalisation and project-based funding**

As Ana Moraes argues, 'public funding for exhibition in Britain, particularly Scotland, is under-researched'.[29] This omission is part of a broader issue, that of film exhibition falling between the cracks in discussions of cultural policy, and artists' moving image claiming a space between practices. In Scotland around 1990, artists working with moving images could be supported

by arts funders or by film funders, which proved crucial at a time of instability. As Erika Balsom has argued, 1990 marked a watershed moment for the 'institutional endorsement of the moving image' as a gallery exhibit, marked by the *Passages de l'image* exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. This signalled a move from monitor-based video art to large-scale projection, which engaged with cinematic forms of exhibition and reception.[30] In Glasgow, that moment was also marked by the opening of Tramway as an exhibition and performance space, and the transformation of the city's main experimental venue, the Third Eye Centre, into the Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA) in 1992. Artists' moving image was often exhibited in these spaces. Other forms of film exhibition, outside the framework of contemporary arts, faced different challenges to access support.

For people interested in screening films or promoting public film culture, the first port of call was the Scottish Film Council. As it existed at the end of the 1980s, the SFC supported film exhibition mainly through long-term commitments to regional specialised (arthouse) venues. By 1993, however, the SFC's aims had shifted from enhancing 'knowledge and appreciation' to promoting 'the culture and industry of the moving image'.[31] This was linked with less long-term funding and more project-based initiatives seen as 'research and development'. Festivals were a key aspect of this new strategy, as they could maximise the impact of very modest sums of money. As the 1994 SFC report claimed, festivals 'achieve a high profile for aspects of film that might otherwise be neglected [and] stimulate activities in areas where regular screenings are absent'.[32] Festivals were thus seen as addressing a lack in regular provision.

This focus on events was compounded by changes in the Scottish Arts Council, the more significant source of support for experimental events. From 1994, SAC was responsible for allocating Lottery funding, a revenue stream that came 'with UK government strings attached' and which 'intensified the pressure on the SAC to hold its client organizations accountable'.[33] According to Neil Mulholland, the SAC 'sought to centralize the arts in Scotland through creeping, predatory corporate strategies: acquisition, merger, amalgamation'.[34] This forced some smaller artists' organisations to accept takeovers or restructuring.

Professionalisation and managerialism threatened the practices of mutual aid and informal, unpaid labour that had sustained the autonomy of Scottish creative sectors. Rewards were allocated unevenly, following what Gregory

Sholette has called an ‘upwardly distributed art factory system’.[35] This conceals the ‘dark matter’ of ‘makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, self-organized practices’ that holds together the accelerating galaxies of the culture industries.[36] In Glasgow, the work of maintaining the scene’s points of encounter was often less visible than individual entrepreneurial activity. Institutions and funding bodies were not equipped to recognise the importance or methods of social labour. In a similar manner, the visibility of special events such as festivals was more recognisable for funders than the unglamorous work of holding space. The trajectory of New Visions, Scotland’s first festival of experimental moving image, offers an illuminating case study.

### **New Visions – ‘Fighting for a space’**

New Visions was founded in 1992 and can be considered the precursor of the festivalisation trend in Glasgow. Throughout its brief existence, it carved a space for moving image culture, legitimising independent film and video exhibition within the contemporary art scene as well as the film industry. It facilitated public access to the technologies and aesthetics of new media, achieved recognition from European festivals and institutions, and placed experimental moving image work in some of the city’s prominent cinemas and galleries. Its contribution provides a remarkable example of a grassroots, artist-led initiative based on the collaborative dynamics of local scenes and functioning at the fringes of mainstream cultural policy. It was shaped by the DIY ethos and politics of its founders, Malcolm Dickson and Doug Aubrey, both active in cultural and political debates around the European City of Culture year. Dickson was part of the Workers’ City group, and founder of the Free University Network (F.U.N.), a collective which organised regular discussion events on the role of ECoC.[37] He was editor of *Variant* magazine (1984-2012), one of the key publications for and about independent and DIY arts, culture, and politics in Glasgow and the UK more broadly. Doug Aubrey was at the time a musician and filmmaker, contributor to *Variant*, and part of the Transmission committee alongside Dickson.

Dickson and Aubrey also ran EventSpace, a voluntary organisation focused on time-based and issue-based arts which previously organised Sites/Positions, an ECoC-supported programme of site-specific art in the run-up to 1990. As EventSpace received no structural funding, it worked on



a project-by-project basis, in which the festival format chosen for New Visions was but one of the manifestations. With time, the festival outgrew the organisation and became its continuously running, most significant event.

New Visions was an autonomous response to a lack of infrastructure to showcase a growing multimedia output. During the 1980s and early 1990s, alternative and community filmmaking in Scotland was revitalised through the increasing popularity and accessibility of video as well as the emergence of the workshop movement. This movement, clustered around Glasgow Film and Video Workshop (GFVW), Red Star Cinema and Video in Pilton in Edinburgh, aimed to empower local communities through the use of video, often for campaigning purposes.[38] Focused on production, however, these initiatives lacked an infrastructure that enabled the exhibition and access to such films for local audiences. The role of New Visions in filling this gap was illustrated by their remit to showcase locally-produced film and video alongside international works, professional alongside amateur productions. The programming strategy aimed to create an 'open scene' for all kinds of works, ideas, and visions to be exchanged and provoke discussion. As Dickson argued, 'we're fighting for a space, not just to show the work that we show, but also the reasons why people make work, why people might decide, under incredibly difficult circumstances, to make art'.[39] New Visions gave a platform to marginalised artists who had no chance at distribution and exhibition via mainstream channels. This resulted in an eclectic approach to programming, more inclusive than selective. The content of the festival combined 'the different mediums of film, video and digital, without worrying about medium specific concerns'.[40] From open submissions, sourced material, commissions and collaborations, the first edition of the festival programmed over 200 works over ten days, presented alongside audio-visual installations and projections, music performances, and critical seminars.[41]

This eclecticism was also present in the choice of venues. Most of the single-screen productions – short to medium length works – were screened at the Glasgow Film Theatre (GFT), one of the BFI-funded Regional Film Theatres. During the 1990s, the GFT had tried to shed its elitist image and started hosting more festivals. New Visions fitted within this effort to break 'into an alternative cinematic culture' by bringing in external expertise.[42] It was still, however, a firmly institutional venue offering a traditional auditorium viewing experience. For New Visions to function as a real site of innovation and experiment, access to other spaces was crucial. Galleries offered a more flexible situation that allowed for greater manipulation of the apparatus and

the reception space, and given the founders' background, Transmission was the obvious choice. This is where the festival launch took place in 1992, with Gabor Csaszari and Jno Cook's *L.S.D.* (Lake Shore Drive), a work which required a purpose-built projector and offered an experience that 'challenged our notions of the presentation of film, film language, central perspective and the area between photography and film'.<sup>[43]</sup> Throughout the years, Transmission offered a versatile physical space that was modified or used differently to accommodate for various art forms and audiences, including the New Visions videotheque. The artist-run gallery represented the intersectional space between the art world and the wider political sphere, and hosted politically-charged events such as a mid-length film produced by *Variant* magazine about the main critics of ECoC, Workers' City, readings of Bobby Sands poems, and a Live Election Broadcast.<sup>[44]</sup>

Another, perhaps less obvious festival venue was the Goethe Institut, which was also a significant partner since the start of the festival and supported other film events beyond its biennial presence. The Institut offered a wide range of cultural events alongside their language courses. The building also included a cinema venue, equipped with one of the best screening facilities in Glasgow at the time.<sup>[45]</sup> The cultural centre often programmed German experimental works, either historical or contemporary,<sup>[46]</sup> as well as supporting exchanges of programmes and experience between Scottish and German film festivals such as Media Art Festival Osnabrück. The presence of the festival in these two institutions legitimated them within a discourse of innovation and experiment, which in return conferred authority to New Visions as a cinema organisation.

With the next two editions, under the leadership of Malcolm Dickson and Ann Vance in 1994 and Paula Larkin in 1996, the festival continued to grow and expand their programming as well as becoming an active participant in film culture, through commissioning and exhibiting site-specific works. As one publication stated: 'New Visions isn't just a series of screenings in cinema halls: its tentacles reach out city-wide, incorporating exhibitions and installations at a host of venues'.<sup>[47]</sup> DIY, artist-led spaces continued to be essential in this mission, and central amongst them was the Glasgow Film and Video Workshop, which had recently moved to new premises near Transmission Gallery. GFVW was a hub for filmmakers and other cultural organisations (such as the magazine *Variant*, that also resided there), and hosted a monthly series of screenings for new local independent work. For New Visions 1996,

GFVW hosted single-channel screenings, installations, and a ‘virtual living room’ with a videotheque.

The festival’s ‘tentacles’ reached as far as an arts centre in the satellite town of East Kilbride, but interventions tended to be clustered in Glasgow’s city centre, even if they spilled out of the galleries. In 1996, for instance, local artists Daniel Reeves and Emma Davie filmed everyday life in several urban spaces, shops, offices, restaurants, schools or factories, and projected these images on corner windows of Sauchiehall Street opposite one of the festival’s venues, the CCA. Such site-specific installations rejected the ‘imprisonment’ of art in a gallery, taking as its subject matter the ordinary experience of the city, and as a venue a space of transit.[48] By intervening in public space, artists used the moving image to disrupt the normal flow of time and people and link artistic practice to citizen-led transformations of everyday life.[49] As part of New Visions 1994, for instance, Peter McCaughey had installed his work *Borrowed Lights (stage I)*, in which found footage was projected into glass cobblestones from beneath the pavement, and also presented *U* at an underground station in the city centre. McCaughey went on to found WAVEparticle, an artist-led organisation undertaking projects contributing to urban regeneration through art.

New Visions interacted in more or less critical ways with institutions, including universities and public galleries. Glasgow School of Art hosted events for each edition, not just in the exhibition spaces but also in the student union. The Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA), launched in 1996, was quickly adopted as a festival venue. GoMA had come under attack for its lack of engagement with local artists,[50] so the partnership with New Visions performed reciprocal legitimacy, bringing together local works such as Paul Cameron’s experimental documentary on the Castlemilk housing estate in Glasgow with European and American productions. The programme at GoMA also included a gallery of multimedia works stored on CD-ROMs or online, which at the time were novel platforms for media consumption.

By the festival’s third edition, new media and online arts had become key areas of interest, demanding new ways of thinking about space through connectivity and virtuality. Two Duncan of Jordanstone post-graduates, self-described ‘multimedia pranksters’ Simon Yuill and Lindsay Perth, produced *Untogether*, one of the most intriguing events at New Visions in 1996. The project was ‘an interactive performance linking the World Wide Web to the streets of Glasgow’, and it ran for a week at Java Internet Cafe.[51] One of the first of this new kind of semi-public space, Java was a key venue for New

Visions 1996, also hosting Pernille Spence's *Bitter Burial* video installation, Sarah Felton's *Elements of Doubt* film loop, and a single-channel work by Lynn Hershman. The liminality of the internet cafe encouraged the explorations of technology, connection, and subjectivity proposed by the works. It was a versatile exhibition space demonstrating the New Visions engagement with technological change at the intersection between creative practices, where the festival was shaping and promoting a new field.

This eclecticism and cross-fertilisation had its own challenges. New Visions refused easy categorisation, and thus struggled to fit within funders' objectives. As Malcolm Dickson complained, SAC or SFC staffers did not even attend their events, which contributed to their lack of understanding of the various experimental art forms.[52] In the context of policy shifts that brought in more top-down oversight of Lottery-funded initiatives and a pull towards centralised consolidation, the funding for New Visions came under scrutiny. In particular, funders questioned the festival's relationship to its Edinburgh counterpart, the Edinburgh Fringe Film and Video Festival (EFFVF). The Edinburgh event had been established in 1984 and started to include video since 1991, in addition to community films, cult classics, and indie movies. The existence of two festivals with an overlapping focus started to be seen by funders as a potential issue of duplication and competition rather than an extension of a thriving scene.

In Film Council documents, New Visions and EFFVF were initially presented as successful examples of the kind of festival that the SFC would encourage, due to their 'innovative work'.[53] Festivals had a 'research and development' role in relation to the broader film culture. As one of the programmers at New Visions, Doug Aubrey explained in the first brochure the festival's liminal status, placing film at the intersection with contemporary art, video and technology, was needed by mainstream culture for 'rip off ideas and techniques' and for the injection of new talent. In his view, Scotland had 'both a *need* and room for more than one such event', as they all create a thriving 'moving picture culture'.[54] This was a broad enterprise that flourished through collaboration rather than competition. Asked if he perceived EFFVF as a competition for funds and audiences, Malcolm Dickson replied that 'the whole notion of competition is nonsense: the fact is, the more things you have in a similar field, the more it broadens your market'. In Scotland, he said, there was 'an undergrowth of film and videomakers, and people that want to talk about ideas, and at the same time the possibilities for that to happen [were] diminishing'.[55]

However, as early as 1994, the two festivals had shown concern for the strategic development of film, video, and new media in Scotland due to the lack of financial stability, especially for grassroots developments, alongside the need for an equipment base and improved exhibition infrastructure. These concerns were also on the funders' agendas and eventually in 1997, the SAC and SFC together with the two festivals commissioned two reports: 'The Strategic Development of Creative Video, Film & New Media', undertaken by Positive Solutions, and 'Equipment Technology Resource for Scotland', handled by Clive Gillman and Eddie Berg of the Foundation for Art and Creative Technology (FACT), both Liverpool-based organisations.[56] The report by Positive Solutions was based on the input of many artists, organisers, educators, and representatives of public funding bodies. It reflected on the state of contemporary arts and 'new media', arguing that funding policies had not yet adjusted to the versatility of new media practices. Respondents also identified the changes in support for screen-based work after the transition from the SFC to a new organisation, Scottish Screen, with a more mainstream, industry-facing focus.[57]

The report recognised the merits and knowledge of both film and video festivals and the important links to the local filmmaking communities. As such, the report provided several options for maintaining and developing the benefits of these two festivals. At a time when the strategic focus for Scottish arts funding bodies was on national coverage and a consolidation of agencies with a broader remit, the report explores the extension of the festivals' activities from exhibition to commissioning, production, distribution, and education. Funding both festivals in parallel was not considered a viable solution as it still lacked the commissioning remit. Out of the two festivals, New Visions was considered as a more feasible vehicle for the proposed development, but the preferred option was for the two festivals to merge and create a new organisation with increased funding and a wider national remit. This option was agreed on by the involved parties and the creation of a new organisation provisionally called The Moving Image Art Agency (MIAA) was discussed. Alongside the exhibition of audiovisual works, its objectives included professional and technical training and development opportunities, improved communication and circulation of information about productions, increased opportunities for commissioning new projects, and organise festival events in different Scottish regions and cities annually.[58] The report ended with an action plan which devised a timeframe for creating and developing the activities of MIAA as an organisation able to attract a larger budget, with a

diversified list of activities, starting in 1998. Members from the steering committee who participated in the report and who were also part of each festival (such as Malcolm Dickson, Chris Byrne, Paula Larkin, Pauline Law, among others) initiated discussions about the new organisation, which progressed slowly and ultimately did not lead to concrete results. A part of the discussion group distanced themselves from this process and formed a new commissioning organisation called New Media Scotland, based in Edinburgh, focused on exhibiting and commissioning visual art, including video.

While festivals such as New Visions or EFFVF ultimately collapsed and scenes gradually dissipated, they shaped and developed professionals who went on to launch other organisations and events that led to a festival boom in the following decade. Document Human Rights Film Festival, co-founded in 2003 by Paula Larkin and Mona Rai, the Radical Independent Bookfair organised by Euan Sutherland, as well as many other events and festivals that followed, had emerged from these dynamics and initiatives of the 1990s. With over 30 film festivals operating annually in a city of just over 600,000 inhabitants, Glasgow had gone through a phase of festivalisation and professionalisation, where experimentation and cross-fertilisation were embraced but distinctiveness became increasingly important in a competitive landscape.

## Conclusions

At a turning point moment, when the legitimacy of artists' moving image as an art practice was being consolidated, film exhibition was a contested practice, and the spaces it occupied reflected this interstitial position. In Glasgow, the survival and flourishing of radical forms of moving image exhibition was dependent on a mutually supportive relationship with the music and art scenes, as well as access to funds from those areas. At an institutional level, this conjuncture privileged event-based forms of organising, rather than long-term commitments. The impact of the European City of Culture on the city's way of imagining and delivering cultural provision can be observed in the increased interest in festivals as opposed to venues or access centres.

New Visions is an illustrative example of a grassroots, artist-led festival that brought a significant and diverse selection of experimental film, video, and art work to Glasgow, despite struggling for funding and legitimacy. It

continued the tradition of artists' self-organising to fill the gaps of a precarious infrastructure. Its constant negotiation of the creative economy discourse and subversion of market-led narratives surrounding film exhibition revealed the struggles over the place of experimental film, video, and new media in the art world. Events like *New Visions* and *EFFVF* relied on informal bonds across cultural scenes to secure spaces and volunteer labour, and in turn served as ephemeral hubs for those networks. At the same time, the festival format proved to be a cost-efficient way for funders to fulfil their social, cultural, and economic objectives in a policy context that valued creativity and innovation. Art, music, and film festivals proliferated during the following decade, while still struggling for regular funding and a supportive infrastructure. Festivalisation thus perpetuated a system that is precarious as much as it is vital and creative.

As Ann Vance concluded in her overview of single-screen video exhibition at the end of the decade, short-term projects in the 1990s depended on 'the energies and unpaid efforts' of people 'whose histories end up lost and distorted or viewed in isolation'.<sup>[59]</sup> The rise and fall of *New Visions*, seen in the context of policy drift, and situated in the meeting spaces of scenes and subcultures, offers a window into the difficult interface between grassroots creativity and institutional models of cultural value. The festival's sprawling format, its use of non-gallery spaces, and its embrace of varied media forms alongside live music and performance were a product of the hybrid, collaborative modes of creative practice that had flourished in the decade before. These modes were less compatible with a growth-orientated, professionalised creative economy, and came under pressure from funders to consolidate and centralise. The festival's cancellation after three editions showed the limits of negotiated resistance.

*New Visions* provided a crucial and unique site for experimentation and the acclimatisation of new technologies with a local/global outlook. The rewards from such efforts, however, do not accrue evenly to those involved. Doing justice to the distinctive way in which artists and film exhibitors have transformed the public realm, and to the function that these gathering sites have held for fragile, local communities, is thus a way to read against the grain of the larger narratives of culture-led urban renewal.

## Authors

Alexandra-Maria Colta is a PhD candidate at the University of Glasgow in partnership with the University of St Andrews and Document Human Rights Film Festival, a collaborative, interdisciplinary study of human rights film festivals. She studied media and cultural studies at the Centre for British Studies at Humboldt University, Berlin and worked in film production and promotion in Romania and the UK.

María A. Vélez-Serna is a lecturer in Film and Media at the University of Stirling, and a film school graduate from Universidad Nacional de Colombia. She co-edited *Early Cinema in Scotland* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018) and is currently finishing a monograph on non-theatrical exhibition for Amsterdam University Press.

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## Notes

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- [2] McGuian 2016.
- [3] Häussermann & Siebel in Getz 2012, p. 28.
- [4] Damer 1990, p. 14.
- [5] McKee 2012.
- [6] Thompson 2013.
- [7] Douglas Gordon famously thanked the 'Scotia Nostra' when he received his Turner Prize, signalling closeness and collaboration but also a sense of kinship that could exclude others. As curatorial collective Mother Tongue have argued, one of the unsaid characteristics of this 'gang of artists' is its whiteness. *Mother Tongue* 2013, p. 8.
- [8] Cowley & Kiely & Collins 2016.
- [9] Walsh & Taulbut & Hanlon 2010.
- [10] Boyle & McWilliams & Rice 2008, p. 315.
- [11] Mooney 2004, p. 338; Garcia 2005, p. 844.
- [12] Jackson 1991, p. 7.
- [13] Garcia 2005.
- [14] Mooney 2004, p. 329; Richards 1991.
- [15] Lowndes 2010, p. 121.
- [16] *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- [17] *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 141-143; Harding 1995.
- [18] Boyle & McWilliams & Rice 2008, pp. 313-314.
- [19] Brown & Jackson & Mulholland 2018, p. 141.
- [20] John Williamson, interview with one of the authors, Glasgow, 2017.
- [21] *Ibid.*
- [22] *Transmission: Committee for the Visual Arts* 2001, p. 5.
- [23] Anderson 2015, p. 58.
- [24] John Williamson, interview with one of the authors, Glasgow, 2017.
- [25] Sinclair 1994.
- [26] Straw 2015, p. 478.
- [27] Harding 2001.
- [28] Keller, quoted in Relyea 2013, p. 97.
- [29] Moraes 2015, p. 135.
- [30] Balsom 2013, p. 20.

- [31] Scottish Film Council, 'Four year financial plan, May 1986', National Library of Scotland, Moving Image Archive, 1/1/397.
- [32] Scottish Film Council Annual Review 1995, p. 6.
- [33] Brown & Jackson & Mulholland 2018, p. 158. See also Galloway & Jones 2010.
- [34] In Brown & Jackson & Mulholland 2018, p. 159.
- [35] Sholette 2010, p. 121.
- [36] Ibid, p. 1.
- [37] Lowndes 2016, p. 197.
- [38] MacPherson 2015, p. 39.
- [39] Dickson in Van Oldenborgh 1994, p. 6.
- [40] Ibid.
- [41] New Visions brochure 1994.
- [42] Dickson 2015, p. 108.
- [43] Crawford 1992.
- [44] The last day of the festival in 1992 was 9 April, which coincided with the UK general elections.
- [45] Marlies Pfeifer personal communication with one of the authors, Glasgow, 2017.
- [46] In 1990, for instance, Goethe Institut organised Experimental Film Workshop with Christoph Janetzko, invited critically acclaimed director Jutta Brückner, and later showcased recent German video art as well as historical works of the German film avant-garde from the 1920s.
- [47] *The List* 1996.
- [48] Bruce 1996.
- [49] Parry 2012.
- [50] Hare 2000.
- [51] New Visions brochure 1996.
- [52] Dickson in Van Oldenborgh 1994.
- [53] Scottish Film Council, 'SFC Corporate Plan 1993/4 – 1996/7 and bid for 1996/7, April 1993', National Library of Scotland, Moving Image Archive, 1/1/397.
- [54] Aubrey in New Visions brochure 1992.
- [55] Dickson in Van Oldenborgh 1994.
- [56] Positive Solutions 1997
- [57] Ibid, p. 4.
- [58] Ibid., p. 17.
- [59] Vance 1999.