INTERVIEW L01: MARTIN SEEDS

Interviewer: Dr Fearghus Roulston
Interviewee: Martin Seeds
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Location: Brighton
Transcriber: Naomi Wells

Textual Note: Annotations and observations appear in square brackets (e.g. [pauses], [laughs]). Partial, interrupted or unfinished utterances are denoted by a dash. False starts, filler words and non-lexical utterances (e.g. 'um', 'hmm') are not generally transcribed. Time codes appear at ten-minute intervals in square brackets in bold type.

FR: Okay, so just to start off, just say your name and today's date.

MS: My name's Martin Seeds and today's date is the thirtieth of October 2019.

FR: Okay, well, thanks very much for agreeing to take part. So I guess the question that we're going to start with to everyone is kind of what interested you in the project?

MS: [pauses] I think the idea of a diaspora and of the reasons why people leave Ireland, Northern Ireland, whatever you want to describe it as, that place, the province, let's call it the province cos that's kind of like, that's, that's totally non-sectarian or, you can't influence, but, you know, it's kind of nuanced towards Northern Ireland, Northern Irish, let us call it the province, yeah, I just, in the way I'd describe it was that, well, you know, there's, there's, we, we tend to think of diasporas as a, down a sectarian divide or as a religious divide or, you know, it's kind of like, the, it's more like, a Catholic Irish diaspora, but actually, you know, through history there has been an enormous, I mean, the first settlers in America were mainly Protestant, so there was a big diaspora from the Protestant side of the community, but when we're talking about a diaspora, people leaving Northern Ireland because of the Troubles or in more recent times, let's say in the last kind of like, fifty, sort of eighty years, I think it tends to be, it feels like it tends to be more focused on the Catholic community and not a lot of emphasis or not a lot of looking at the idea of diaspora irrespective of anyone's sort of religious, sexual, gender, colour, whatever orientation, it's just like, this is a diaspora and like, let's have a think about what and why and how and who, irrespective of where they come from and of their background.

FR: Okay, I think hopefully we'll, we'll get into some of that [laughs], thanks. So just to start, where are you from?

MS: I'm from Belfast, from east Belfast, so I grew up, do you want, do you want me to say where I grew up, is it, so I grew up in, I grew up in east Belfast in, just off the Albert Bridge Road, so quite a staunchly kind of loyalist Protestant area, lived there I think until the late sixties, early seventies and then my parents bought a house, still in east Belfast, but in a, in a kind of a new housing development closer to the, what's now known as the City Airport, but

when I was a kid it was an old RAF base, so my, so up until probably I was about seven or eight I was like, playing in the streets just off the Albert Bridge Road, I think we lived on Trillick Street I think it was, and only cos, not cos I remember from seven years old because people have told me, but yeah, so, so those very early days were around that kind of hardened kind of loyalist area, but I've no great memories of things that were taking place I don't think, and then yeah, so that sort of like, it's probably '69 or '70 we moved to Sydenham, it's just across from City Airport, again, like, again, a set of terraced houses, but built in a more kind of modern style and much bigger than what we were used to and, you know, indoor toilet and all the luxuries that you expect from a modern house.

FR: And what did your parents do?

MS: My dad had various jobs as did my mum, they were, neither my mum or dad are kind of like, sort of post-sixteen educated like, I think my dad probably left school when he was thirteen or fourteen, whenever he could because at that time, you know, you just, they needed to earn some money to support the family, so everybody had to chip in, so came from a big family, so my dad started off as a haulier, as a, he would drive trucks, cos my grandfather was a cartier so he would have a cart and he would, he would cart coal from the docks by horse and cart and then, so my dad just kind of sort of, I think, I'm assuming there was some sort of lineage, never talked to him about that actually, and there was some sort of like, well, it's, it's kind of like, this is what I know cos my dad told me, so he'd just done it as well, so he basically went and set up a horse and cart he had a lorry and I think he used to have, we used to drive this big old ex-army lorry as well this massive big truck which you, I remember as a kid having to almost like, climb up like, a, it was like a ladder, like climbing, scaling a building to get inside it was so high up, but he would like, move stuff from one place to the other, I don't know what stuff, it was just he would just move stuff, but then he, somehow or other I think he started off trying to be an upholsterer and then he moved from upholstery into carpet fitting and so that was what he sort of specialised in, so he was in the carpet trade for a long time, ended up having his own business for a little while, that didn't fare so well, particular probably in the late seventies, early eighties, that was just the economy, he was in a town in County Down called Newtownards, and I think there was a bit of an economic downturn for the town, cos they opened up a massive big shopping centre just outside the town and that kind of killed all the economy, so he's had various jobs and then after that he just, you know, he worked in Short's aircraft factory, he tried his hand as a milkman, I helped him with that, but he, but again, my dad's just got this very strong work ethic, it's just all about, you know, do whatever you need to do to provide for your family, that's his ethic, so he just did whatever he could do, and so he ended up, you know, a multitude of things, successes, some a little bit of a failure and then, but he ended up in Short's aircraft factory working as a chemical miller, I think that was his official title, milling sheets of metal. My mum worked on and off, in between children, so there's three of us in the family, but she had all sorts of jobs varying from, I think she used to work in some of the mills in east Belfast, and then she worked as a, an assistant in a deaf school I think for a little while, and she was a home help, and she had various jobs like that, a school playground lady, so those kind of, and a cleaner for a long time as well, I remember, sort of the last, maybe sort of the last jobs I think she had was a cleaner, she used to clean in police stations and schools, so sort of more institutionalised kind of like establishments, but that's where the money was, it was like, public, it was kind of like, public institutions or public, publicly

funded institutions or, as you know, Northern Ireland is very much heavily funded on our employed, heavily employed in the civil service or government organisations, so yeah, varied range of jobs just really to keep the money coming in and doing what needs to be done, so.

FR: Sure, okay. So it's interesting you said that you have this kind of retrospective sense of Albert Bridge Road in particular as being quite a kind of staunch or loyalist community, but you said, were saying you weren't necessarily aware of that at the time.

MS: No, I have vague, vague memories, but, but, I mean, the only, the big memory that I have is just sort of some barricades and men is masks and, I think obviously there was a, there was, not obviously, but, I mean, there was a time when I remember being with my dad in the car and visiting from our new house in, across from the City Airport in Sydenham to my aunt's, my great-aunt, who still lived in the area, so my dad went to make sure she was okay cos there was a lot of violence and trouble going on, so we went in the car together, I was only like, probably eight or something, nine, probably eight, but I remember us driving up and like, there being barricades across the road and like, men in masks and I can't really, vaguely remember what they had in their hands, but they were, you know, they were covered up and looking aggressive and, but I do remember them coming over and like, quizzing my dad about stuff, but my dad weirdly knew all their names, it was like, Billy is that you, Jimmy, he just knew who they were, just by seeing their face and their eyes he just knew who they were and their voices, they were like, and I think they were a little bit stunned that, that somebody, I'm guessing they were a little bit stunned that he kind of figured out who they were, so they were kind of playing this role of the protector and, you know, of this kind of, this masked crusader, but like, he knew, he knew who they all were, they knew who he was and so that was fine, he was like, allowed to go through. But there's not an enormous amount of like, from those very early days not an enormous amount of memories of those things, as I, you know, living there, in east Belfast where I was was quite a, was quite a quiet little suburb, I'm not sure if that was the reason my parents decided to move us out there, well, into that Sydenham sort of, that Sydenham area, but I think it was also they were just a bit more, they were earning a bit more money and they could afford it and they wanted to buy a house and it was a new development and so they decided to do it, but **[00:10:00]** whether the area was chosen because it was a little bit safer or further away from that sort of, those kind of early Troubles aggression in the late sixties, I'm not particularly sure, but, yeah, so, but I like, later years, you know, there was a, there was like, other little incidents of things that I remember, but I was never in the middle or in the thick of anything, I was always very good at avoiding stuff.

FR: That's a good skill to have in Belfast [laughs].

MS: It is, and it's one that, it's one that, I think that, that always stays with you, I don't know, I just feel that like, when I got to England I just, you know, I, I, somebody, somebody, I remember taking a couple of friends back to Belfast like, probably in the nineties, late nineties after the peace agreement, very late nineties then, and I said to them look, just so you know, people look more here, so it's not that they're, it's just, just that's it's just like, if you go into anywhere else in Europe or anywhere else at all people tend to look at you more, they study you a little bit more, they try and get the cut of you and that's just the

thing that's done, we, we, and then I said well, and I, and I didn't actually, I was, as I was saying, it I was processing it myself, I was going yeah, we do we, we, we do that, we study, we look at things more, we, we weigh up a scenario and a situation and people and body language, well, I tend to do that and maybe it's just, maybe it's just me being over paranoid or over anxious about groups of people, but I tend to do that, I tend to, and I think we do in the North, maybe in the South as well, but I do think people, we do tend to look more than they do in England, they tend to look away a lot more in England, they tend to be a bit more kind of like, a little bit more kind of like, they don't make eye contact a lot and like, even when you say cheers I have to like, educate my friends to look someone in the eye when you say cheers, you know, clink a glass, but yeah, so, so yeah, how did we get on to that, I, I, I digress too much, I'm sorry.

FR: No, it's all about the digressions I think, but we were talking about kind of habits of caution maybe.

BH: Yeah, habits of caution's a great, yeah, it's a really great, it's a great phrase cos I remember when I came to London in '86, I'd finished off an HND in computer studies and I managed to convince about five friends, we had a discussion five friends that I was studying with that, you know, maybe I didn't really convince them, but there was an inkling that we had to do something or go somewhere because there was just nothing for us in Northern Ireland at that time, and that there was plenty of jobs in London and that this could be a thing that we could do, so, you know, I remember like, us agreeing it on that day and just basically going and buying a boat ticket, coming home and totally blindsiding my mother who almost fell to the floor I think in the kitchen when I told her, very, I think I could have chosen my words and my timing a little bit more carefully in retrospect, but yeah, but I remember coming to London and just being totally bemused by the place, totally a massive culture shock, I mean, everything was just like, like, it was, I don't know, it just seemed like this jewel box of everything and anything was possible, you just had to go and grab it and do it and and make it happen, it was just down to you to do it and if you had the right work ethic, if you had the right determination you just made it happen, you just done it and so I made that, yeah, I kind of made that, I had that thought in my head pretty early on and so I was pretty determined just to, to make a really good go of it, enjoy myself there, to take every single wild and crazy and interesting and financially rich and culturally experienced, I just, I just went a bit crazy with it all over a large number of years and I really enjoyed myself there, so, but it kind of made me feel at the same time in retrospect whenever I thought back about growing up in Belfast I felt a little bit cross, in fact, more than a little bit cross, quite cross that I was, that that opportunity and possibility, that kind of culture was just not there for me and it was never going to be there for me and it's never going to be there for any of my friends who grew up around me, and that's just anything from like, pubs and clubs and like, theatres and, you know, just from, from a, you know, it's, they just, it just was, the opportunities just did not seem to be there, okay you could say that for any capital city, but it just, I mean, I've been to Manchester and I've been to Liverpool and they just felt, there was a lot less anxious and free and so therefore you felt that you could go and do anything and talk to anybody and be anywhere, you didn't have to look over your shoulder all the time in a sense, that kind of clichéd phrase, but like, yeah, but yeah, so I made the most of London like, wild and crazy hedonistic times there, so, and that was a conscious

decision that, and again, you know, looking back it was, I was maybe bitter might be a better word, but I was really quite annoyed by, by that lack of opportunity that was there.

FR: So what age, that's really interesting, what age would you have been when you left Belfast?

MS: Twenty-one or twenty-two, twenty-one, twenty-two.

FR: So a fair wee while then in Belfast before moving. So what did you do like, in those years in Belfast?

MS: I studied, so I studied, I had a, I had a bit of a bad car accident, I was involved in a bad road traffic accident when I was about sixteen, seventeen, so that put me back a year or two with my studies at school, so I had, so I was, so that's why I was kind of a bit of a late bloomer when I got through to university, so instead of like, finishing my HND when I was like, twenty or whatever it was, there was a little bit longer for me because I had a bit of time when things weren't going well, I had a bit of a head injury and I was physically fine, but I had a bit of a head injury and I suffered from petit mal epileptic fits and absences as well, so that kind of, and I was on medication and that kind of like, messed with your head quite a bit and, and that kind of put my educational kind of achievements back quite a bit, but eventually that all came through and I got my HND and I met a really great group of friends and, as I say, we kind of realised the potential opportunity, you know, to move to London and just through some contacts we managed to find some student accommodation and we moved there.

FR: And you all moved together?

MS: Yeah, yeah, there was about five of us came together and I think, and we moved into some student accommodation in east London in [pauses], I can't remember the name, just off Stepney Green.

FR: Yeah, I know, yeah.

MS: It was an old, basically it was, it was accommodation above a Methodist church called the East End Mission and it's a big Methodist church, it's a great church, but it's a modern kind of building and above were all these kind of apartments which were student accommodation. I think it was a flop house at one point it was a homeless set up, but it was turned into, for a theology college that was based there and also there was London College of Furniture, which was just down the road, and there was another small college as well, so it was used for accommodation for them, but we managed to, one of our gang [pauses] knew that the person who administered the allocation of the rooms over the summer, they, they grew up together and so they were able to sort us out with like, five rooms, we paid, they weren't free, we paid for them, so we got to London in '86, it was a s–, I remember the heat was wild, it was just like the hottest temperature I'd ever experienced in my life, it was such a hot summer, but it was, it was, yeah, the rooms were, it was quite a shock going, even from going from student accommodation to to these little pokey bedsits, basically you were in a bedsit with a shared kitchen and a shared shower, so yeah, and then having to,

basically we got to the point where we had no money, we had very little money, so we had, everything that we had we just pooled all our funds together and we just kind of shared that, we kind of just worked out how we can survive with the cheapest basic kind of food possible between the five of us, and that worked, and we all applied for the same jobs cos we all had the same qualification, and [pauses] I was the first one to get a job, even though we applied to, everyone applied to the same jobs, it was kind of weird, I was the only one who got an interview and I think when I mentioned this to the company they were a little bit kind of like, well, why didn't we pick up the others, well, I don't know, they would, they would like a go.

FR: They'd also like a job, yeah.

MS: They'd like a job too, but yeah, so I got a job, my first job was as a programmer, trainee programmer at Glaxo Wellcome that was based up in Islington in north London, so again, it was, but it was quite interesting about, you know, I was living in east London and travelling to north and it was like, exploring other parts of the city and I remember really quite vividly what east London was like at the time, I mean, it was just going through that sort of mid-eighties transformation that was just starting, so, and I remember what Islington was like in the kind of the mid-, late **[00:20:00]** eighties, you know, it wasn't as plush and as beautiful and as slick as it is now, and it just slowly became this, became more and more gentrified, I mean, parts of Islington were obviously quite, much more developed and expensive places to live, but most of it wasn't really, and the East End was just really very, very run down and very rough and I can remember walking through streets around Stepney and looking into the basements and seeing these kind of little rows of Bangladeshi ladies or Indian ladies, just like, with kids just scurrying around on the floor, but just stitching things, sewing stuff, there was all these sweatshops everywhere, just hidden away in these little sort of basement apartments and stuff and, yeah, so, and then, but then all around that kind of squalor you just walked, you know, twenty minutes towards the, towards the docks and then there was like, you know, multimillion pound apartments being built with like, I mean, there was one I remember very vividly like, that time was just quite vulgar that the contrast between the two, those communities, you know, there was one, there was, they were selling this enormous big penthouse apartment and you got a free Porsche and the Porsche was like, or a replica of the Porsche, I don't think it was the actual Porsche, but it was strapped vertically to the side of a building with some scaffolding, you know, it was like, you can have this car if you buy this building, it was just like, what, it was crazy.

FR: A big difference from Belfast.

MS: Yeah, it was shockingly different, I mean, even both sides of the community as well, you know, even though there was lots of like, trouble and problems in Belfast, but I wasn't exposed to that level, but then when you're living right in the heart of that community and who were very welcoming, really, really welcoming, really warm, kind, genuine, loving and for me being thrown into the mist of, mix of a, thrown into a community with an enormous cultural mix was also very new as well. I mean, Belfast in like, you know, sixties, seventies, eighties was not very culturally rich, it was very difficult to see a black face or an Asian face there. You went to the Chinese restaurant, Chinese takeaway, you know, and that's when you seen somebody from another part of the world really, everybody was white and then so

you come to London and all of a sudden there's this like, enormous big mix of people and like, I didn't have any of the, I don't know, if you have skills to, to, cross-cultural skills, I, I don't know if they are things that just develop as you, as you're a child, and if you're in that com–, in that kind of mix of people then, those kind of skills just come naturally, you just know how to interact with people from different communities and different cultures, but I didn't have any of those skills and I, but I didn't, but I think my naivety just kind of was the thing that kind of like, swept all that to one side because I just didn't know how to, if I was saying the wrong thing or not the wrong thing, so it didn't actually occur to me that I would be or would not be, so I just talked to people like they were people and that was totally fine, which is kind of what you're supposed to do anyway.

FR: That's interesting, you're kind of separated from it as a Northern Irish person, you're outside it.

MS: Yeah, I mean, there was, it was really quite amazing, we used to play, I remember we had a little football team in our little, in the, in the bedsits that we all had, obviously there was a lot of students there, so we would play football on a Saturday or a Sunday morning or something, and it was just a big mix of like, people from different cultures and obviously cos there was lots of students there, there were some from different parts of the country and some from different parts of, yeah, mainly from different parts of the country, not many Londoners were there, but it was really quite an eye-opener because you were just like, all of a sudden you move from this place which was, which was like, divided along this kind of sectarian binary, you know, and there were all, you know, they had these enormous differences, totally irreconcilable and very different cultures and that didn't get on at all, and then you're in this pool of people like, where those differences didn't actually matter like, they, they weren't issues, they were actually things to celebrate, they were actually things to enquire about like, how do you do this or do that or my mum makes this, try this, my mum made this for me, try this food, it's like, wow, it's amazing, it's like, woah, this is great, you know, this, you know, this is what a culturally rich environment should be, it should be about experiences.

FR: So the difference is there, but not the tension around the difference.

MS: Yeah, yeah, totally, yeah, totally, there was no tension at all and I didn't really feel any or perceive any tension.

FR: Well, that's what I was going to ask actually. So you moved to London in '86 and in terms of the Troubles in Britain, right, and some of the bombings that happened in the eighties and then into the nineties, is there anything about that period that you remember as kind of standing out to you, or anything that kind of was on your radar at all or–?

MS: No, I don't, I think well, yeah, there were certain things like, I do remember when it came and, you know, and I remember being, first or second trip into the West End with maybe a couple of friends and we were just trying to find our way around, but we just got totally lost and it was the day, it was before, you know, before Google Maps and you had an *A to Z*, you know, you had a little paper *A to Z* and we didn't have one of those, and maybe we did, maybe we bought one between us, but still like, trying to get your bearings from a

book and you're standing and there's millions of people running all around you, it was all very confusing and you're just not used to that, and so you would ask somebody and they would like, look at you because they, either they didn't understand what you were saying or they recognised your accent and got a little bit frightened by it. I do remember us asking a policeman for directions one time and immediately you could see the body language stiffen up and and there was just this, yeah, there was this immediate reaction and, yeah, I was saying before how we kind of, well, I tend to study people a lot and, you know, and so I noticed his reaction, his body language was like, immediately just there was a reaction there which was not that I want to help these people, it was like, I'm suspicious of these people, it was an immediate kind of like, quizzical look, you know, so I remember that, I remember that reaction every so often to us, and then I also, there were, I think because I was working in a sort of professional environment and people were more educated I never really felt at work that anybody was looking at me when, you know, when there would be a, you know, an explosion somewhere or, so, they, the Hyde Park bomb, the, you know, those sorts of events, they never, I never really felt that anybody was like, looking at me in any sort of like, you know, it's your fault or any sort of guilt or finger pointing way, but they were on my mind a little bit. I never, somebody asked me once did you ever try and disguise your accent because my accent isn't–

FR: Ah that's interesting.

MS: Yeah, it was really funny cos I think, I think it's because they had the conversation with somebody else who did try to like, soften their accent a lot more, I never did, my accent is quite soft now, it's not as thick as it used to be, I used to have a very thick and very fast east Belfast accent, but, and the reason why it's changed is because I spoke so fast that people couldn't understand what I was saying, so I had to slow down, so I ended up with this kind of slightly elongated, and my vowels became more rounded and less flattened and so, and so, and then you lose your colloquialisms cos people don't understand them, so I, so I, there, I'm sure we had conversations in the pub about them and I, but I, about those kind of the explosions and the attacks and letter bombs and, but I never really felt that anybody was like, in general just pointing their finger at a, in a kind of like, it's your fault and like, there was like, this kind of like, universal blame because you come from there then it's everyone's fault from over there, and certainly what was quite odd was that, you know, as a lot of people will testify, you go to like, you're a Protestant, you're brought up in this kind of environment where you're British and you've got to be like, proud of that and then you, and then you get to England and then everyone just thinks you're Irish [laughs], and then, so you, and then this, it's a real, it does really mess with your head quite a bit cos like, but I'm, but I'm British, and they're like, and there was this really like, confused like, ignorant, but not in a stupid ignorant way, but just all knowingly that people just didn't get, didn't understand the fact that the island is divided into two and one part's of the United Kingdom and the other part is a separate country, and it was just another island, it was Ireland and you were all Irish, there was no there was no different nuances and flavours, it was just you're Irish, and so that was, I think **[00:30:00]** one of my friends maybe was a little bit more perturbed by that than I was, it never really bothered me, I didn't care about that.

FR: You had not bought into it before.

MS: No, I never bought into the whole kind of like, you know, politics for me was something that I always avoided, took me a long time to actually start voting, I never voted for a long time, religion I always avoided and politics I always avoided, and really because of my experiences of growing up there, of what I seen that it was doing, how it put wedges between people, how it could be used to manipulate people, for, in a bad way, I know it, I know it, you know, it can be and has been and overridingly it's used in like, in, in, for good, but, and when it's used in a, for bad it's really, really bad, that's the problem with it I think, it just can be really dreadfully manipulative where, once you've got that captive audience and it's, so I kind of avoided all that, I ignored politics, and for a while there was a period where I just actually ignored a lot of news about what was going on in Northern Ireland, so–

FR: That's interesting.

MS: Yeah, I kind of blanked it for a while.

FR: I think that's quite common, I did the same thing when I arrived. Did you ever go back to see family or–?

MS: Yeah, yeah, I would go back, but, but [pauses] not as frequently as I sh-, maybe I say frequently as I should, but like, I don't know, what is regular frequency, I don't know, but I did go back, I went to see, but mainly it was for [pauses] family events, it was more out of the sense of like, duty, of family duty I suppose is the word, so it would be, you know, weddings, funerals, you know, big birthday events, Christmases, and I never like, I would never just go oh I'm going back, it's summertime, I'll go back to Ireland for, you know, I'll go back and visit for a week and just spend a week back, I never done that. In fact, to be honest, the first time I done that was two years ago, I spent a week and it was the best week for, it was great, and that kind of made me think, you know, and it took a long time for me to do that, and I'd been back, I had been back before like, you know, cos I made a lot of work there, but it was, I was going there specifically to make photographic projects, to make artwork, I wasn't going there just to like, not do anything, to enjoy the place, and obviously while I was there making work I would hook up with old friends, but it wasn't me like, lying on a beach or going to a museum or going to a gallery or meeting some friends or going to the pub and just having that breadth of time where I am there specifically just to enjoy the place and enjoy the people, it was me going there to work, to specifically look for something that I could photograph, so it was only like, a few years ago that I, a couple of summers ago that I did that.

FR: That's really interesting. Do you think, so you were saying at the start of moving to London that London seemed like this kind of vista of possibilities and opportunities, and I suppose was that kind of really positive thing about London, one of the reasons that you went back for kind of big events, big occasions, family occasions, but not really very often, it doesn't sound like you were homesick at all [laughs], in other words.

MS: No, I think the first month or two maybe I was, but once we cracked that job, I think once the hardship was over, we were still living in these kind of really crappy bedsits, but the thing was that, yeah, so the environment wasn't great, but the people were amazing, I met some really good English friends from different parts of the country, we had this little

sort of strong group of friends which, I mean, I had a strong group of friends when I moved, but then that very quickly expanded and that was through just the other people who were living in the building, and then eventually, you know, through work and, the local pub was great, you know, I remember going to the local pub across the road and they did have that sign, that, that sign, that [laughs], you know, the, the, the no dirty clothes, no blacks, no Irish kind of thing on the sign and that was like–

FR: Really?

MS: In the eighties, it was still there–

FR: Wow.

MS: It was still there, it was a real hardcore East End pub.

FR: I thought that would be down by now.

MS: No, it was there, the sign was there, cos it said no Irish on the door, so we kind of like, cos we weren't really sure, cos, cos–

FR: Are we Irish? [laughs]

MS: Cos, yeah, exactly, that is exactly it, cos we, we, cos we were, it was all this thing, it was like a comedy sketch, cos we were standing outside the door looking at each other going like, are we Irish, cos we, we, that's how, that's how pathetic it was like, we didn't actually know what we were because we'd spent a little bit of time, you know, we'd been there for a few weeks and everyone just considered us, you're just, oh you're Irish from the first, from when we stepped off the coach at Victoria coach station it was like, you know, you're just Irish that's it and so, but yeah, but inside we thought we weren't, but then again we had this kind of like, are we, are we not, we just didn't know like, had we been lied to all our lives and then you could see this sign, it's like, no Irish like, well, like, and so I can't remember who did, but I just like, I think I stuck my head in and I walked in and I said are we okay to come, it was the stupidest thing I said to them [laughs], are we okay, I'm here with my friends, are we okay to come in, we're from Northern Ireland, is that okay. I know it sounds really dumb, right, but like, we just didn't know, because it was a real hardcore East End pub, you know, it wasn't like, it was a nice pub, but it was your proper kind of East End like, proper *Eastenders* TV show kind of pub, you know, it was full of great characters, but really wonderful, warm, kind and very, very welcoming people, I mean, there was a lot of times I'd spend there like, evenings like, from in the early months, even when I first got my job and my friends were not getting jobs and they weren't very happy, so I wasn't very happy cos they wanted to leave and I didn't want them to leave and so there was a few kind of like, drunken nights and like, not feeling very happy in the pub drowning my sorrows a bit and you know, the [pauses], the owners of the pub just looked after me, you know, they fed me and they carried me home across the road to the building, literally like, would take me home cos I was like, I wasn't capable of doing it, they looked after you basically, so, but yes, so, sorry the original question was about not going back, is that right?

FR: Yeah, it was just about sort of why you think you weren't, you didn't go back.

MS: Yeah, I just, I just think I, I think going back to what I was saying before, it was about that realising the potential of this place, the things that I had missed out and that, that there was nothing there for me back in that place, there was just nothing there for me, and it kind of had, it just felt like an enormous disappointment, and then I also, and this is probably something that I did feel guilty about this for a long time, I don't anymore, but I did for a long time that I, but it's only on reflection that I realise that I, perhaps I felt a little bit, that I was more worldly-wise and my eyes were opened a little bit more to, to more sort of like, a bigger world of all these possibilities, diverse communities, that there was this big, massive, rich, wonderful place out there and it was call-, and you could go and live it and enjoy and take, make the most of it and that just felt like it was totally suppressed in Belfast and in Northern Ireland, you just, that opportunity wasn't even talked about, you couldn't stick your head above the parapet, you know, you couldn't, you couldn't be something different or, because you would draw attention to yourself and that's what you didn't do, you didn't draw attention to yourself, you went along with everything, you stayed in your area, you stayed in your box and you did your standard roles that you were supposed to do, you know, like, when I was growing up it was like, well, you know, you need to get yourself a trade, you need to have a trade, you know, you've got to be a builder or a plumber or a carpenter or an electrician or something like that, you had to have a trade, there was never any, any sense of anything outside that, there was never a sense of looking at anything bigger than that, and that's what I think I found most annoying.

FR: That kind of conformity.

MS: Yeah, that, cos that, that kind of, that just stopped, that, yeah, there was that lack of potential, that ability to try things out, to be an explorer, cos that's what I've always been, I've always just like, maybe a bit too headstrong, maybe a bit too, but I've always been someone who's pushed ahead, sleeves up and just tried something out and see what happens, and if it doesn't work then I'd do something else, there's no big disaster, it's an experience, I've learnt something, I've met some new people, I had, I've been to new places and I think that was probably evident in my kind of, you know, my kind of [pauses] being more verbal or more pushy about my original small group of friends moving to London, I was more of that, I was more of a protagonist than that I guess by trying to encourage them to go, I was a louder voice I suppose and I was probably the louder voice and I said let's just go and buy our tickets now, it's, just make it happen now, let's not dither because if we dither it's not going to happen, buy our tickets and that's it, so we all bought our tickets on the day, so I am, I've always been that kind of, not impulsive, thought things through in a sense, but, but wanted to go and explore and be adventurous, and Belfast just wasn't the place for that, Northern Ireland wasn't the place for that, there was too many other things going on.

FR: Yeah, no, that, that makes sense. I'd like to get into **[00:40:00]** sort of what happens after you get the job in London, but I just, before that I wanted to go back to, at the start of what you were saying there you said you felt guilty about that for a long time.

MS: Yeah, I felt–

FR: So what–?

MS: Well, just that guilt that I felt that I was now better than everybody else, and so then when I went back, when I did go back it just felt like it was a small world, and everyone had small ideas and small opinions and, they weren't very, they were very inward looking, very insular, so it was like, so you're standing at the borders of a country and you're always, you're always looking inward and dealing with things that were inside those borders and not putting into context with the greater sense of the world, and that's what really bothered me, I think that's what leaving really done for me, just that, that ability to put not only my own life, but just issues that were going on in the world into context of other issues that were going on in the world and just seeing how, you know, just having a broader view of things, being able to connect things together and understand that, you know, having that very sort of inward-looking view is really, it kind of goes back again to saying that when you have that inward-looking view it just kind of throws this big damp blanket over any potential to grow and develop and to be something that you want to be and to explore the world and to grow, you just can't, you're confined within these kind of very tight borders and then within those tight border, the border of a country, you're confined within the parameters of your, of your tribe as well, but, so I felt like, I did feel that guilt looking back that I felt that I was more worldly-wise than people, when I was talking to people I got, when I was back in Belfast, travelling back I would get, I think I would get quite frustrated, I almost felt like I was dumbing down and that was a real arrogance, I felt I was being, looking back on it I was being really arrogant then and I shouldn't have, you know, I shouldn't have felt like that, I felt that was the wrong attitude to have, but yeah, that kind of, yeah, having a greater understanding of the world, it felt like your eyes were open, you know, it's like, wow, like, all this other stuff's going on in the world that I didn't know about, cos I was so kind of, we were so wrapped up in like, what was going on in our own little place, this little, this nondescript little corner which, yeah, which has slightly been forgotten about.

FR: And this thing of boundaries within boundaries I think that's interesting.

MS: Yeah, yeah, it just was, it just kind of becomes this shell and there's another shell, another shell and you got hemmed in, you just feel like, that you feel totally like, claustrophobic and then all of a sudden you're released into this enormous, you know, London was just this like, big wide explosion for me of like, stuff and like, I had crazy hedonistic times there and that was, that, you know, and you go back to Belfast and everything seems so repressed and like, undeveloped like, economically, culturally and people's viewpoints, they're sti-, they just felt so backward and I just felt like, I guess I felt elite and that's not, that's not a good, that's not, I don't say that with any sort of sense of pride, but that, that, you know, you know, there was lots of things going on and, you know, but for me, but I just felt like, maybe it falls, maybe it comes back to that sense of disappointment and bitterness and anger of like, of that lack of potential, that was not, that potential was not available in the place where I grew up, it was all controlled.

FR: I know absolutely what you mean. You had to, you have to move to try and reach that, yeah.

MS: Yeah, yeah.

FR: So going back to London, you moved to London with some friends, you got a job as a programmer and then what happened after that? You kept working in that field?

MS: Yeah, I kind of kept working in that field, in IT, sort of developed my career, got to a point where, I worked for various companies where, a pharmaceutical company, banks, but I kind of switched tack a little bit, it's all very geeky, boring, I was always a very geeky kid, you know, I was a total geek, you know, in my bedroom like, you know, building little circuit boards with my friends and we would just build stuff and we built our own little kit computer and things and, you know, in the early days, in the eighties when home computing was kind of going crazy and, yeah, so, and I was always programming my computer and I did sort of computer studies for my, for my HND, so I kind of kept through and I went through the progressive ranks and then we left the, we left the East End Mission and moved together as a small group to share a house and then eventually I ended up like, in the late nineties, yeah, I think it was very late nineties, going freelance and so I became a freelance consultant and [pauses] what was interesting was I started working, freelance was great because I, it kind of, again, it was just me branching out and deciding that I didn't want to work for anybody else, I want to do my own thing, I know I've got these skills and I know that people want them and I know I work hard and people know that, and the IT industry, although it's big in London, people get to know you and they ask for you by name and so I know I could do that, and so I just branched out did my own thing and I was just doing this freelance consulting, this very sort of specific, high-end application that was becoming very popular, and so I took advantage of that and then over the years I did that for quite a number of years freelancing, but then started managing teams of people to do that. As I got older I got more skills and I would manage large teams of people to build enormous databases and information systems for companies to use to find out how well they're performing, all very dull, but what was really interesting was that when, although the systems were very kind of similar in what they did, it's when you're working with different commodities which was more interesting, so when you're working for a bank and you're [indecipherable] systems such as pensions statement or something, or there's an issue with somebody's, you know, fund or bond or something, it's not so interesting as when you're working for a movie company or a music company and you're looking at record releases and film releases and video sales and, so that's when things got much more interesting and, you know, when you were actually looking at different, in different businesses, so I worked in the music industry for a few years and the video and movie industry for a little while, but always behind the scenes, never in the kind of creative sense, but I was immersed in, I'd built up quite a group of friends who were creatives and so I was immersed in this kind of creative culture, but not being part of it, and I'd be like, you know, I would go with Warner Brothers, I had the occasional trip to L.A. and so you'd be on the movie lot and you could walk around the movie lot and you could, you know, there was like, a background artist there painting trees, you know [laughs], it was like, and you walk with my coffee going looking, and they were like, hi, how are you, like, hi, what are you doing, it was like, oh I'm painting the trees [laughs] and then do you want to see around the set, I'm like, okay, so like, show you around the set of some movie that they're making and like, and it's just like, it's so fake, it's just you, it really does open your eyes as to how, almost like, just so flimsy, the façade is flimsy and yet, and actually the actual sets themselves are not very convincing

to the naked eye, but on camera [laughs] they're so convincing, so yeah, so I, so they were really interesting times working and travelling with Warner Brothers, that was good, they were very good years, and yes, as I immersed, and then I had a great group of friends in London who were people who worked, who worked as writers and theatre directors and gallery people and artists and so I was immersed in that kind of culture and, but not making anything and eventually after a number of years and, I decided that I would just, I had enough of working in IT and I always had an interest in photography and had always been taking photographs so I decided to go and do a, stop work for three years and just do a degree in photography, so that was a big, enormous shift. So I was living in London, I had a house, I had a car, I had this kind of quite high-end life I suppose [laughs], being able to go to premiers of some movies and flying business class or first class to L.A. or to around Europe and, you know, it's really quite lovely, but very dull, very boring after a while and I was kind of losing the plot a little bit because I had, there's nowhere for me to go in the company, either move to another company or [pauses], or move to L.A., which was, you know, that was a potential I suppose, but not really anything that interested me, I just needed to change, and again, being that adventurous person I kind of **[00:50:00]** realised that I'd been doing this for so long and I got wrapped up in the money and all the things that I had, you know, at that point, at the point I left I'd stopped being freelance because the movie company offered me a proper contract and so, managing this big team of people and so like, I said yeah, let's do it, it sounds a great opportunity, but it wasn't really for me in the end, I couldn't really put my heart and soul into it, so I had lots of lovely things, a nice big house, a nice little sports car, beautiful boyfriend [laughs], it's ticking all those boxes, you know, all I needed was a pool in the back garden, a jacuzzi, a hot tub, you know, but yeah, I had all these things and it's like, and I just realised they're just all meaningless, they're just, I had some lovely art pieces and they were just all meaningless after a while and they just didn't have any value for me. I realised that value was somewhere else for me and so I needed to go and get that sense of enthusiasm that I had when I first moved back to London, from Belfast to London, and so I decided to do this degree in photography, so I did some night classes and one of the tutors helped me with my portfolio and I applied to Brighton cos it was the only place I wanted to go to do my BA, and my cousin had been and she said it was a great place, so I applied to this one place, determined this was the place I was going to get in and that was it, there was nowhere else it was going to happen, it's going to happen for me and, cos it was important for me to move away, I had to move somewhere else, that was a key as well.

FR: It's the kind of change you realise is lacking–

MS: Yeah, Brighton or Manchester or Liverpool or Glasgow, I had to move away, but I thought let's try Brighton that's the one place I want to go, and so I moved to, I got, I got, had my interview, portfolio was accepted, got a place, gave up the job, rented out the house, got rid of lots of stuff, and moved to Brighton and rented a flat and started my course, that was a big thing to do. But actually financially not such a big issue because, you know, people saying that's a very brave thing for you to do, I was like, well, actually like, no, like, emotionally yes, financially no, because that was okay, I had like, a house that was worth a lot of money, I had stuff that I could sell, I had money in the bank, you know, it was fine, financially I was quite a, you know, I was a student, but I was doing okay as a student [laughs].

FR: Yeah, that makes sense.

MS: And that was always the key thing like, I worked for this, I never felt guilty about that at all, and I worked for that, I worked hard for it and so like, these are things that I've got, so I need to start using these things now to enrich my life in different ways and to allow me to do the things that I feel that I, you know, that feel right at the time and if it works, it works, and if it doesn't then try something else.

FR: Yeah, that makes sense, and it's kind of maybe good then for the final third [laughs] of the interview to turn to the photography because I guess it's something I've been thinking about as we've been speaking is that it's striking that you moved to London, you kind of don't really go back to Northern Ireland, you were saying you sometimes don't even read the news from Northern Ireland, and when you start making photographs, at least recently from what I can see, Northern Ireland is kind of a presence there.

MS: Yes, yeah, yeah, I guess I think it's a, someone said to me, and this is the best description, I think it's an unrequited love affair and the unrequitedness kind of flips, sometimes–

FR: That's what I was going to ask, in which direction?

MS: But it flips, it's kind of, it, it flips, and sometimes I love it, it doesn't love me back and sometimes it loves me and, yeah.

FR: That's beautiful, that's a really good [indecipherable].

MS: And, but I do tend to get, when I've tra–, go back there, I do tend to get disappointed, there's something that always happens that disappoints me. I'm having a great time, maybe I'm there for like, a few days and I'm meeting some friends and there's something happens around me or I see something on a wall or there's an incident and, and, I, I just feel disappointed, that just, I, cos I'm like, wow, it's changed, it's amazing, it's really moved on now and then something happens, just reminds me actually, it's, the underbelly of it's still the same.

FR: That's really interesting.

MS: So when I started off doing the photography at Brighton, my first two years, there was, I would totally refuse to make any work about Northern Ireland at all, and my tutors were really pushing me to do it cos they seen all this cultural baggage there, the things I needed to explore, get off my chest and I just totally refused to do it, point blank and we were having these very pointed conversations about it and I just like, totally, and the more I said no, the more they realised that it's something I needed to do. I'm like, well, I'm just not doing it, just refused to engage with it, there's bigger things in the world than that place, it was like, I'm not going to be defined by that place and where I come from and also because I kind of looked at what had been done before and like, I have to like, compete with like,

some very high-end photographic artists who'd made all the work that you, that I, that you could ever make about the place–

FR: [laughs] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS: Like, well, how do I compete with this, you know, I need to f–, I need to be very clever and find another angle, you know, and that just seemed to be too contrived and I didn't, too clever, let's be clever and find a clever way around it and, well, so yeah, so it took a long time for me to actually, so my final year project was basically, it was quite naively, I kind of, my little strap line was, it was a search for a lost cultural identity, and so it was, it was called *I Have Troubles*, in little sort of like, square brackets, dot, dot, dot, I can't remember what that's called, name for it.

FR: Ellip, ellip, ellipsis?

MS: Yeah, with a dot, dot, dot in the middle, so there was like, this kind of missing, there was this kind of miss-, it just said I had Troubles, I have Troubles, that was the name of the project and it was just the bottom line was a search for a lost cultural identity, and so I made this effort to my final year project to, I travelled back a lot and I would just, I just, I defined these kind of six things or six areas, I think it was six, that I wanted to explore and I would photograph in and around those kind of areas, all black and white, all on film, all very clichéd documentary style, cos that's what I wanted the look to be, and that was the first project I made and after that I kind of sort of, yeah, things kind of, yeah, didn't quite carry on in that vein, I tried to do other things that didn't quite work and eventually I went back to making work about Northern Ireland, I was making work on the fringes of it I suppose. I found this place in upstate New York called Ulster county, and so upstate New York there's a county called Ulster county and oddly I think it's, it's, I think it's bordered by Green county and Orange county, honestly you couldn't write it any better, it's really great, it's great, there's a Green County, Orange County and Ulster, I think Ulster, and actually in Ulster county there's Woodstock, actually the 1960s Woodstock is in Ulster county, but it's a great place, so I thought I'll go there and I'll make a project there because it's like, there must be something that, that connects like, why's it called Ulster county, and there is, there's a history behind that, there's a legacy, there's the Earl of Ulster or whatever it is, at the time or he was like, he was like, the main conqueror of there, he owned all the land and, you know, so there's a history there, I can't remember it off the top of my head, but there is a connection to why it's called Ulster county, so I went there and I made some pictures and that didn't really work out well, but I met some amazing people and had ended up having like, a two-month residency there a couple of years later, and so I kind of felt quite bonded to the place, but also quite surreal when you're looking around and you're seeing all these kind of properties which have the name Ulster on them like, you know, Ulster, even Ulster Street or a bank called Ulster Savings and Loans, it's like, and it's all these kind of, you know, very odd to see that, and then with American cars and accents and and just those kind of cultural references like the fire hydrants and the phone boxes and things like that there are all very different and, so yeah, so, so yeah, and then much more recently [pauses] all the work's really been about, and much more politicised as well, which is quite unusual, I never, I just kind of slipped into that and actually I didn't think of myself as a political artist and I still don't, but it's been a label that's been given to me and I haven't really refuted it though

I don't think I kind of call myself a political artist, but the work is about much more than politics and [pauses] yeah, that's where I am now, I don't know [laughs], is that–?

FR: Do you think that doing the work has changed the way you feel or think about Northern Ireland, I guess that's what I'm interested in. That, what you were saying about going back and having this sense of it having changed and then there's disappointment, I think is really–

MS: Yeah, I think it was coming to terms, I think that's with age as well, you do tend to come to terms with like, a lot more about who you really are and your attitudes to yourself and to other people and to the world around you, and you kind of become more, because you've got that history and you can think about what you've done in the past it, it's a, I think that reflection for me is, was important, that kind of looking **[01:00:00]** back and kind of thinking about [pauses], about my experiences of growing up there and my engagements with Northern Ireland, with the years while I was living in England. [pauses] So I think it was, for me it was, it's more about, maybe it was a reaching out, maybe it was me trying to connect again in some way, but also it was, it was, I guess in some way it's me becoming more involved with what's going on there and highlighting and having the sort of artist's voice that I can maybe say things a bit more explicitly or blatantly than maybe other people can't, or maybe they're a bit more poetic and they cause people to stop and think, so they're not about any one particular, any one particular voice, it's kind of a universal voice, these are, these are problems that are universal problems, so, you know, and I can, and really in the way I've kind of positioned myself, the way I kind of talk about myself is like, I'm interested in conflict, but the conflict of identity, conflict of cultures, conflict of politics and that's the conflict that I'm interested in, the conflicts of identity primarily like, and what happens when, when those conflicts arise and like, and just highlighting some of those things, to say look how ridiculous this is, I mean, like, how do we ever get to these points like, how does this happen like, like, just pull it all back to a base, the common forms, who we are, we're human beings like, and we all see and feel and love and desire and cry, and we all have these kind of common factors all around us, and so I think it's important that we kind of pull people back to those common denominators, which we seem to have forgotten, and move away from the kind of intolerance and bigotry, you know.

FR: It's really interesting. It seems like it goes back to that move to London and this kind of multicultural, but universal, theme.

MS: Yeah, yeah, it's kind of, I think there's, there's all those things get, you know, when you start, yeah, when you think about it in that way, yeah, you can see that, that those kind of learnings have come, they've kind of stuck with me, those kind of things have really, you know, yeah, I've clung on to those I think a lot, and I'm seeing, maybe I'm seeing, trying to to see Northern Ireland in that way and to get other people to see the same, in the same way as well, to see with common eyes instead of those kind of bigoted sort of one-sided eyes.

FR: Do you still have friends and family in Northern Ireland?

MS: Yeah, my brother, sister, mum and dad are still there and their siblings, so like, uncle, and so I've still got a couple of friends which I still see, one of my university friends who

came to London, one of the original group, but then went back, everybody left apart from me, I think there might be one, one other person still here, I'm not sure, he might have gone back now, but pretty quickly within the first six or eight months everyone left.

FR: Really, as quickly as that? Wow.

MS: Yeah, probably in the first eight months I think, no actually that's wrong, eight months that's wrong, it'd be in the first, so one, two, two people left in the first six months and then I think there was three of us left and I think we hung on maybe for another, maybe a year or two, a couple of years I think, yeah, a couple of years.

FR: And they all moved back to the North?

MS: Yeah, I think there's one who didn't, me and one other stayed and sort of built our careers here.

FR: That's interesting.

MS: Yeah, built our careers here, and by that time I'd made lots of other English friends and sort of friendship groups that moved on and shifted and–

FR: Yeah, but you stayed in touch a little bit with some of those people?

MS: Yeah, yeah, there's one person I, we also meet up every time I go back home, and she's married now, she has a family and we, it's just like, we're just a very tightly bonded friendship, a really, really good friendship, and then my childhood friend who my, who I grew up with, we were kind of like brothers I suppose, his mum and my mum grew up together, so like, and we lived beside each other when we were growing up in Belfast, and so we've always been friends, so I've got those two little sort of friendship groups there, and then people that I've met in Brighton who've been Northern Irish and have moved back, I would meet them as well, so I have those kind of connections and so I'd go and meet them and we would, you know, we would, it's quite odd because like, there's a real different, what I find is there's a really, there's a big difference still in talking to someone who has, from Northern Ireland, who has lived away for a long period of time, or if it's for a number of years, and then moved back again, there's a difference between talking to that person than there is between talking to someone who's never lived and experienced life outside of Northern Ireland, even though they're educated, and even though they're educated and culturally aware there's a real, I can't put my finger on what it is, but there's just a nuance of of their attitudes, their language, the way they sp–, the way they position issues and talk about the world and it's just, it's different.

FR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS: It's more open and, yeah.

FR: I can, I can see that. I think, to be honest, we've pretty much covered it. I guess in closing, first of all is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to talk about, or anything that comes to mind?

MS: Not really, I don't think so, I mean, covered where I'm from, there is a lot stuff and I ramble a lot, I know.

FR: No, it's great, it's great.

MS: It's kind of like, yeah, I always apologise to my students in advance cos like, it's just like, it's like, this is what you get like, like, you'll get some old gems, you've just got to like, bear with me and I'll get there, you know, I promise you this is going to be good, but you just kind of have to like, like, stay to the end, it'll all happen, you know, you'll learn something, it's always like, there's a reveal somewhere, so I think we've–

FR: I think that's perfect for oral history, that's what, yeah.

MS: Yeah, good.

FR: And then the other question I guess is looking back, are there any kind of moments or periods that seem particularly important to you in that kind of migration experience?

MS: The experience of moving?

FR: Yeah.

MS: I think the, I think the, I think [pauses], nothing that's like, eye-openingly like, I think for me the one of the, I remember getting off the coach at Victoria coach station with my friends and, in London, and the thing that hit me was the smell, I just couldn't get over the smell of the place, I couldn't breath.

FR: A bad smell?

MS: Yeah, the city, the stench of the city, I just, it just overwhelmed me, I couldn't like, how did people live with this, it wasn't because I was in a coach station, there was fumes everywhere, it was just that it was the city and stuff, I could smell the city, it was a very odd experience just to have and it was the weirdest smell ever.

FR: It's quite a visceral–

MS: Yeah, it was like, woah, I just, yeah, yeah, it felt very tight-chested, and then going to the underground for the first time and the first other Irish person that I met, so we got picked up at the coach station, our friends, a friend of ours took us to the tube station, got us tickets and, you know, we got on a tube train, which was the weirdest experience obviously.

FR: [laughs] Yeah, of course.

MS: Never been on a train, a metro in my life and so, but it was my first encounter with another Irish person was on that train and the carriage was kind of empty and he was sitting very sort of spread-legged, slumping down in the seat, drunk, I mean, really, just totally battered. He had workmen's clothes on, I would assume he was working on the work on the building sites, and he heard us talking and he started striking up a very drunk conversation with us, but all he could say was I can't read nor write, but I can drive a tractor [pauses], that was my first interaction–

FR: That was your first–

MS: With another Irish person in London, and I was like, and I actually thought well, shit, is this what's going to become of me, but, you know, I can't read nor write, but I can drive a tractor, and I'll always remember that phrase, always remember that phrase, I can't read nor write, but I can drive a tractor, and that was the only thing he could say, he just said it over and over again [laughs].

FR: [laughs] Different layers of aggression I guess, isn't it?

MS: It's weird, it's like, okay, this is, like, it's almost like, someone's like, you know, waving a finger at you saying like, just be, this is what you could be, just like, don't go there, just like, you know, you know, it just felt like this is the, the lower end of everything, just like, stay on the straight and narrow, work hard, do your thing, you know, that, the old-fashioned Protestant work ethic, which I don't know if it's a thing or not, but it's like, it's, you know, because it infers that, that someone who's not Protestant does not have a strong work ethic, so it's inherently racist I think as well, it's like, so, but, but, there is a very, but I was always brought up with that very strong work ethic.

FR: Yeah, well, you mentioned your dad.

MS: Yeah, always, brought up with that very strong, you do stuff, you don't lend or borrow, you do things by yourself, you know, like, for me like, applying for an Arts Council grant is like, I just don't do it, you know, I'd rather fund it myself [laughs] like, I don't do that like, I can't, it's just not my thing, and so you make it happen yourself, in your own way.

FR: It's that thing about possibilities like, in London you feel **[01:10:00]** all these possibilities, but there are bad possibilities as well, right, which is kind of the figure of that guy, there's possibilities for it to go really well, but there's also these kind of new possibilities for failure or whatever, that you might not have in Northern Ireland.

MS: Yeah, yeah, totally, and that's, yeah, I think that's, that's a good way to put it, it's like, there are, there are possibilities and they are, they are your either, there's a scale.

FR: [laughs] That's a good way to put it, yeah.

MS: Yeah, and you find your way through that and sometimes you choose the bad ones and you learn from it, and you choose the good ones, you learn from that and sometimes the

ones you think are the good ones aren't actually the good ones and so that's just called living, isn't it, and like, you know, it's not, but I always tell my students it's not about, they get overwhelmed with all the potential possibilities about making artwork, it's like, well, it's not about the potential, it's not about the possibilities, it's about making a decision like, so you've got all these possibilities and there's a myriad of, you don't know which to take, but because you don't know what's going to happen, well, like, no matter which one you choose you don't know what's going to happen, so the outcome's the same no matter which, no matter which route you take, so like, just take one, it's like, it's not set in stone, try this one and if it doesn't work out you've still got time to try something else.

FR: And the outcome's always uncertain, no matter what you do.

MS: Yeah, it's the same outcome, isn't it, it's like, yeah, it's like, well, then just choose one, it's like, why are, why are you beating yourself up, it's not like you know if I choose this one it's going to be rubbish like, then, well, you're not going to choose that one, but that one's a good one, so then choose that one, but they're all, I don't know what's going to happen.

FR: They all might be good, they all might be bad.

MS: Yeah [laughs], that's called learning, you see.

FR: That's life [laughs].

MS: Yeah, try something, learn from it, do it differently the next time.

FR: Alright, thank you very much Martin.

INTERVIEW ENDS