

ART

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Ellie Harrison: The Glasgow Effect

I agree with almost everything I have read and heard from Ellie Harrison (Profile *AM346*). She is passionate about inequality, climate change and artists' roles in society. Despite this, like many, I received her project *The Glasgow Effect* with irritation, but as I understood more about her intentions, I felt increased affinity with the work. The book charts Harrison's experience of organising a project – backed by Creative Scotland funding – in which she committed to stay in the city of Glasgow for a year, travelling only by foot, bicycle and public transport. Harrison's concept responded to a report on the effects of poverty in the city coupled with her concerns over climate change; the project was intended to highlight her criticisms of national austerity and Glasgow's neoliberal culture-led regeneration.

Harrison's announcement of the project was met with public anger, vitriol even (*Artnotes AM303*), which affected her deeply. The artist made herself vulnerable by creating a personal project about one of the most complex and sensitive topics in contemporary Britain – inequality. She tripped up in underestimating how firmly she would be seen as part of the enemy clan of liberal elites. Class and privilege are complicated. Artists have cultural capital but little income; they are wrung dry and others benefit. I agree with Harrison that we need to talk about these things more. We also need increased nuance. Harrison's work was seen in the context of the extreme poverty around her, which is a touchstone and driver for the work. She could at times write with more self-awareness and qualify some of her experiences and claims further. **W**

The book has three sections. The first, 'A Brief History of Neoliberalism', intertwines her life story with analysis of recent political history. The way that Harrison picks her way across references, with the conceptual artist Douglas Heubler alongside former prime minister Gordon Brown, can be enjoyable. While parts are incisive, with theories explained simply, this section is over-ambitious and not well constructed: she uses too much detail, tries to do too much, and things get a bit boring and cloudy. I understand Harrison's attempt to make big topics feel less abstract, but her use of personal narrative feels clumsy. Instead of making the ideas more relatable, it closes things down. I want her to simplify and distil. When I think about the conditions that led to this book, I see that its excess of information and overly broad scope probably come from the artist's sense of anxiety and defensiveness.

Section two, 'The Glasgow Effect', is where the book gets going. Here Harrison scrutinises the background of the project, the haranguing she received on social media and her experience of undertaking the work. For me this section should have constituted the whole book. The discussion about how the social-media berating affected her health and emotions is one of the most timely aspects of this narrative. After posting a brief introduction to the project, Harrison was surprised (naively) by the vitriol aimed at her on social media and the immediate take-up by local and national press. She jokes that this could be seen to provide the engagement and impact around her project. Ten pages of the comments she received are followed by analysis.

There is a significant difference between choosing to

live in a certain way to highlight inequality and living in a certain way with no agency because of inequality. Although she initiated the project with this in mind, Harrison's original post announcing it did not communicate this, and I am not sure she reflects deeply enough on this in the book. Alongside comments about where the art is in this project, responses to her work highlight perceptions of artists as money-wasting privileged people who don't contribute to society. Because of her class background, occupation and Englishness, Harrison is seen as an outsider in Glasgow and Scotland, despite having lived in the city for more than seven years at the point of announcing the project. The discussion this raises about belonging and community is insightful.

One of those to lambast Harrison was rapper Darren McGarvey (Loki), whose treatise *Poverty Safari* was prompted in part by *The Glasgow Effect*. His book relates intimate experiences with systematic issues through angry, taut prose. After reading more about *The Glasgow Effect* and taking part in a public discussion with Harrison, McGarvey realised that her project, although articulated in very different ways from his own, was coming from the same political position. New connections and understandings were forged in the face of the divisive politics of austerity which aims to pit us against one another and corrode analysis and agency.

Ultimately, *The Glasgow Effect* was successful in fostering debate. Harrison's commitment to reflecting on and sharing her experiences is impressive. It is clear that the artist needed to write this book to move beyond the distress she experienced, and despite it being sometimes turgid and occasionally overlong in places, it is important she did. The project raises many of the most pressing topics of the day and it seems clear that Harrison will use her experiences to fuel future works and forge relationships through an intersectional approach. I see it as a timely call for compassion and connectivity.

Ellie Harrison, *The Glasgow Effect: A Tale of Class, Capitalism and Carbon Footprint*, Luath Press, 2019, pb, £9.99, 978 1 912147 96 0.

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Ellie Harrison speaking at the Glasgow Film Theatre about *The Glasgow Effect* in 2017