

## CURVES AND CONCRETE – v4

### MAIN CONTRIBUTORS:

**Murray McCormick** – veteran Scottish skateboarder

**Ralph Gilhooly** – veteran Scottish skateboarder, knew Iain well

**Iain Borden** – professor of architecture and urban culture at University College London; academic; skateboarder

**Sandy Urquhart** – Steve’s dad / Iain’s brother

**Toby Paterson** – artist, skateboarder (Glasgow)

**Dawn McDowell** – artist / historian

**Simon Montgomery** – architectural historian / artist

**Sam Vettese** – Senior Lecturer in Applied Art and Design, Edinburgh Napier University

**Nick Devison** – artist, printmaking specialist, Principal of Leith School of Art

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**R3 INTRO: Now on BBC Radio 3, our Sunday Feature takes us to Livingston, in West Lothian. There, the skateboard park is of major significance – not just architecturally and culturally, but also very personally, for the radio producer Steve Urquhart. This is: CURVES AND CONCRETE.**

### 0’00” PRE-MONTAGE

**SCRIPT (Livingston): My Uncle Iain, Iain Urquhart – I was only 8 when he died – he was just 44, he was younger than I am now. I do remember him, I knew he was an architect, I knew he was unconventional, and artistic... but it wasn’t until recently, I realised he’d created this, here in Livingston, “Livi”. And, only now am I finding out how important it was. And still is!**

**MUSIC: Roy Ayers – We Live In Brooklyn Baby (instrumental)**

### 0’30” OPENING MONTAGE

FX SKATEPARK THROUGHOUT

**MURRAY:** You've got to be tough to skate this place! It's pretty savage.

**DAWN:** Oh my God – look, there's an older guy here, there's all kinds of people here. Young people, older people, grannies watching.... people having a great time!

**NICK:** ...fearless young kids here, aren't they?!

**RALPH:** People come from all over the world to skateboard Livingston.

TOBY: It sits within the psyche of – not just Scottish skateboarding, but kind of world skateboarding.

DAVID: If you can skate Livi, you can skate anywhere.

MURRAY: If you can skate this, you could skate anywhere, really.

RALPH: Even Tony Hawk says it's one of the best parks in the world. So if he says it, that's good enough for me!

ARCHIVE: “A new town here – pivoting on the old village of Livingston.”

TOBY: The further away we get from its construction, the more visionary it seems.

### 1'30" CLIPS – CREATIVITY / ART

FX SKATEPARK

IAIN: Skateparks are community spaces. They build social cohesion, and they build entrepreneurship, and they promote creativity. They do all kinds of things.

FX SKATEPARK

TOBY: Art comes out of these places. They're culturally significant. And the older they get the more culturally significant they are.

### 1'55" LINK / WHY IS THIS SUBJECT IMPORTANT?

**SCRIPT (Livingston): I'm not a skateboarder – never have been, never will be! But I find skateparks captivating, and not just because of my family connection to this one in Livingston. It's their vastness – the curves, the colourful graffiti, the bold concrete permanence... the artistic design. How they sit in the landscape. How they've been shaped by their surroundings. And, how they shape their communities, the people who use them, who in this case have used them for decades.**

DAWN: The skatepark was built in the early eighties, it might've been the last piece of “public benefit” built for Livingston New Town. And then, what you get after that is private enterprise coming in, and only building and developing where there would be private profit. So, I mean, it is an incredible place to look back and say that all of this stuff was built for everybody's benefit.

### 2'55" MURRAY + RALPH INTROS

MURRAY: I'm Murray McCormick. I'm one of the veteran skaters on the Scottish scene. Because I'm 55 now. And when Livingston was built, talking about 1981, I was around about 15, 16. And this was like a godsend. This was... paradise! (laughs) Brand new, mint condition, state of the art skatepark, and really just a bus journey away for me, easier to get to than Glasgow. Absolute heaven! (laughs)

RALPH: My name is Ralph Gilhooly. I was a bicycle ride away from Livingston Skateboard Park when they built it. So for me, I was just, I was made. I could finish school, go home, get my skateboard, be on the bicycle and be at the skateboard park in 15 minutes.

### 3'45" WHY IS LIVI SO GOOD

MURRAY: It's such a good park.

STEVE: Why? Why is it such a good park?

MURRAY: In scale and design and shape, it is still better than probably a lot of parks that are being built today. That's thanks to Iain, the architect and designer.

### 4'05" UK SKATEPARKS BEFORE LIVI

MURRAY: Before this, all the parks that were built in the seventies – Glasgow Kelvingrove, and the ones in England – there was no skaters involved in the design, I doubt, very much of those parks. And they were kind of lumpy, like big, really high walls with flat banks and hardly any transition.

### MUSIC: Boards of Canada – Roygbiv

RALPH: Nobody had ever dissected what makes a skateboard park work in Britain, full-stop. Nobody. There was none. Knowing Iain – I think he thought to himself, I'm going to build a park that is, has got the perfect bits for everybody.

### 4'50" WHO WAS IAIN URQUHART

RALPH: Iain Urquhart was an architect who worked for the Livingston Development Corporation. And Iain had a dream about building the ultimate skateboard park, 40 years ago. Probably most people thought he was mad, and 40 years later people are saying he's a genius.

FX SKATEBOARDING... MUSIC UP

**SCRIPT (studio): My own memories of my Uncle Iain are: Bohemian, artistic, bit of a hipster, complete with beard... not like my Dad at all. Although he's pretty cool in his own way...**

5'30" SANDY – MAIN

SANDY: I'm Sandy Urquhart, I'm Iain's younger – young brother.

STEVE: And my dad!

SANDY: And your dad! That's right!

SANDY: Iain... didn't always have a beard, did he?! But I can only picture him with a beard! (laughs) I just can't picture him clean-shaven actually! What was he like? He was slightly taller than me, not much. He wore glasses, like myself, from quite a young age. His hair was curly. And he was left-handed...

STEVE: Like you?

SANDY: Like me.

STEVE: Is that unusual for siblings?

SANDY: Well, our mother said that I copied him, I wasn't really left-handed. She said! (laughs) So what else can I tell you about him? Well... he was into sport, to a degree... but he went climbing. And he spent a lot of time in Glencoe. Many weekends in the year, no car, thumb a lift up to Glencoe on a Friday night and back on a Sunday night.

SANDY: You could describe Iain as... a little bit eccentric. In fact, probably more than a little bit eccentric! When he was in Glasgow, at the Glasgow School of Architecture, he took part in the students' rag weeks. And one particular rag week, he had climbed up the corner of what, at the time, was a bank, it was in Buchanan Street.

*FX GLASGOW BUCHANAN STREET 1960s*

SANDY: And he had written a slogan quite high up above the ground. And the only reason we got to know about that was, on television the following night, there was an item on which the BBC interviewer was talking to the bank manager, shaking their – looking up and shaking their heads, and wondering how somebody had managed to climb up there, because it looked well nigh impossible. Unknown to them, the perpetrator of the crime – i.e. Iain – was standing behind the bank manager, and appeared on the film! (laughs) And that was the sort of thing he did!

MUSIC: King Curtis – Beach Party (playing on wireless)

SANDY: Iain was very much a night owl when it came to work, we had a room in the house – it should have been the dining room, but it was commandeered by Iain who had this big drawing board in the middle of the room. And he did a lot of his work on that drawing board. He worked long into the night. Cause his attention to detail was incredible.

*MUSIC DOWN*

SANDY: We lived at time, place called Shawlands, in Glasgow – Ravenswood Drive, in Waverley Park.

STEVE: My next bit in the documentary will be me standing outside that house, saying something! I don't know what, yet...

SANDY: Oh, right! Well, the window – the downstairs window that looks out onto that cul de sac, is the room where his drawing board was.

STEVE: Right.

SANDY: So you can say – I am standing outside of the window of the room where Iain did his student drawings when he was in Glasgow. (laughs) (FADES)

8'50" LINK

**SCRIPT (Ravenswood Drive): I'm standing outside the window of the room where Iain did his student drawings when he was in Glasgow. He completed his studies in Edinburgh, at the College of Art – and it was in 1970 that he joined Livingston Development Corporation, to design recreational buildings and leisure facilities for the New Town. And in the years that followed, he kept an eye on this thing called "skateboarding", and the emerging skate parks.**

9'15" IAIN BORDEN – MAIN

IAIN: I'm Iain Borden. My day job is I'm Professor of Architecture and Urban Culture at University College London, and I've been a skateboarder on and off for 40 odd years. We're at Crystal Palace in Southeast London. In particular, we're at Crystal Palace Skatepark, which opened about two years ago. This is the first actual skate park to be built here, but it's always been, Crystal Palace has always been one of the original homes of skateboarding.

FX – CRYSTAL PALACE SKATEPARK

IAIN: This is the pool. And it looks like a swimming pool! People come here and say, is it a swimming pool? It's got brightly coloured blue and white tiles at the top of the wall. And it's got "coping", which is like you'd find in a swimming pool. And I guess if you blocked up the drain, we could fill it up in water and swim in it one day, but I don't think we ever will!

STEVE: And Iain, there's a direct link between skateparks and swimming pools?

IAIN: Yes, that's right. Up until the middle of the 20th century, all swimming pools were effectively rectangular. And then a famous Finnish architect called Alvar Aalto, who was known for producing a kind of organic version of modernist architecture, designed a house called the Villa Mariah in Finland, and he designed this kind of amoeba-shaped swimming

pool – much publicised in the architectural press. That pool was then copied by the designers of a famous house in America, called I think the Donnell Garden. And that becomes associated with luxury living. And then when people build lots of much cheaper, more affordable houses in suburban tracks across California in the 1970s, it's often that kidney-shaped, amoeba-shaped, rounded swimming pool that they copy.

## FX SKATEPARK

IAIN: In the mid seventies, there were a couple of big droughts in California. Which meant a lot of the swimming pools were empty, people couldn't put water into them. And somebody at some point realised that if you go fast on a skateboard, you can ride up the walls of a swimming pool – a bit like a fairground ride, or on a wall of death, riding their motorcycle right at the top. And you can hit the top of the pool. You can ride over the tiles, which makes this amazing kind of shuddering noise. You can grind your truck, which is the suspension of the skateboard, against the stone coping at the top. And you can even fly out into the air, turn around in the air, and drop down again. And so swimming pools become this amazing terrain for skateboarding all the way through the 1970s. Then when skate parks were built, the first skate parks were built in '77, '78, they very quickly realized that these swimming pools were a good prototype for what they should build. So then when people in Britain are looking to build their skate parks, and they're often looking to America for prototypes and precedents as to what makes a good skate park, then they copy what they see there. And the people that designed Livingston – Iain Urquhart – that was an inspiration for Livingston. So in effect, Livingston is a backyard Californian swimming pool that has been transplanted and moved over to the sunny delights of Scotland!

## MUSIC: War – Good, Good Feelin'

## 13'00" AMERICA TRIP

**SCRIPT (studio): In the late 70s, Iain and his wife Dee – that's my Auntie Dee, who herself was really into skateboarding – they were organising clubs, competitions, and events for young local skateboarders. The two of them went off on a factfinding mission to North America, visiting skateparks, meeting riders, just immersing themselves in that world... then returning to Livingston with Iain's sketchbook full of plans and his head full of ideas.**

RALPH: When they came back, they got us all together and said, we've been to America. And, we've got super eight film. And we all went, yeah great! They had a projector, and played us all their Super 8 film. It was just... mind blowing. We didn't realise how rubbish we were. (laughs) We watched, you know, Tony Hawk and Steve Caballero, and all those guys. And then we rewound it back and watched it again and again, and we just oohed and aaahed... and... Iain said – let's build something to compare with them.

IAIN: I think Livi is the first skate park where you've got a skilled designer, who's visited skate parks in the UK and in America, and who's spoken and conversed with and collaborated with lots of local riders. And that's when the formula for what makes a good skate park comes together. And Livingston's the first to do that.

## 14'25" LIVI – ORIGINAL PLANS

FX PAPER RUSTLING

IAIN: This is the only time I've ever seen proper architect's drawings for a skatepark from the 1970s. I suspect most skate parks were built on a much more rule of thumb. And if you look at, I've got some of the original drawings... FLICKS THROUGH PAPER... have you seen these?

STEVE: No I haven't seen these! Oh, wow...

IAIN: One of them shows the precise design of this double bowl, including all the radiuses and dimensions, concave and convex, in a detail that you don't normally see – or I've never seen for any other skate park in the 1970s. Beautifully annotated. There's one particular section where Iain Urquhart, the architect, has taken enormous care to detail exactly where you might roll into the bowl, and show how you, by implication, how you might gain speed quickly, but not too fast. And there's a whole series of pretty detailed laying outs of radiuses, and setting out points, and depths, and so forth here, which is extraordinary.

## MUSIC: John Coltrane – Traneing In

## 15'45" BIG BOWL + TRANSITION MACHINE

**SCRIPT (Livingston): Iain Urquhart himself wrote in SKATELINE magazine, at the time... "The pride of the park must be the large DOUBLE BOWL designed to meet the needs of the most radical skate freaks. It comprises two interlocking bowls, like a figure of eight, both about 28 feet across, directly linked with the MAIN BOWL which is all of 11 feet deep, with sweeping walls rising from a gently radiused floor to a perfect grinding edge. The possibilities for dazzling new manoeuvres are endless. And the surface will be equal to – or even better than – the best to be seen anywhere!"**

MURRAY: The big bowl, that's the sort of intimidating part, but it's the jewel in the crown. Designed by Iain. And he – he designed a mechanism for getting the perfect curve all the way, round, the perfect circle. It's like a sort of medieval looking construction! Like, basically just a big wooden digging machine.

IAIN: The Livingston Transition Machine! It looks like a sort of medieval siege engine! It's a timber, right angled triangular frame, to the top of which is attached a swinging arm, to "shape out" the sides of the bowl. And on the end of it, it has a cutting blade, which is first used to kind of rough out the shape, and then is drawn back to produce a smooth finish, which is then hand finished off with a trowel. Actually, when they were building the main bowl, the main contractor decided actually, they didn't want to bother with this machine. And he insisted they did, and they walked off site...

RALPH: Now I remember being there... I watched them put the shotcrete in, the concrete stuff, and they were doing the trowelling, and Iain was sort of looking at it, and they weren't using the arm, and he could see it was all wrong, and he wasn't happy. And he jumped in! He took a trowel and he was just cutting it all off himself...

IAIN: Iain got down into the bowl and finished off the final shape of the double bowl, which is remarkable! That's an architect getting his hands properly dirty, building the skate park!

MURRAY: I've seen photographs of Iain up to his knees in wet concrete! Just so as they were getting it right. And the results... it's paid off.

FX – LIVI SKATEPARK

### 18'05" INTERLUDE – VOX POPS AT LIVI

KIDS: What are you recording? What's happening here?! What are you up to? Are you doing a recording?!...

STEVE: A radio feature. My uncle designed it, he was the architect who built this place...

KID A: It's good stuff he's done here, man... One of the best parks in Scotland, definitely, and this is five minutes away from my house, so it makes it great!

KID B: Tony Hawk rode here...

KID A: ...he was carving that big bowl...

KID C: It's brilliant for people that can just come down and see all your pals, it's all fun...

KID A: There's a good scene down here with the skaters, aye, everyone's friendly man...

KID C: It's like a wee second family, almost, everybody's nice, friendly, no-one's like you cannae do that... Cos I just started a month ago, and – the people over there, like I'm 13, and they'll be like, thirty! Older! And they'll help me. It's amazing!

FX – LIVI SKATEPARK

### 18'55" MONEY SPENT + AGAINST THE GRAIN

MURRAY: It's the best money ever spent, this place, for kids – generations of kids coming here for best part of 40 years, like, for free, looking after each other, looking out for each other...

MURRAY: It was odd, because the time this park opened, and the money that was spent on it, it was kind of going against the grain because the craze had definitely died. So...



STEVE: That's quite a big risk, particularly for young people, because this could have been like the least cool thing going. So this could have been a huge white elephant...

MURRAY: That's true! In terms of the times after the craze, '76, '77, everyone was skating, then it was – it was unfashionable in the 80s. And it's amazing how they got away with it and got the funding. But thank God they did! (laughs)

IAIN: I'm amazed that Livingston did get built. I'm amazed that the Livingston Development Corporation didn't pull the plug and say, what are we doing? Sinking all this money into a giant concrete hole in the ground, when skateboarding has, is dying? So I can only presume that Iain Urquhart, and Dee Urquhart, and all the other people responsible for getting it built, were incredibly successful in arguing that there were local riders, and that there was a certain sense of "build it and they will come", that there were still skateboarders – and they were right! But it must've been a gamble. But when it finally opened in 1981, it was this amazing skate park. It was one of the best skate parks that had ever been built.

#### 20'25" TOBY – MAIN

TOBY: The first time I saw images of it, of Livi, was in BMX Action Bike, which turned into Rad magazine. It was pre-graffiti, still pretty pristine looking, which at that point it would only have been, like 4 or 5 years old. And I was like – that's in Scotland? Wow! I think without realising it at the time, it fostered – you know, it was an absolutely extraordinary thing around which a scene of international significance was built.

#### MUSIC: Dinosaur Jr – Just Like Heaven

TOBY: My name is Toby Paterson, I'm an artist based in Glasgow, but grew up predominantly in this city as a skateboarder. And at the age of 46 I'm hanging on as a skateboarder by my fingertips! And intend to do so for the rest of my life.

**SCRIPT (Glasgow street): Toby Paterson sort of reminds me of my Uncle Iain – passionate about skateboarding, but also about architecture, and art, and design, and what skateparks should look like, and who they're for. It was not just at Livingston and other parks but also here, skateboarding on Glasgow's streets, that really steered his career.**

#### MUSIC FADES UNDER

TOBY: There were always like, you know, arty skater weirdos about here. And then as one comes into one's teenage years and something like skateboarding – or later teenage years – it becomes essentially your identity. But you start thinking, well, what am I going to do? You know what? Oh right. I've ended up at art school! But I'm still probably skating more than I'm doing at art school! And the two things gradually sort of come together, and you're already a skateboarder and you're slowly becoming an artist of some sort. And you think, well, what's my thing? What have I got to – how do I engage with the world? You know, I'd been interested in atmospheres and environments as a kid and was interested, like – why

does this place feel like this, as I was growing up. And then coming into something like skateboarding, quite literally bumping up against these spaces and against these forms and these materials and these textures, I started to think, well, why is all this like this? And then you raise your eyes and you actually look at the building that these spaces provide the setting for. And you think, well, where did this come from? What are the political and social tendencies that cause this to be like this? Like, why is a bit of public space in a social housing scheme in Glasgow, why is it different to, you know, the IBM building in Chicago? Well, let's have a think about that! And that's really the way that – I've now had 25 years of trying to work that out, and learn about the world by looking at and experiencing it spatially, I suppose. And very much, differently from an academic or an architect, subjectively as an individual artist. And as a skateboarder! Never good enough to be a skateboarder as a profession, but engaged with it, and just about good enough at being an artist to make a living!

**MUSIC: Gang Starr – Mass Appeal**

**23'40" TOBY ON M74 FLYOVER**

**SCRIPT (motorway): Much of Toby's work is inspired by concrete landscapes – he reimagines architectural spaces, often "unloved" and forgotten places. Glasgow has quite a lot of those, including here in the southside of the city, near to where my Uncle Iain grew up, and where I live now. Toby's part of a collective hoping to transform this bit of vacant land, underneath a motorway flyover.**

**MUSIC FADES UNDER**

TOBY: It would be – almost be like a spot that's tailored towards skateboarding and BMX and parkour and free running, for example, but be a genuine public space for all. We fervently feel it's an idea whose time will come, and will be a sort of 21st century version of what Iain Urquhart and everyone in Livingston achieved – this notion of a social condenser, almost, and a landmark.

**SCRIPT (studio): Until this point, neither Toby nor I realised just how close his vision is to what my Uncle Iain had in mind, forty years ago.**

STEVE: Have you seen the plans for Livingston?

**FX LEAFING THROUGH PLANS**

TOBY: They're beautiful drawings. I mean, they really are lovely, lovely artifacts in their own rights... This one, I don't really remember having looked at this one before, it's this extraordinary kind of retaining, essentially the outside wall. And this is where my wider architectural interests come in. It's the non-skateable bit. This was intended to function as a climbing wall, not that I've ever personally seen anyone climbing there. And I don't know how many climbers would enjoy climbing on a sort of concrete surface! But...

STEVE: Well, I think there's a couple of things to it. Iain was really into climbing, so that was part of it. The other bit is that this isn't just a skate park, this is a "sports landscape", which had a trim track. And, when you're trying to get this approved and trying to get funding, I think it's a lot easier if you say it's not just a skate park, it's all these other things as well!

TOBY: That is – that is fascinating! I mean, what it shows is that within our, beneath the M74, you know, there's nothing new under the sun! It builds our case – I mean, we need to pull in Livi as a sort of 40-year historical sort of precedent. To see Livingston Skatepark described by Iain Urquhart as a "sports landscape" makes perfect sense. You know, and – what's the most significant thing that came out of this sports landscape? The skate park! (laughs)

### 26'10" LIVI NEW TOWN – MAIN SECTION

**SCRIPT (Livingston): Livingston Skatepark was designed not just as part of a "sports landscape", but also within the context of a larger artistic environment. I'm on my way now to meet four artists who've been digging deep into the town's history, and its identity... and they're going to take me on a little tour.**

DAWN: We're friends, firstly, but artists, designers, and historians who just had an interest in what was left of the modernism that we could see in Livingston. I'm Dawn McDowell – I live near Livingston in a village called mid Calder. I've lived here for almost 20 years...

NICK: I'm Nick Devison. I'm an artist and I'm the principal of Leith school of art.

SIMON: I'm Simon Montgomery. I'm an architectural historian, working in the public sector with the historic environment and a part-time artist.

SAM: I'm Dr Sam Vettese, I am a lecturer and researcher at Edinburgh Napier University. I moved to Livingston New Town when I was two and a half. And I feel like it's really inspired my work since then.

### 27'15"

WALKING FX

SAM: When I was a really young kid, and we first moved here... I just thought everything was beautiful. I had that aesthetic already – I loved the cast concrete, I loved the colours, I loved the murals, I loved the paths... I just loved the way it had been planned.

STEVE: Did you get the sense that other people saw it in that way, and loved it like you did? Or were you –

SAM: No. I got a sense that nobody really felt – even my mum, mum and dad didn't really like it that much. But it started to get vandalized pretty much immediately. And ... I couldn't really understand why anyone would do that, (PLANE FX STARTS) but it was probably just

that, they thought about the aesthetic of the place or paternalistically thought how people should live, and the people that vandalized it were maybe bored, and didn't feel that way, didn't feel a sense of community, didn't think it was beautiful... (PLANE FX FADES OUT)

**ARCHIVE CLIP – FROM ‘LIVINGSTON, A TOWN FOR THE LOTHIAN’S’ at around 2’00”**

<https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/2219>

*ARCHIVE: “A New Town here would generate life for an area of some eighty square miles of Midlothian and West Lothian. An area far enough removed from Glasgow and Edinburgh to preserve its own local character – pivoting on the old village of Livingston, in the valley of the River Almond.”*

28’45”

WALKING FX

STEVE: What’s caught your eye over here?

DAWN: I’m really excited about this! Because, part of what’s left of the first ideas of the New Town designers and architects was about creating a place where people could be healthy and happy. And this is called the trim course. And you see there’s a sign, just underneath that brush, that says “JUMP”! But it’s about following – Sam has to tell you about this! (laughs)

SAM: This was built in the late 70s, and it was really hard going! It was maybe just pre- Jane Fonda workout... they really pushed you actually, with all the things – you had to pull yourself up, monkey bars... and then they would be quite modernist and “paternal”... it was pretty exhausting... but this is gorgeous! Look at that...

DAWN: They’re just like little street signs, tucked away...

SAM: It was laid out as a circuit...

STEVE: Did it go into the skatepark?

NICK: Well it’s interesting – if you just go around this bend, the skatepark is just there, isn’t it...

SAM: The trim course would be right into the skatepark...

STEVE: Absolutely! I want to look at the back of this wall – this is the climbing wall.

DAWN: There’s hooks there!

STEVE: Yeah, do you see them?

DAWN: And it's meant to look like rocks?

NICK: I like these impressions of feet in the concrete!

STEVE: I've never seen these before!

NICK: Aren't they amazing! They must have been put in there at the time, somebody having a bit of fun. I wonder if they're the people who built it? And here are some more...

STEVE: Now I'm thinking if these are my uncle's feet?

NICK: They could be! (laughs)

SIMON: They look deliberate...

NICK: It looks like a signature...

SIMON: ...definitely looks deliberate, yeah!

**MUSIC: Kick Push – Lupe Fiasco**

**30'35"**

FX – ENTERING SKATEPARK

SIMON: Well, it's amazingly big... just as a construction...

FX SKATEPARK

SIMON: I think what we're really fascinated with about New Towns, is the fact that they tried experimental ideas that somehow they got funding for. Which seems extraordinary.

NICK: The sheer scale of this place, if you think of it as an experiment, it's hard to imagine that now, that sense of ambition.

DAWN: The money for the new towns came from central government. So they got established, and this idea of paternalism was based on the fact that all this land could be purchased, for the public good. And, the value that would accrue, by developing this land, would be for the community. We're still benefiting from it now, we still enjoy what the original idea was all about.

FX SKATEPARK

SIMON: I was trying to think if there was any kind of architectural connection that we could make to the mainstream ideas of brutalism and expressionism and things like that. But it's kind of expressed in the way of a monument – that's how I feel – it has a monumental

quality, which maybe has a little bit of a sense of it being a sort of connection to the past and, and a sense of permanence...

NICK: ...it sort of sits in the landscape, doesn't it...

DAWN: ...and the idea of those bings. So, West Lothian was really characterised by the Shale bings...

SIMON: ...landscape forms, exactly...

DAWN: ...and the leftover, the spoil of mining, and the monuments of industry, that's right. And so, these curves in this landscape are sort of imitating what was there historically from all the industry of the past.

SIMON: I think there was a particular aesthetic that architects connected with, which was to do with the space race from the previous decade. And, there was a kind of idea that a lot of new buildings, public buildings would actually look like moon bases. And we've got some very good moon bases in Scotland – Carrbridge, Landmark visitors' centre at Carrbridge – was one of the best moon bases... it had walls that sloped in, flat roofed, round corners to the windows and doors – it had that, very much that Apollo space race aesthetic. And I'm absolutely sure that influenced everything about the environment that Iain Urquhart was working in.

33'00"

**SCRIPT (Livi): Livingston Skatepark is right by the River Almond – and dotted around the river, is one of the largest collections of “public artworks” in Scotland, commissioned by the Town Artist – it’s remarkable now to think there was a Town Artist, but this was part and parcel of the new town projects. And just like the skatepark, many of these artworks are bold, sculptural, playful, and vibrant... but they also reflect the industry of Livingston’s past. Nick, you’ve brought us to this one, which is called ‘Standing Stones’ by Denis Barnes...**

NICK: Yeah, it's – I think this is a really magical – sort of moulded, concrete moulded blocks in a little weir, that goes down... they look like little buildings floating, cities popping up out of the water... It's very hidden, it's a little gem, this. The idea of a sort of enchanted space, isn't something you'd always associate with a sort of New Town experience, is it? But I think it is here.

SIMON: How this relates to the skate park is the playfulness in the way that concrete's used. It seems very reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright's textile houses in California, the Ennis house particularly, and... I'd love to know if Iain Urquhart was involved in this.

FX FADES TO DIFFERENT LOCATION

**SCRIPT (Livi): We're walking just around the corner to an underpass – and as we come through here, tucked away, enveloped by plants, is a major commission by Ian Hamilton Finlay, one of Scotland's most celebrated artists. Now – again, Dawn, this seems to complement the skatepark, because, well, it's curvy! And it's made from concrete!**

**34'45"**

DAWN: Yeah – so, this is a poem by Ian Hamilton Finlay called “Wave” poem. And he's carved out the word “wave” in all these different languages in these panels, that are in between buttresses. And it just scoops around the edge of the Almond as it turns around, past the centre.

SIMON: I think what I'd say about the town artists was, they were really given free reign to do what they like, and they could just go around and pick any sites they liked, and create a piece of art that they saw fit. And they seem to be another part of this kind of leap of faith to do something experimental, which the authorities seem to back. And that seems to be a very kind of sixties idea – that kind of freedom to investigate ideas which might not work! (laughs)

DAWN: Yep – cos in 1970s, this new thing of environmental art was really important, taking art out of the museums and in the galleries, and bringing them outdoors where people could enjoy them. And this is part of the new town idea that, uh, is a new place, and where they would have new ideas for art as well as architecture.

**GIRLS APPEAR IN BACKGROUND – IMPROMPTU VOX**

STEVE: Any kind of synergy with the – you can come through! (laughs) We're just recording a radio thing.

GIRL 1: That's cool!

STEVE: Do you live here? Do you live here? Have you noticed there's a poem there? Have you seen this before?

GIRL 1: I've seen it, but I've never actually read it.

STEVE: Can you describe it to us?

GIRL 1: I just see lots of fancy writing.

STEVE: What about you?

GIRL 2: To me, it looks like some type of code-ish thing for like a poem.

STEVE: That's exactly what it is. It's a poem. And the poem is called “Wave” and it's the word “wave” in lots of different languages.

GIRL 1: So anyone that lives here that speaks a different language can see that, so they can know what it is?

STEVE: Exactly. Do you like it?

GIRL 1: Yeah. It's very beautiful!

STEVE: You don't have to just say that, cos you're on the radio. Do you really like it?

GIRL 2: Yes! It feels like it should belong here for everyone to see, and like different languages and how to say it.

STEVE: Do you like living in Livingston? What's good about here?

GIRL 2: I love... well, it's natural beauty is like why I like it.

GIRL 1: It's all beautiful.

STEVE: And do you ever go to the skate park?

GIRLS: Yes. We always go to skate park – we've actually been today... we go on a stunt scooter... well, I go on a razor scooter... I go on a stunt scooter because I can go up and down and jump and that... (FADES)

**MUSIC: Pixies – Ana**

FX SKATEPARK

### **37'30" DEFINITION OF SKATE PARK / AESTHETIC QUALITIES**

IAIN: When you look at a skate park – the best way I can describe it is as a composition of shapes and forms, undulating shapes and forms in concrete. And it's sculptural. And it's like a moonscape, or a lunar scape. It's quite hard, except through metaphor and comparison, to describe exactly what you're looking at. And there are artists – so Noguchi is one of them, who's produced these amazing kind of organic shapes – and there are architects that have produced blob-like forms and so on – but they're not really a direct influence on skateboarding. Having said that, skate parks today are starting to think much more about how they look, how to make them beautiful as well as functional. And Livi was a prototype for that, the way that Iain Urquhart considered how it sat in the ground, and provided viewing terraces. And you can tell from the long sections through the designs that he's thinking about that very carefully. Probably unbeknownst to anyone else other than himself. But, thank God that he did.

### **38'35" SUPER 8 CAMERA**

FX – SUPER 8 CINE FILM PROJECTOR WHIRR



RALPH: That's ...me, I think? (laughs) This is Iain! So this is him, in America. So, Dee must've been filming... so there he is, there he is with his camera... there he is...!

FX – SUPER 8 CINE FILM PROJECTOR WHIRR

RALPH: Iain liked to roller skate. I think Iain liked to, you know – every now and then I turn round and you know, there'd be nobody around, and Iain would be almost like one of these Victorian ice skaters, just sort of very beautifully, roller skating with his pipe in his mouth! Very elegant. And I think he, on the quiet days, probably skateboarded around Livingston, and said – I did this. You know? It's pretty cool!

FX – SUPER 8 CINE FILM PROJECTOR WHIRR – fades

### 39'25" IAIN'S DEATH

SANDY: Iain died on the 30th of August, 1983. He had been ill, and – he hadn't let me know that he was ill. And I got a phone call on the 29th of August to say that Iain was in hospital, and, he'd like to see me. And we left the hospital about 3 o'clock in the morning, and came home, and he died about 8 o'clock that morning. Um, he didn't want me to know that he wasn't well. Which some people don't.

STEVE: No. And you and Mum went, to see him?

SANDY: Yeah.

STEVE: I remember you getting back... I can remember it really clearly. I remember you getting back, and I just didn't quite know what to say to you. Cos it was such...

SANDY: Yeah, it was – oh, it was a shock. It was a shock.

**SCRIPT (studio): At the same time, Ralph Gilhooly also got a phone call, from one of his friends...**

FX TELEPHONE

RALPH: I was in my mum's kitchen, and the phone went, and I was like, hey, what are we up to? You know, are we going to go down to Livingston? And he said, Oh, I've got some news for you. And I said – what? And they said, Oh, Iain's died. And I said, Iain who? And they said, Iain Urquhart. And I was like – but he can't be, because I've just seen him, you know, and – to me at that age... I couldn't work it out, because he never looked ill. You know, he was just absolutely fine. And I just couldn't get my head around it. It was a real shock.

FX LIVI SKATEPARK

## 41'15" LEGACY OF LIVI + IAIN

RALPH: Without Livingston, skateboarding might not be as it is – not just in Scotland, but, in Britain, in Europe and even in the world, because those big American parks are gone, they are not there anymore. What they have is big wooden half pipes. So, in terms of your traditional concrete skateboard park, that was taken from the original essence of skateboarding, which was people skateboarding in empty swimming pools – I don't know how many parks there are left. Probably almost none. And that's why it's a Mecca. Because if you're in Brazil, or Argentina, if you're in New Zealand, everybody knows Livingston. You've got to – and if you're a real skater, you've gotta say you've skated it. Otherwise you're not a skater. You're not! (laughs)

## MUSIC: Herbie Hancock – Watermelon Man

FX LIVI SKATEPARK

STEVE: Iain claimed it would be a prototype. Yeah – “it's a unique sports landscape project, and if it works well, could lead to the building of similar facilities elsewhere. Watch this space!” he says! And I guess, well, it did!

IAIN: It did. I mean, we had to wait quite a long time... but yeah, in terms of providing a skate park that is a landscape, and is a social facility – well, that starts to happen again from sort of 2005 onwards, but particularly the last five or six years. And in a way they're based on the Livingston model. That's what they're fulfilling, is Iain Urquhart's prophecy.

FX LIVI SKATEPARK

## MUSIC: Herbie Hancock – Watermelon Man – FADES OUT

RALPH: I'm absolutely sure if Iain was still here, forty years later, he would be astonished that it is still as used as it is. I mean, it's unbelievable.

## 43'10" FINAL WORD

STEVE: So, we didn't know much about the skate park, we've found out quite a bit now, we've found out it's quite a big deal...

SANDY: ...yeah...

STEVE: So – what do you make of it all?

SANDY: Very proud of my brother! That's it – simple as that... I'm very proud of what he managed to achieve. I'm sure he was proud of the things I managed to achieve as well. But, yeah. That's the way we were.

43'35" ENDS

R3 OUTRO:

**CURVES AND CONCRETE** was produced and presented by Steve Urquhart – it was a Far Shoreline production for BBC Radio 3.