

# **CHUNKY MOVE**

**Activators 4: Conversation Series  
and First Chapter of a Novel**

Chunky Move is located on the unceded lands of the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations. We respectfully acknowledge the significant contributions of Australia's First Peoples, and are committed to supporting the continuity of culture and relationship to this land.

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# DDDD DEAR READER AUDIENCE EEEEE

## Dear you, here now.

**Activators 4** was formed across hemispheres in a global pandemic: from Aotearoa-New Zealand to the United Kingdom, from Sweden to Gariwerd-The Grampians. Surprisingly, the long distances increase the level of intimacy between conversationalists, both in content and attention. Gaps become spaces we can lean into. Wait in. Linger with.

Absence, text and performance are light currents flowing through the **Conversation Series**, a time capsule of lurking questions, interests and problems occurring between October / November 2020. Amaara, Amrita, Daniel, Megan, Rhiannon, Tim and their partners discuss connection, rigour, change, hopelessness; threesomes in exchange for legal advice, objects instead of hugs, a chorus, wetting the bed, darkness-dancing, an orca, queers pissing in alleyways. A hot blind date for some and a quick heartbeat of new collaboration for others, across oceans and plane-free skies and plastic bottle mountains, from their closed eyes to your (one) open ear. Their references are included in a Reading List at the end of each conversation.

**AN EMAIL PERFORMANCE OF A FIRST CHAPTER OF A FICTIONAL NOVEL AS PROPOSITION (or a minor text in six parts)** is a lesson in performative velocity, the 'when-hits-what-hits-how-hits-who', voices formed with many relationships made with some sort of polyamorous attention. Step-audiences, embedded in the text via the cc' and bcc' tabs give a kind of creepy feeling, forever entombed in the stage wings of an email performance, now captured as an image (for all eternity).

*– Hey Brian, if you're reading this. Is it possible to have absolutely no limits, and is this even remotely desirable? Time and money and the heart-mashing of moving cities, of un-sticking oneself. A tangent that stays open for another chapter, another time –*

In winter the landscape is still, very still. Round windows of houses collect snow. Ice stays frozen on tree branches, thick and gentle like white pythons, lazy. The snow continues to collect in the twigs and buds, clinging in over-sized mounds. Suspended in mid-air, snow floats in tiny rhizomatic structures, each crystal interlaced with the one next to it, above and below.

This is how we hold on, when nothing is underneath: we touch a little differently; we plait, we stick, we sink. I wouldn't (just) call it love, or survival. I don't know what I'd call it. But these artists and their partners and Brian embody it – crystalline resilience in an extended gesture.

**Leah Landau**  
Curator for Activators 4

## About Leah



Born in Ngunnawal-Canberra, Leah Landau is an Australian artist working with dance, choreography, text and curation.

As a dancer Leah performed in *Ultimate Dancer* a.k.a Louise Ahl's (SWE/ UK) six hour epic saga *Hevi Metle* at Baltic Circle for Contemporary Art Newcastle (2020) and choreographer Luke George's (AUS) *Public Actions* at Dance Massive Festival, Melbourne (2019) and Keir Choreographic Award (2018). Together with dance colleagues across the world, Leah set up *A Class for A Cause*: an online public teaching resource where anyone can teach a class and propose a charity to donate to (or pay themselves), designed to connect a wide community of dancers/body practitioners in times of COVID-19 and beyond.

As a choreographer, Leah most recently performed her work *Goat Talk* at Dans Massan (2019), Stockholm and Dance Massive Open Studio Program, Melbourne (2019), *Smoke Smoking* at Danscentrum Stockholm (2019); *Romancer* at Lucy Guerin Inc.'s Pieces for Small Spaces program 2016 (Melbourne), among many more.

Leah's writing has been published as part of Dance Massive Festival (2015), Swedish Dance History Vol. 3 and independent zine, *This Container*. From 2013-2016 Leah co-produced *Dance Speaks*, a performance lecture series for dance artists in Melbourne and Sydney presented at various galleries, bars and studios. From 2020-2021, Leah curated two programs for Chunky Move's Activators series: *Activators 3: BONANZA!* and *Activators 4: Conversation Series and First Chapter of a Novel*. She is currently based in Stockholm studying a Masters in New Performance Practices.

**[www.leah-landau.com](http://www.leah-landau.com)**

## **About Activators**

Activators is a series of free public outcomes curated by **Chunky Move** Artistic Director Antony Hamilton and independent choreographer and curator Leah Landau.

The Activators program invites independent artists to apply choreographic approaches and principles to ideas such as site, space, time, and material, keeping the body at the centre of their investigation. The resulting hybrid events may involve elements of performance, installation, discussion, and/or demonstration, and will feature artists whose work plays a role in shaping and influencing conversations in society and culture.

Previous Activators:

**Activators 1: Helen Grogan and Mark Friedlander**

**Activators 2: *Body/Insect/Machine* by Prue Lang and Mathieu Briand**

**Activators 3: *BONANZA!* by Harrison Hall, Sam Mcgilp and Justin Kane**

Activators is supported by the City of Melbourne Arts Grants Program and presented in partnership with organisations including MPavilion, Science Gallery Melbourne, and Alpha60.

**Brian Fuata**  
**First Chapter of a Novel**

**AN EMAIL PERFORMANCE OF A FIRST CHAPTER OF A FICTIONAL NOVEL AS PROPOSITION (or a minor text in six parts)**

1 message

Brian Fuata <brian.fuata@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 18, 2021 at 3:54 PM

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# THE INCREDIBLE BODY MECHANIX

featuring OMEGA CLASH MCs

"B BOY YOUR BEST"—5:25

"BONUS BEATS"—2:58

b/w "B BOY YOUR BEST"—4:48  
(Dub Version)

"BONUS BEATS"—1:32

0-96953

## CURTAINS OPEN

To begin, I acknowledge the unceded lands of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation where I live and work. I pay respects to elders past-present-emerging. I acknowledge their continuing global contribution to arts, culture and science.

Always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.

Dear Leah, Anthony and Kristina

I hope you're all well considering our world.

This is an email performance titled,

***AN EMAIL PERFORMANCE OF A FIRST CHAPTER OF A FICTIONAL NOVEL AS  
PROPOSITION (or a minor text in six parts)***

Please know we're being watched by a select audience placed in the darkened seats of *Bcc*.

Hi everyone,

I'm Brian Fuata

For those new to my practice, this email falls into the repertoire of epistolary performances now in its eleventh year ...

An Exposition:

Artist Leah Landau was invited to curate Chunky Move's latest edition of [\*Activators\*](#)



- even animals, real or imagined
- You need to think outside the box
- I just need a better box *Turns on the TV*
- *His hiking boots not intended for actual hiking have yet to break-in which makes walking hurt. Unknowing of his pain, in New York people stopped him on the street to compliment them*
  - Dope shoes bro
  - *His pale face reddened Oh thanks...Yeah they're great...I love them...He thinks of the word "ghetto blaster"*
- Darling?
- Just going for walk
- It's too late
- I need some air
- Don't leave me alone *His body strobed in television light*
- Come then
- It's too dark...It was a long drive...We're tired...Stay
- I won't be long

## Part 2

- *From the bed he watches him walk out*
- *Be back The front door is a threshold he now crosses. His return to the house is compelled by heat and obligation. Now presently alone, their two bodies humming from their recent proximity, will in their momentary split branch them both to elsewhere...Ah fuck...Chuckling...It really is dark...Uh...Maybe I should go back...Nah...He chuckles again, walking further in...Hello darkness my old friend Sung in high register...Hello darkness my old friend Sung in low register...The atrium of sky and earth that he can vaguely outline holds the public transport of pop song to return his voice to him as a twisted other...he abbreviates the line to its salutary tip HELLO ... Hello ... HELLO ... Hello ... HELLO... Hello...This echoic self, massaged his head...*
- Ha, weird...I feel like weeping...and he does
- *...Rain falls...And the worms rise from the earth as liquid streams*

## Part 3

- "...We just arrived...The drive wasn't too bad, just long...In bed watching TV what are you guys doing?...He's outside getting air...Really?...You want me to get him?...Mum he's fine, he doesn't believe in ghosts...Yeah, my body is exhausted, I'm gonna run a bath..."
- *He disrobes in front of the mirror that's gradually fogging from the rising steam now beading on his skin, his act of standing is emphatic held against the rolling tides of fatigue. He leaves his now frosted reflection and enters the surrender of water...*

## Part 4

# *An Intermission of Gratitude*

My dearest Latai, Priya and Samia

Sat present on stage, here with me, in Cc

Our TroppoGalaktika collective enlivens me

Our last event [O.A.SiS](#) held at 107 Projects in Redfern called upon our community to gather - spect-actors - sharing witness to an intergeneration of emerging and established BIPOC artists; sharing BBQ; sharing music spun by Radio Skidrow DJ's ... left our community restored for days after ...

Ours is an art of restoration. Of dance. Of food. Of joy.

I can't thank you three enough I'm left speechless.

Here's to more events in the future either by us or others, seeped out from it.

Love always,  
Brian

Part 5

- *Interior / Inside...*



- *Exterior / Outside...*



Part 6

To end with Amy's beginning

...An acknowledgement of water to accompany the acknowledgement of land  
So I may, if I may, I'd also like to begin with eyes closed. And with my eyes closed, our eyes closed, to maybe focus, to try to pull focus on to the water in our bodies. To feel, if we can, the way it rushes around our bodies. We can feed it in the blood, in the bloodstream. And if we can the, I feel like we exist in a constant state of evaporation, and so I wonder if we could bring our attention from the bloodstream to the edges of our skin, this largest organ of our body. If we could energise every pore of our skin from the insides of our toes, all the way up the outsides of our shanks, around our arms, and to our head. To breathe through every pore and to feel the water shimmering out and back in. And perhaps out to the trees, or atmosphere that surrounds us, outside our buildings, outside into the wind and the air, to feel the moisture

heavy...And then rushing through this world between London and Melbourne I was thinking about this conversation and the fiber optic cables that are making it possible, about whether we could think through the molecules of water in the air between us, through the catchment areas of the Thames and the Yarra. Across the oceans, the North Atlantic, the South Atlantic, the Indian Ocean, all these bodies of water between us, and feel how they connect through our pores, as we breathe out, in this conversation, and in, we breath interconnected.

## About Brian



*Care disfigurements (soft hands) 2018, Westspace, Melbourne.  
Image by Jacqui Shelton.*

**Brian Fuata is based on Yagara Country (Ipswich, Queensland). He works in the improvisation of live performance, mediated and recorded performance, writing and objects. He employs the image of the ghost as an exploitative strategy to produce and order content. He uses multiple registers of performance, persona and public speaking to produce from a given institutional context of site, body and presence a dumb zone of dramatic affects.**

## **Conversation Series**

*Conversation Series* invites six Australian-based artists to discuss absence, text and performance, with a conversation partner of their choosing. Each conversation is unedited and lasts approximately one hour.

Artists were asked to speak to someone who is relatively unknown to them; someone they may have met in passing, at a residency or a festival; perhaps someone they have never met but are curious about; someone that may not come from an “art background”.

## Amaara Raheem & Tru Paraha



*Amaara Raheem and Tru Paraha. Images courtesy of Amaara and Tru.*

This was our first conversation but it wasn't the first time we met. In 2017, in Wellington, Aotearoa we both attended *Performing, Writing: a symposium in four turns*, Massey University. But somehow there, we were ships passing in the night. Then in 2020 we were invited to join a collaborative writing project with two other performance-makers and writers so we've recently been writing in parallel.

Activators was our first conversation in-person, in real-time, in direct communication, 1:1. We have a shared history of brown skin and a divergent history of being Indigenous / Immigrant. We are both interested in choreographing the unseen, performing absence, deep listening, walking at night, star-gazing, considering the unnameable forces that govern the universe like black holes, dark matter, ellipses and eclipses, how fear resides in our nervous system, and becoming *Dakini* (Sky Dancers).

## **About Amaara**

Amaara Raheem is a shape-shifter, an unspectacular dancer, permaculture enthusiast, occasional writer and amateur weaver. Dancing came about through working in theatre, and for her language has always been part of her practice of movement. To move and to speak is to produce a new kind of thought, body and words entangled in-motion. Amaara's practice of choreography and performance is deeply shaped by her history of migration. She crosses cultural as well as disciplinary borders.

## **About Tru**

Tru Paraha is a choreographer, writer, and director of experimental performance. Her commissioned performances and collaborations extend across visual arts, dance, film, poetry, music, live art, design, and theatre. She lives in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa and is currently an Arts research fellow at the University of Auckland. Further information about Tru's work can be found [here](#).

# **Amaara Raheem & Tru Paraha Conversation Transcription**

## **Amaara Raheem:**

Hi everyone. Hi Tru, good morning.

## **Tru Paraha:**

Thank you.

## **Amaara Raheem:**

Thanks so much for joining in with this conversation today, and for anyone who's listening out there, you're very welcome.

I would like to acknowledge that I am speaking from Djab Wurrung country, which is three and a half hours west of Melbourne in Gariwerd, otherwise known as the Grampians. And to acknowledge the Elders, past, present and future, especially at this time, because just last week on this land, the Directions Tree was cut down here Djab Wurrung, which is a great cultural asset. It's an 800 year-old tree that was removed for the expansion of a highway. And all of the mob that were on that land were evacuated. So it's been a hugely traumatic time, and I just want to acknowledge the cultural genocide that is ongoing on unceded lands, where I live.

My name is Amaara Raheem, and I am a dance artist and a choreographer and a performer and a writer and a researcher. I live here and I've been here since April, but I also live in Melbourne in Narrm. I sort of move between these two places, and my practice is really... It's very deeply shaped by my history of migration. I came to Australia from Colombo, Sri Lanka, when I was 10 years old, at the onset of the civil war in the mid 1980s. And I lived here, I grew up in Melbourne, and I moved to London in my late 20s and I lived in London for 15 years, and now I live partly in Melbourne and partly in Djab Wurrung country, so the idea of multiple belongings is very resonant to my practice and also this notion of crossing borders. I've crossed linguistic borders, geographical borders, borders of identity, as well as disciplinary borders.

I'm undertaking a practice-lead PhD at the school of architect and urban design at RMIT University. And I'm undertaking research in a discipline outside of dance in order to look back at dance, because one of the ways that I operate, from an immigrant kind of heritage and diasporic lineage that I come from, is that in order to look at something it's like I need to leave it, I need to look back from a different country. So when I was in England, I really looked at what it was for me to be Australian, and when I'm in Australia I guess people still ask me, "Where are you from?", which reminds me that I'm not apparently from here.

I went to the School of Architecture and Urban Design to really learn from a design-led context. I wanted to think about concepts such as repurposing, adaptation, landscape, interiority, how this might become dance research methodologies in my practice. And in turn, I really wanted to contribute choreographic thinking and performative approaches and embodied thought into contexts outside of dance, to push dance into multiple directions.

My work takes many forms, it's audio, live performance, text and conversation, as well as advocacy and building networks. And on that note, I invited Dr. Tru Paraha to have a conversation with me today. Tru and I—I don't know if I actually met Tru at the Performing, Writing symposium that we both attended in 2017 or '18. It's hard to tell because time no longer operates in ways that I understand. We were in New Zealand, in Aotearoa, in Wellington at Performing, Writing symposium, both presenting, but I don't remember meeting Tru there or having a conversation. But more recently, Theron Schmidt, a friend of ours and collaborator invited Tru, myself and Joe Pollitt, who's a dancer based in Perth, a dancer, artist, writer, to come and do a collaborative writing project for an upcoming journal, online journal.

And so when I was invited for Activator, I thought, "Wow, this is a really great opportunity maybe for me to invite Tru into a conversation, to actually have a conversation." Because we've got this parallel practice of writing this article together.

I know Theron very well and I know Joe quite well, but I'd never... Well, I had met Tru but we hadn't yet spoken, so this is literally, in some ways, our first conversation, although we've been speaking in other ways.

Welcome, Tru. Please, could you tell us a little bit about your practice and maybe the trajectories of your practice.

**Tru Paraha:**

Kia ora Amaara. *[introduction in te reo Māori]*

I'm currently sitting in my office here in Auckland, AKA Tāmaki Makaurau, here in Aotearoa, and it's a real pleasure and a delight to speak with you today, Amaara, and to have this kōrero extend out into the world. Who knows where it goes, who knows who hears this. It's a privilege for me to be able to extend our ideas and to have this kind of a dialogue, especially during these times.

I come from similar backgrounds or sort of parallel backgrounds, as you've said, Amaara. I come from a choreographic background. I have a predominantly performance-based practice, which originally started with art school, and now I really only have interests in terms of dance, with experimental practice that feeds into my choreography and into live art, into experimental performance, which also has a sort of a parallel writing practice.

And so I predominantly work with poetry, transcultural literature, and performance writing, hence why I was attending the Performance, Writing symposium back in Wellington, and I think it was 2017. And that's where I met Theron. We didn't meet. I saw you perform at Performance Arcade, and I was aware of you, but I don't think we ended up having an exchange at that time, but I've always known since then who you were, and that you were involved in performance, and having seen your work.

I'm currently working at Auckland University as a research fellow, which is a new position that I started this year actually, having just recently finished my PhD. And so that was really great to go from the PhD, that research mode that I've been sort of immersed in for a few years now, and into a postdoc where I'm focused on what I'm calling astrochoreography and dark sky archiving, which is an extension of my interests in dark sky research, night sky protection, and I suppose a whole gamut of interests that come under that sort of fascination, and looking at cosmological perspectives from te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori, which is also a broad spectrum of Māori knowledge, and looking through Western astrophysics and naked eye observation.

**Amaara Raheem:**

Amazing, Tru. Thank you. There's so much that I would like to say to you but I feel a bit speechless. But yes, also to thank you very much for agreeing to have this conversation and to acknowledge that we've met and know of each other and that there was a passing between us of a body-to-body passing, and now we get to talk directly.

In the lead up to this conversation, Tru and I exchanged a few emails about how we might structure the conversation. We decided to have a very open conversation. I think we're both interested in experimental practice, but also improvisation redesign methods, where thinking happens in real-time between us. However, we also talked about... Well, we talked about absence. We didn't go into the topic itself, but we decided that absence was something that might be a departure point.

Tru, we can absolutely end up talking about anything, I think, in this conversation, but I wanted to maybe begin with this term 'absence', and to share a few thoughts with you about how I am approaching it at this point in my life. And then from there we can unravel, and I'd love to fly into the night sky with you.

**Tru Paraha:**

Sure.

**Amaara Raheem:**

Look, I don't know what your history is or relationship is to being seen, but I have brown skin and I live in a predominantly white country and I'm in contexts where I'm often the only visibly brown person in a room. So, for me, being seen and being visible has always been a very complex... I've had a very complex relationship with it since I was 10 years old. I mean, I do remember standing at Melbourne Airport, arriving here, and realizing age 10 that I was brown, because I didn't know that beforehand because I lived in Sri Lanka and everybody was brown. I wasn't aware of the colour of my skin. It was only that moment of standing in Melbourne Airport and just sort of looking around and seeing all the different bodies passing through that I realized my difference.

I know, I couldn't tell what the consequences of that was going to be, and they are very complex and multilayered, but I do remember the sinking feeling that this is maybe not such a good... This was not a good symbol or potent—yeah. I remember the potency of that moment.

But that said, so I spent a lot of time, I think I, consciously and unconsciously, have been working in my creative practice and in my performance practice with the idea of presence. I've done a lot of work to work on my energetic body, as well as skills and techniques of performance, acting as well as dancing. And more recently, I've come across some thinking and some writing that comes out of Japanese theatre traditions of which I have no training in. I don't have any training in Noh or Kabuki or Kyōgen. What fascinates me is that in these traditions, there's this intermediary character who is called the Waki, and the Waki performs absence. So the Waki is something in between a real identity and a fictional character, and they exist on stage and they express their own non-being. And there's a whole technique for... In a way, their role actually is to not express.

So I've been thinking a lot about acts of withdrawal, about my relationship to being seen and becoming invisible. What it is to actually step aside, step out of the light and into a darker realm in these ways. Do you have a response?

**Tru Paraha:**

There's a lot in there that as you were speaking I was thinking about the other day, I was complaining to a friend. This is actually a common complaint of mine, that I feel that I'm stared at a lot. I express it to different people. I say, "I feel like when I go into a café or when I'm walking down the street or walking through the university, that I feel eyes on me." And I'm often told, "Oh," you know, various reasons for why this might be. But I think it's to do with my brownness. That's obviously an assumption, but it happens so regularly that there's something that's being stared at. And it might not be me, but it might be the brownness that you speak of, or it could be this absent quality. And what I mean by that is, I was going over in my mind, "Why do I feel that I'm being either stared at or surveilled, or I feel very visible?" And I actually love invisibility and anonymity.

I actually forget my ethnicity and the brownness of my skin and my features when I'm going through life, because I'm not standing in front of a mirror, or because I'm not walking around thinking of myself in these constructed ways, as I go about my life naturally.

I'm constantly reminded of what I am through the surveillance and the eyes of others. And so what I've been enjoying about, and I've been doing this for a few years now, in terms of exploring choreographic darkness, and it's a performance practice, so it's not something I'm thinking about in terms of my personal life, is that under the commonality of darkness, or lack of illumination, we can enter into this space where we have to be seen in other ways, or we are unseen through darkness, or we are seen anew. And I was talking to some dancers I was working with, who normally would love to be seen, so they pride themselves on the work, being visible and especially the physical nature of the dance, for example. And then it can be challenging to then say to them, most of what you do will not be seen, or will be very hard to discern through the haze or through the penumbra, or with the lights completely blacked out. And so what is it that you bring to the dance or to the space in this kind of state?

And I love this sort of process, because unless you're reading a bio about me and if I hadn't spoken in te reo Māori, which is my traditional language here, you wouldn't know what culture I was from or what ethnicity I was; you've got no idea how I look, as a listener. And so does that matter, or does that change, or is it very important that you do know these things?

I'm not even sure if I'm really answering your question, but it was just sort of an immediate thing that came up. And so like you, as you said earlier, I'm also... It's because of my interests, I think, that I tend to be involved in spaces where I too am usually the only Māori person in the room, the only Māori woman with a PhD in the room, or the only person who has my particular set of interests in a room, which is predominantly full of other people who are mainly white.

We're talking about university environments, even the area where I live is a very affluent area, not the particular place where I'm staying, but the real estate in my local suburb of Herne Bay is one of the wealthiest areas in the country. I walk into different spaces and I'm the only one who looks like me, clearly, and it's felt, and it's accounted for in an intangible way. Like in an unspoken way, I can see that I am felt and seen in that way as different.

Whereas I find that to be kind of a false estrangement, really, because I'm tangata whenua of this country. I am the bread and butter and the salt of this land. I'm not strange or alien or exotic. In fact, I am probably what you would call just the most ordinary aspect of this country really, in those terms. So it's really interesting.

**Amaara Raheem:**

Yeah. I think that's a place in which our experiences diverge and differ because I'm an immigrant to this country. When I was growing up here, I was often confused for being Indigenous. I became this kind of very strange placeholder because often Indigenous Australians are not visibly brown because of the enormous amount of genocide that's happened here. So I was in situations where I went through this phase in my teenage years where people would say, "Where are you from?" And I experimented by saying, "I'm from Australia." Because I felt then that I was from Australia and spent most of my life here. But when I said I'm from Australia, people assumed that that meant I was Aboriginal. Yeah, it became this very interesting thing to be. And this is another thing that I'm quite interested in playing with, is being a guest in a country as host. The relationship between guests and hosts in terms of hospitality actually. But I wanted to ask you what choreographic darkness is?

**Tru Paraha:**

I suppose I should have an answer since I spent three years researching it.

**Amaara Raheem:**

Was that your PhD?

**Tru Paraha:**

Yeah. My PhD, it came from my interest in working with really low light levels and blackout and darkness and working only at night and all of this sort of thing. And so I thought, "Okay, cool. I want to explore choreographic darkness," but I was also interested in strands of darkness meaning from a Māori cosmology, which was sort of one chapter. And then I was also looking at concept horror, and notions of darkness through horror.

And it was the only way that I could get my horror interests into my PhD without being laughed out of the room. The looks that people gave me when I mentioned that I'm going to do a PhD on horror or on horror choreography, it didn't go down well at Dance Studies anyway.

**Amaara Raheem:**

Yeah, sure.

**Tru Paraha:**

But if you could find a way to make it work or to have it sort of become relevant, sort of through different strands, then that's kind of where I went with it. So I was looking at... I mean, conceptually, at what happens, what darkness enables, what happens when we have these unseen dances, when performance become anonymous, when we are all in a communal collective space through the performance, and what happens to this notion of audience, performer, the boundaries between us, the space itself becoming dispersed, and a dispersed centre, and moving away from that proscenium arch, which is very clearly— we're the audience sitting in darkness observing this illuminated spectacle or whatever. So choreographic darkness for me takes on sort of has multiple implications and can be expressed through different modes, including writing. So, yeah.

**Amaara Raheem:**

Yeah. To the listeners out there, this process that Tru and Joe and Theron and I are involved in at the moment is collaborative writing process. We send each other texts, and I loved that text that you sent on arrival, Tru, which from memory, and I haven't looked at it since two weeks ago when you sent it, but there's this... On one page is a black circle, and then on the other page, the words are all typed but it's quite cosmological, I thought the arrangement of it. Words are typed over each other. It's like a constellation in the sky. Was that intentional, Tru?

**Tru Paraha:**

Yes. Yeah. No, it was. It was interesting to me because I was thinking about this kind of way of writing all this visual mapping or a visual star chat. And so using the idea of a star chat or a cosmological space on the page.

And then when we decided to come together and do this collaboration, I thought, “Oh, I’ll try this out here.” And so because that particular task was about arrival. Just for the listeners, we’re looking at presenting a collaborative text that we present in stages similar to a choreographic or performance schedule, where we’d have arrival, we might set each other a series of warmups, go through some tasks, do feedback and response. And then I think departure is the-

**Amaara Raheem:**

Yeah, I think so.

**Tru Paraha:**

Yeah. And so this was arrival and I was thinking, “Okay, how do I arrive in the space?” And then that made me ask, “What is space? And where are we?” We are everywhere. I mean, we’re in the globe. We’re remote. And how do I sort of express this idea of remoteness, distance? But not something that causes despair or longing or necessarily the distance that is imposed on us through the emergency situation that we’ve been in with COVID, but distance in spatiality on our planet.

Yeah, and of course my head’s all up in the stars at the moment because I barely sleep and I’m looking at stars in the morning and thinking about planets and cosmic objects. That first actual text was an ellipse, because I started off thinking that I was going to do my postdoc on black holes, and then it just sort of expanded into different places. And so I’m glad that it’s done that because it’s opened up other... Just thinking about black holes allowed me to open up into other areas of thinking.

**Amaara Raheem:**

And when you talk about horror... Well, there’s a couple of questions that I wanted to ask you. Do you make a distinction between horror and Gothic as genres?

**Tru Paraha:**

It’s interesting because I didn’t do a lot—I really like Gothic, but I didn’t actually look into that very much.

I was looking at cosmic horror mainly, so I was looking at notions of cosmic darkness and speculative philosophy, and looking at very recent sort of speculative materialist philosophers, and philosophers of horror like Eugene Thacker and Reza Negarestani and others, sort of exploring horror in terms of the uncanny, the unhuman, the unknown, which also taps into a cosmology of Te Pō which is a Māori notion of darkness perpetual; multiple dimensions of darkness which are both illuminating and terrifying and meditative or inspiring.

And so I was trying to look at unhuman qualities of horror, and also moving away from psychological horror, and trying to get away from film and all the stuff I love. I love horror fiction. I love horror literature, Gothic included. I just wanted to take it somewhere else. I wanted to get it away from literature. Well, the literature that I had been reading in the past, and away from film, and bring it into what would choreographic horror look like, or feel like, or what could be another way of experiencing it beyond notions of fear? Yeah, I'm not sure if I was particularly successful in my—

**Amaara Raheem:**

Well, it's interesting that you should say that, because fear is the first word that I would associate with horror. And I avoid horror films, horror literature, because I really experience fear and it doesn't give me... It's not a thrill of fear, it's actually I can't sleep afterwards. I have nightmares if I'm alone reading anything that's a bit scary. I get very anxious. And it's like I don't want to put that into my body or my psyche or my imagination, because one of the things about horror now that you speak, is that it's so active in the imagination. I mean, I saw Jaws, I feel like my parents own me an apology for letting you watch Jaws at such a young age, because swimming in the ocean is... I mean, it's taken me years to undo that fear.

I mean, I know that there's a lot of people who are drawn to horror because they're so... And when I was an actor, I mean, I was such a B-grade actor that I only got auditions for horror movies. I had to go and pour fake blood all over myself and scream and stuff. I didn't get many parts, but I do remember thinking, "Oh God, I don't want to make horror movies." What drew you? I mean, was it even as a child you were drawn to horror?

**Tru Paraha:**

Yeah. I think basically when I was thinking about a PhD thesis and what I would really be able to stay interested in for three years or whatever, I was thinking, “Oh, I wonder if I could bring my horror fanaticism into my PhD.” And I really didn’t think I’d be able to find a way. And so I just wanted to look at horror because I was interested in it. And I’m talking about sort of specific kinds of horror found in literature and books I like, and also in film, but also my interest in darkness and how that also extends into notions of horror and not only horror. And then I was thinking, “Oh yeah, I’m just trying to take my interests, my fanaticism, and turn it into a PhD.” But I have been watching serial killer movies since I was a kid. And that whole fake blood thing, I mean, I could have gone down that road, but I tried to sort of... I didn’t take it into the splatter and gore realm of things. I was trying to make it seem a lot more theoretically sound.

I think it was just from that. And also because I knew no one else was doing it. That made it hard too, because there weren’t a lot of precedents for me to work with that kept it in a place that could avoid the splatter and the gore, the way that horror is often critiqued in film as well. And I wanted to just sort of move in a different direction with it. In real life, I don’t like it.

**Amaara Raheem:**

If you take away the splatter and the gore and the fear, what elements of horror are you working with, apart from darkness?

**Tru Paraha:**

I think it’s something to do with the relationship with the natural universe. And I think fear is there to a degree, there are unreachable parts of our planet and of our cosmos that if we try to approach it in our human form and in our fleshy form, we’d be annihilated, because we can’t coexist with radioactive materials or with... There are spaces that we’re not physically able to enter into. And so we walk around our world and around nature, which we think of in a loving kind of bright way, when there is danger abounding, always: the weather, the depths of the oceans. So I was looking at horror as, I suppose, the sort of the augmented natural world become unknown to us.

I love to go climbing mountains, I love trekking through the forest. And I was recently down South doing some stargazing down there for my research. And there's this mountain I was about to walk up and then I had to leave because I'd forgotten something. I thought, "Oh, maybe I'll walk up here at night. It'll be amazing at night." But I just didn't want to go up. I didn't want to walk up that mountain on my own at night. It was just creeping me out.

And I'm thinking, "Well, what's the difference?" I mean, it sounds like a cliché, but it's something to do with the unknown, but it's about my human existence interacting with the non-human world beyond what I understand to be familiar or safe, or maybe beyond what I could psychologically cope with or beyond sensation.

I remember walking through these really tall trees one time when I was down South on another trip. It's this experience you can have where you walk through these tree-tops that are, I think, 20 meters high or something. And I felt this deep sensation down through my spine, right inside my nervous system. And for me, that's fear for me. That sensation that I got through my spine when I'm walking on the thin ladder through the tree-tops, and I'm at a height. Or we walked down onto a plank and you're literally looking down into this forest of trees and you're really, really high. I actually felt my body go into this involuntary sort of state of, I guess, what I call fear. But for me, that was a very felt sensation in the body. I think a lot of the fear associated with horror is more psychological.

**Amaara Raheem:**

Yeah. I mean, I have a very strong interest in the Gothic. I love Gothic literature and Gothic film. I'm yet to understand—and my PhD is not a research on Gothic. And another thing that I've been doing, living in the country this year, is we go walking at night. I'm very scared to go walking on my own at night, even just down the lane. And when I hear thumping of kangaroos or birds disturbed in the trees, it sends that felt sense of fear that you were speaking about. I mean, everything else just... It's such a present moment activity, isn't it?

**Tru Paraha:**

Yes.

**Amaara Raheem:**

It's like if you want to do meditation to focus your mind, it's like go walking in the dark because I'm so attentive, so alert, so aware, and this hyper-consciousness, I suppose, of my environment that I don't have during the daytime, when I can see and I can walk in a kind of dream world, I can think about other things. So I really appreciate that.

And one of the other things that I love about living here is the night sky, this huge night sky in the Southern hemisphere that I get to... For me, it's very similar to walking along the ocean. It feels to me that walking at night and the experiences I've had with the sea are of the same order in my body.

And I love what you were saying about the other than human that's not of the animal species necessarily, but maybe pertaining to ghosts or I suppose even unnameable forces in the universe that exists in the realms. Yeah, please.

**Tru Paraha:**

No, sorry. I was just saying I think you've said it, which I think that's what I was meaning. Yeah, the unnameable forces. So I can't even be sure what they are. I'm not thinking about the animals or... Well, maybe not animals that I know of. But some unnameable force that I feel is only there in the darkness.

And so as you're talking about your night walks, I'm following you, and I can see you walking along a beach, and I'm having similar experiences. When I'm out at night, I'm both cautious, hyper-aware, and also enthralled at the same time. So when I do stargazing and night sky observation, I feel like I am knowing myself in another way and also tapping into something that I will never know, but receiving at least something of it. Like something of the cosmos, or something that it teaches me. But I'm also really aware how self-involved that can be if you're just looking into the cosmos and into natural spaces and into the darkness to try and find some human remedy or some human answer, instead of letting it be what it is and simply experiencing it.

So I'm sort of going between just experiencing darkness and the night sky and experiencing the glow and colour of a particular cluster or constellation or cosmic object, and then going into sort of my clever thinking toward my post-doc, about how I could use this or how it might be translated in other ways. But I'm trying to give myself the space to just, like you say, walk and be with the ocean or be with the sky, even be ignorant with it as well.

**Amaara Raheem:**

Yeah. I mean, I think we're sort of reaching the end of our time, at least in this moment. But I wanted to ask you if you know of the figure, it comes out of Buddhism actually, of the sky dancer? Who is very fierce. She's called a Bodhisattva. And a Bodhisattva is a human who achieved enlightenment, but then decided at the point of death to not actually leave the human realm, but to continue to work in the world until all beings achieved enlightenment. They embody a kind of infinite compassion because they are here bearing witness to all of our sorrow and despair and suffering, and doing their best to get us out of the wheel that we are constantly spinning in. But they exist in the realm of the sky and they are called the sky dancers.

**Tru Paraha:**

I love that. No, I'm not aware of these figures. I know the name, but I'm not aware of the narrative around that.

**Amaara Raheem:**

Yeah. I think they come out of Tibetan Buddhism. That's how I encountered them.

**Tru Paraha:**

Sky dancers. Nice.

**Amaara Raheem:**

Thanks, Tru.

**Tru Paraha:**

That went by fast. That was great.

**Amaara Raheem:**

I so look forward to our continued writing process and also meeting in person next time.

**Tru Paraha:**

Yeah, so do I. Thank you so much for the invitation.

**Amaara Raheem:**

Yeah. You're welcome. Okay. Ciao.

**Tru Paraha:**

Ciao.

## **Reading List**

- ***'A Choreopoetics of Te Pō' in ka mate ka ora: a new zealand journal of poetry and poetics*, Issue 18 by Tru Paraha (October 2020)**
- ***'Chapter 2: In the dark' in Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance* by Andre Lepecki (2016)**
- ***Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* by Reza Negarestani (2008)**
- ***'Starry Speculative Corpse' in Horror of Philosophy #2* by Eugene Thacker (2015)**
- ***'The Corpse Bride: Thinking with Nigredo' in Collapse IV* by Reza Negarestani (2008)**
- ***The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror* by Dylan Trigg (2014)**

## **Amrita Hepi & Tilly Lawless**



*Amrita Hepi and Tilly Lawless. Images by NIK TO and Ryan Pike*

*Content warning: Coarse language, descriptions of drug use and sex.*

So often when lost in the act or observations of moments of irreverence or desire we forget the transmissions or transgressions that have led us there.

The labour that leads us to the sex, dance, pleasure, race and brief encounter with the thrill of a body.

During this conversation Tilly and Amrita discuss what is involved in the behind the scenes work of getting to “work”, what it means to see your own subconscious desires take shape in front of you and explore ideas around what constitutes work in relation to the body.

## **About Amrita**

Amrita Hepi (b.1989, Townsville of Bundjulong/Ngapuhi territories) is an artist working with dance and choreography through video, the social function of performance spaces, installation and objects. Utilising hybridity and the extension of choreographic or performative practices, Hepi creates work that considers the body's relationship to personal histories and the archive. In 2020 she is a Gertrude Contemporary artist in residence and is currently working with Kaldor projects/Serpentine UK as a participating DOit artist. Amrita trained at NAISDA and Alvin Ailey NYC.

## **About Tilly**

Tilly Lawless is a queer, Sydney-based sex worker who utilises her online platform to speak about her personal experiences within the sex industry, in an attempt to shine a light on the everyday stigma that sex workers come up against. Growing up in rural NSW, her writing is often a bucolic love letter to the countryside that she comes from, and also a deeply intimate insight into queer romance and relationships. You can read her writing in various publications, but it's best going straight to the source and reading it directly from her Instagram, @tilly\_lawless

In 2020/2021 she will be working in collaboration with Amrita to make a new work called *The Read*, supported by Vital Statistix. Tilly's book *Nothing But My Body* will be released by Allen & Unwin in June 2021.

# **Amrita Hepi & Tilly Lawless Conversation Transcription**

*Content warning: Coarse language, descriptions of drug use and sex.*

## **Amrita Hepi:**

Hi, my name's Amrita Hepi and I'm talking to you from Wurundjeri country in Kulin Nation, so-called Melbourne. I'm really happy to be here talking to Tilly Lawless. Tilly Lawless is a queer Sydney-based sex worker who utilizes her online platform to speak about her personal experiences within the sex industry, in an attempt to shine a light on the everyday stigma that sex workers come up against.

Growing up in rural New South Wales, her writing is often a bucolic love letter to the countryside that she comes from, and also a deeply intimate insight into queer romance and relationships. You can read her writing in various publications, and also you'll be hearing from Tilly and a little bit of her writing as well.

I first came into contact with Tilly online, and it was such a pleasure. I was so in awe of how she wrote and also how she thought about the body. And I guess without further ado I'll stop talking about you and start talking to you. Hi, Tilly.

## **Tilly Lawless:**

Hey.

## **Amrita Hepi:**

Hello. Whereabouts are you calling from today? Or yeah, where are you dialling in from?

**Tilly Lawless:**

So, I'm speaking on the lands of the Gadigal and Wangal people, the Eora nation, in what's known as Sydney. And it's a beautiful, sunny day. A perfect day to be in front of a laptop.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yes, exactly. So, I guess I wanted to start by I guess just to, we've been asked to introduce ourselves. To introduce myself, I am an artist who works in choreography and dance. And yeah, I guess that would be the most accurate. I'm also a Bundjalung woman from northern New South Wales, and I'm a Ngapuhi woman from northern Aotearoa. I'm sitting in my lounge room, it's kind of sunny, it's kind of muggy. And I have black hair and a gray turtleneck on and dirty fingernails. Yeah, can you introduce yourself?

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah, so I'm Tilly, and I work in I guess two very different spheres. My main job, as in that's where I make most of my money, is in sex work, and in-person sex work, so full-service sex work. So, I work very much with my body in that way. But then my passion and my other kind of work is writing, which obviously exists in a way more liminal space, and is not with my body at all. Oh, I guess it's with my fingers, of which my fingers are also dirty.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Grubby girls post-pandemic.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

What are you talking about? I think that was interesting. When you're talking about how one is with your body and how one isn't with your body, how much of your writing can sometimes go into I guess the physical? How much of it comes from a physical experience that then goes onto the page?

**Tilly Lawless:**

Oh, I think my writing is completely grounded in the physical. I feel like so much of the time people try and separate the intellectual and the physical. And sometimes highbrow writing is considered stuff that only really deals with the cerebral.

But for me, I think our body is like what we live in everyday, and I also don't believe we exist without our body, I think that is us. And so, every single emotion I have or experience I have, I associate with the part of my body that felt that emotion the most. So, I often enter my writing through whatever I was feeling in my body at that time.

**Amrita Hepi:**

It's such a temperature check.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

It's funny as well, I think I've said this to you before and I know I've mentioned it in interviews before, but there was a time when I was younger where I felt as though if I could just be brilliant with my body, if I could have presence, and this is from a really young age, I wouldn't have to talk so much. And then I've heard people express it in the inverse, "Well, if I could just be really clever. If I could be really smart with my words I could ignore my body."

And I mean both of them are fantasies, that to ignore the body and not the mind, to ignore the mind and not the body. But they're kind of all emanating to this idea of presence. The idea of presence in performance, I mean in the work that you do. And I also wanted to ask a question here. Because you drew the distinction between these two realms of work, which are very different but I'm guessing in some ways connected, and do you do one in order to support the other? Or are they both very much the choices that you make because you're like, "These are the things that I do because I'm in some way in the project of..." Yeah, I don't know. Do they support each other?

**Tilly Lawless:**

I'm like you, I don't come from a wealthy background, so I definitely entered sex work just from a pragmatic economic perspective. I needed the money. And then writing has just always been my true passion and I've done it since I was a child. And I've always been very cynical and thought it's impossible to make it as an artist, so I've had sex work as my income and been able to write on the side. And that's something that I'm glad I did, because I do see some friends who try and make it as an artist and get so burnt out by... it becomes almost an obligation that they have to create. And I luckily, because I do sex work, I've never had to create, it's just something I can do when I feel.

But also, the more I've done sex work, I've been doing it for coming up to eight years now, the more I've also appreciated it as an art form. Because what I do really is a performance with an audience of one or sometimes two. And as I've grown to understand the way I can use my body more to get a certain response from other people, I've seen... I think when I first started sex work, I was like, "This is just what I'm doing for money." But now after so much time I can see the skill that goes into it as well. Yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yeah. You've spoken really beautifully to me before about the idea of seeing the subconscious and also the ability... we were speaking about the ability to be surprised. And I guess in regards to the... yeah, where do you think the performative comes into the realm of the work that you do?

**Tilly Lawless:**

Well, with sex work-

**Amrita Hepi:**

And skill as well. I love this idea of skill.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah. Well, the thing about with sex work is you're having to respond to the invisible... No, not invisible, sorry, they're visible, but they're not verbal cues.

They're physical cues that people give, and they're also often subconscious cues that they're giving. And you're having to constantly respond to them and adjust your performance according to their response.

Because you can't for example go into a booking with a man who is maybe looking for something sensual and intimate, and behave like a porn star, because that will just throw him off. But then sometimes you go into a booking with a man and the more girlfriend vibe is off, he wants a really amped up performance. So, you have to adjust throughout.

And also, everyone comes into that room with their own baggage of things they don't like, or whatever's going on in their life. And so, you're having to read that and respond. And men, like most of my clients are straight men, and straight men are notoriously bad at expressing themselves. So, you're really only getting the physical cues that they don't even know they're giving out. So, sex work is a flexible performance that you're having to change in every moment.

But then writing I suppose is also... I mean, I don't really think of my writing as a performance. I don't really think of writing as a performance till the moment that it has an audience, so till I publish it or post it. Because the act of writing... it's maybe the same with you and the act of creating a work, it's quite solitary. But then once you have an audience, that's when it becomes a performance. I don't know though, maybe when you're conversing what do you...?

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yeah, it's like it comes into the room. And also I guess what always surprises me is... You were just talking about this idea of reading the subconscious desire. So, someone will say, "I want this." But then what they're actually meaning is they want something else, which is apparent, but not by the word. It's like how to have the tenacity to actually follow through with your desires.

And I think sometimes when I have the desire to make something and I think that I want this image, and I kind of have the image in my mind or the text or the way it could work out in the theatre or the process. And then I'm always surprised at what it then turns itself into.

And if I get too stuck on wanting one thing in a certain way, like sometimes that can be incredibly rigorous, and then it yields the thing that I want. But more often than not, I find that it's like leaving that flexibility in order to be surprised by myself.

Because we could write one thing on the page, right? And say I'm telling a love story, so here's a love story X, Y, Z. But it's all the nitty-gritty little bits and pieces in the performance, in the act, that leads to the act, that all of a sudden your subconscious is quite exposed to the room. I find that a lot in the process of making, especially with being confused or even continuing to try something again and again until you kind of can re-see it or re-read it in some other ways. But sometimes I just feel like I'm... It's hard to... If anything, I feel like I'm in the relationship, or that you've described, between yourself and the client. Sometimes I feel like I'm the client where I think I know what I want. I think I know.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah, you've come in with an agenda.

**Amrita Hepi:**

I've come in an agenda, and then I'm in it and I'm like, "What I actually wanted was the... Well, I said I wanted a girlfriend experience, but what I actually wanted was the porn star experience."

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Or I thought I was making a contemporary dance work, whatever that is, and what I've made is a set piece with a provocation to four community groups.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Totally. And I think it's so important to stay opened and receptive to the idea that our subconscious might bring things out in the process. Because I don't know, sometimes I see interviews with famous people, and they speak about the fact that all you need is perseverance and grit and looking at your goal.

And I'm like, "That doesn't speak to me." I think also you need to allow for a degree of change and flexibility, and maybe your goal won't be your goal.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Totally, totally. I think as artists too there's being torn between the outcome of something, and then the process of something. And then also I would say with a lot of artists at a certain level, I feel this as a First Nations artist, this level of bureaucracy and responsibility that you also feel. And I mean I feel it in a way because I'm committed to the project of loving dancing and doing dancing, but then it's hard to draw the ring around yourself, a one, to allow yourself to continue with the project of loving what you do, without necessarily having to push towards a very concrete outcome. But at the same time, it's like it is nice to have an outcome, it is nice to have a structure to work towards, to show. And it's like how to balance that thing to continue with the act of loving, that somehow transpires into the act of doing.

And I feel like for writers, I used to get kind of jealous. I dated a painter for a while, and I'd always be like... Be in his studio making things by himself. And I'd be dealing with a lot of dancers and producers and et cetera, and I'd be like, "Wow, what a luxury to be able to make things by yourself." And then on the inverse then I made these chatbot works where I was working mostly by myself, and I was like, "God." They're kind of two sides of the same coin, because you're always trying to get to the outcome. And whether or not the outcome is transparent in a room with lots of people, or the outcome is transparent by yourself with only an audience of one, it all comes out in some way I think from that psyche.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Totally.

**Amrita Hepi:**

You're at some point undeniably vulnerable. And it's not like... I mean I was watching the Michael Jordan documentary about basketball, and I was like, "Damn, sometimes I wish I could just train to be a great conceptual artist."

And I was like, “What a fallacy that’s just not going to happen. Doesn’t work like that.” But I think when I was first talking to... Now I’ve kind of riffed on your....

**Tilly Lawless:**

Oh, don’t worry.

**Amrita Hepi:**

The wantings of art and doing of art. When I first came to you to make this work, *The Read*, speculative title, what was your... how did you feel?

**Tilly Lawless:**

So, the reason I liked what you approached me about was because I’ve always thought about the similarities between... People think of sex work as so different to all other things, you know what I mean? They kind of put it in a box by itself. And for me, it’s so similar to other kinds of both physical and emotional labour. It’s like therapy and it’s also like being a football player in a way, because your body can get easily injured and maybe it doesn’t have a lot of longevity to it. But then also I see it as similar to so many art forms as well, which people don’t think of. I think they’re so caught up in the theoretical discussions around the morality, that they don’t think of the way in which it’s like everything else.

And also the way in which all work and art is like everything else. There’s a congruity to all of it. And just like you were saying in the way that working by yourself ends up being like working with other people. I think people get caught up on the differences so much that they don’t see the alignment between it all. And so, what you approached me about really appealed to me, because I was like, “Yeah, this is the way I think about sex work.”

**Amrita Hepi:**

That’s so true. And I really liked what you were just saying then. Yeah, it’s like work is work is work is work, the king has to work, and artists are working. And I guess we can get caught up in the measuring, the meritocracy of art, underneath the utility or like a futile utility or meritocracy under a conservative government, which is kind of a boon.

But it's then that you're... like I hate the idea that in some way the artist is divorced or special or a genius from the working class in some way, because it's all really intertwined.

I guess for people that are I guess listening to me and getting to know us for the first time, me and Tilly are supported by Vitalstatistix to do a residency this year, and also a residency next year very generously. And we're working on something called *The Read*, and it'll explore the body of professional service. And so often when we're lost in the act or observations of moments of a reverence or desire, we forget the transmissions or transgressions that have led us there. The labour that leads us to the dance, to the sex, to the pleasure, the race, the brief encounter with a thrill of the body. And I mean, that's the starting point, but I feel like it's going to ebb and flow out from there.

So yeah, that's where... And yeah, I guess almost as well, I wonder when you're talking to people about sex workers, I feel not to be like, "Sex work, dance work, they're exactly the same", because they're obviously very different. But I do find a lot of the time people will talk to me intuitively about the limits of it first. "How much longer do you think you can do this for? When will it be over?" Before they're thinking about the potential of how it'll continue to reverberate through things for the rest of our lives. Do you find that?

**Tilly Lawless:**

Oh, yeah, totally. I feel like people see a time limit on many kinds of physical labour and creativity, which is... But I feel like it's aimed at often more at women. Because I feel people like us, when am I going to stop sex work? And people obviously are like, "How long can you dance for?" But I feel like a man who's working on roofs or a concreter, no one's being like, "Oh, you're going to have to give that up pretty soon, your back will give way." But because women are meant to keep their bodies like youthful and only meant to do things with them publicly when they're in that pristine state of nubile young bodies, I feel like people always think of the disintegration of women's bodies. "So, what point are you thinking of stopping?" But I don't feel like they do that to men so much.

**Amrita Hepi:**

It's like this weird thing of how long can you be able to be seen for?

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yes.

**Amrita Hepi:**

How long can you be seen for before it's embarrassing in some way?

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

And especially be seen as the object of desire before you have to... yeah, before you're not anymore. And it's that weird, again, comes back to that invisible visible. Yeah, the invisible and the visible, how long are you willing to be visible for? And for what? And I think that that's an interesting... I talk a lot about... I mean, I think that I describe myself as a voyeur a lot, and it's one of the skills that I think is healthy with dance. The idea of being able to witness others and to be witnessed by them, and how powerful that is. But then yeah, how long are you able to be able to bear the witness, bear the gaze of others?

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

And it's almost like it's weird when you can feel the gaze coming on. And then when all of a sudden it's like you feel the gaze of desire, and then at one point you think that you're working with the gaze of desire, or you kind of think you're the choreographer. And then there's another point where you're like, "Wait, wait, wait, is it going away?" Yeah, I don't know.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah. And I feel like also sometimes you're not aware of feeling the gaze on you, till suddenly you don't feel it. Or vice versa, you don't realize you haven't been feeling it, till suddenly you're feeling it a lot. And so for example, sometimes when I for example get, you would be the same, I get more attention in certain cities. So, if I go to like Italy, India, Morocco, because I'm blonde and blue-eyed, all those places I got so much attention from men, and it was exhausting. And then one of the reasons I like Berlin so much is because I'm completely unnoticed there, because I'm not exotic, I don't stand out. And I didn't even realise once when I travelled in Morocco, I didn't realise why I was so exhausted, till I got to Berlin and no man tried to talk to me. And I was like, "Oh, I've been feeling the gaze on me and hadn't even realised till suddenly there was an absence." Yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

I thought as well, I sometimes used to hold this thought when I was traveling through some Southeast Asian countries, this kind of feeling of I almost felt like, "Oh, cool, I can be a spy here. I can fit in." And then I remember being in Malaysia once and they were like, "Oh, no, we know you're not Malaysian, you're too tall. You're just too tall." And I was like, "Oh, damn."

**Tilly Lawless:**

You're like, "There goes that career option if my dancing falls through."

**Amrita Hepi:**

"You're too tall, and you're very obvious." I think I'm being all low-key, and really I'm like, "Aha", and spying. I guess because we were just talking about absence. Do you think absence or a lack of something, do you reckon that drives or detracts from passion?

**Tilly Lawless:**

For me, I can't speak to everyone, but for me it definitely drives it. So much of my writing is about loss or mourning, or I often write the most when I'm really heartbroken.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Totally.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah, and this book that I just told you I've just finished writing, it was written through lockdown, and was just about all the things that I missed before corona, and what lockdown had taken away from me. So yeah, I actually don't even know if... I don't want to feed into the tortured artist thing, because I think that's fucked, I think you can totally create art without being depressed. But I do wonder if you're completely satisfied with everything in your life, is there such a need to-

**Amrita Hepi:**

What's the drive?

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah. Well, because I often find writing for me is like catharsis if I'm struggling with something. Or we were talking about the other day that dance can be a way if you're feeling intense emotion, you can dance those emotions out of you and work out what's really underneath. And so, I feel like for me writing is like that. So, I do wonder if I was completely satisfied in everything with my life, would I need to write?

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yeah, I mean I agree that heartache and the heartbreak lamentation is definitely driving things. I think as well I feel like the further that I've gotten with dancing, it's almost been away from the overly emotionally expressive, which I think is very powerful thing to do. But it's almost like trying to... it's this weird thing of who has the right to express themselves, and in which ways? In which way are we able to do that to work with the... And also to the right to refusal of expression and dance, which is I guess kind of caught up in this very post-modern movement of dancing away from the transcendental. And I mean, I'm very in to dance in that it is ecstatic, and that you're moving into the rigour of the feeling of it. The feeling of doing the thing, rather than being driven to go, "I need to rid myself of this." And to... yeah.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah, it doesn't need to be going away from something and be heading towards something. That's actually a good-

**Amrita Hepi:**

It propels-

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah, yeah, totally. That's true.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yeah. But I agree with you about the heartache.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah. At least there's one good thing that comes from heartache.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Totally, yeah. I wonder about... I made this work recently that was very thinking about the power of devotion, or the lack of devotion, or really trying to think about vengeance and love. And I feel like it's always a sticky subject to quantify. I mean it's the same with trying to in some ways I imagine... I mean I'm not that great at writing. I enjoy it as a way to try and remember things as like a callback system. But I guess I wanted to ask you about how, I know this is a very vague question, but how do you think the body speaks in your writing and in your work?

**Tilly Lawless:**

I think that my body demands to be seen in my writing, in that it doesn't like to be left behind, it doesn't like me to write all these things about my feelings and not mention it. It's constantly reminding me like, "Hi, I'm here and you need to reference me in what you're speaking about." Because even in that I can't go a day without having my mood affected by my body in some way, in that whether it's period cramps or whether I have PMDD, so before my period I get completely insane. And I have a hyperactive thyroid, so that affects my mental health, and I have tinnitus. And so, I feel like everything that occurs in my day-to-day is governed by what's occurring with my body at that point.

So, not only is it constantly there. But yeah, when I begin to write it's like, "Don't forget." That what has happened, hasn't just happened in the vacuum of your mind, it's like, "I'm there with you, and sometimes I've caused it." So, I think when I write I keep things very visceral, because to me the act of thinking has to be visceral because it exists within the physical realm. Like our minds exist within this physical shell. Am I making sense?

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yeah. No, that makes sense. That makes sense. And you've done the amazing thing and you've written a book.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

"I've wrote a book during lockdown." Can you tell me a little bit about that?

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah. So, it's basically, I don't know if you've ever read *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf. But she wrote that in the 1920s, and it was one woman's day as a train of thought.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yes, yes.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah. Okay, so I've taken that concept of just following someone's train of thought. But what I've done is I've done it over eight days across a year, and it's to mimic the way in which you think, depending on what mental state you're in. And it's to show the ways in which mental health are cyclical, and that your mind, the pace of your mind and your thoughts, is affected by your emotional state.

And so, if you're elated you think at a certain pace, or if you're depressed or if you're really anxious it becomes very repetitive and you stick almost at the same topics again and again and are unable to move past them. So, it's trying to show the way in which your external world and your internal world interplay. And yeah, so that's what it is, yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

I feel like I remember in *Mrs Dalloway* reading it that there's something like what is the mind... I'm going to fuck this up. But what is the mind compared to love? Or what is the mind compared to the matters of the heart, matters of love.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

And yeah, it was trying to split that into two things, which is just impossible.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Oh, totally. But yeah, I've kind of taken the theme a little, not all the themes. But it also, as well as dealing with mental health, it's very much about romantic obsession, and the way in which that forms your mind. Yeah, so that is what I've written through lockdown.

**Amrita Hepi:**

I think she, I don't know if this is in *Mrs Dalloway*, but also the feeling in *The Bell Jar*. Virginia Woolf was, one thing that I remember is, "to love makes one solitary". To love something or someone, it ensconces you into the reverberation of the idea of love in and of itself. As much as it's a shared experience, it's also incredibly lonely. I constantly harp on about being in the product of loving dance, and in some ways it's like you're allowed the love of witnessing others, but it kind of, by identifying that love, it becomes in some way a solitary pursuit.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yeah, and you're never as lonely as when you're completely in love.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Oh, totally. Because I think when you're completely in love you're existing mainly in your mind with the concept of the person you're in love with. And when you're in your mind, you're truly alone.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Cool, can't wait to fall in love. I like this idea, I've been thinking and talking a lot about... I feel like it's been a very nostalgic time, and I really have been leaning into nostalgia a little bit, much to the... sometimes to my own peril, sometimes to my own... probably my analyst's annoyance. But I wonder what's the project or the act or the thing that you wish you could have done? You wish you could have realized, or? Yeah.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah. Do you mean someone else's work that you see and you're like, "Oh, I wish I did that"?

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yeah, like that, but also the thing or the moment where you were like, "God damn, I wish I got on that plane." Or yeah.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Oh.

**Amrita Hepi:**

I like both of these questions.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Okay. So, for the second one, I don't think I... I'm very impulsive, so I don't think I have actually anything that I haven't done that I'm like, "I wish I did." There are things that I did that I wish I didn't.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Okay, okay.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Like my only savings for example last year, well at any point in my life, is I've had a little bit of Bitcoin. And last year this girl asked me on a date in London, and I was like, "Yeah, I'll fly to London for a date." So, I sold my Bitcoin to be able to afford it. And got there and she'd started dating someone else in the meantime, which was fine, my risk, but I was like, "Why the fuck did I sell my only savings to buy a flight to the other side of the world for a maybe date?"

**Amrita Hepi:**

Oh, my God. I feel like I have totally done something similar.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Done something like that?

**Amrita Hepi:**

I kissed somebody, and then was like... they were like, "When will I see you again?" I was like, "I'm going to London in 36 hours, do you want to come?" And then they came and I was like, "Oh, my God." I was like, "Hardly know this person, we're going to spend all this time together." But it makes for a great yarn.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Oh, no, totally. Such a funny story. So, there's definitely nothing that I, "Oh, I wish I did it", because I have always just done it.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yeah.

**Tilly Lawless:**

But in terms of a work, I don't think there's a work in particular that I wish I'd done. But I did say when I was really stoned the other day with my housemate, we were talking about how we want people to think about us with our art or whatever. And I was like, "I want people to think about me the way they think and feel about Dido." I feel like with Dido you're like really emotional and you're solitarily walking through a cityscape thinking, thinking, feeling. And I'm like, "That's what I want people to relate to me like."

**Amrita Hepi:**

Oh, my God. That's like the constant nostalgic melancholic state of 2004.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yes, yes.

**Amrita Hepi:**

That's so great. What about when she collaborated with Eminem as that-

**Tilly Lawless:**

Oh, my God. No, that is not... And I hate sometimes when I search her that's the first song that comes up, I'm like, "No!" What about you? Do you have a work that you wish... is there something that you're like, "Damn, I wish I created that"?

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yeah, there's heaps. Oh, wow, wow. I think I just have artists that I'm generally really in love with. Like oh, God. And now I'm like, "Ah, who are they?"

I really like Sophie Calle, she's a writer and a hysteric and an artist who I feel like she takes the maps of her experience and makes these incredibly participatory works. And she's just continued to do it in any kind of form or way that has come into it. So for example, she does a bit of performance and then a bit of... yeah, I feel like a little bit is very scrapbooking. And because I'm such a Doris or constantly curious-

**Tilly Lawless:**

Wait, what did you refer to yourself as? A Doris?

**Amrita Hepi:**

A Doris. It's like a blak term for being just constantly checking things out.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Okay, yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

I'm always like... I'll be in a house and it's like, "I wonder what's in the fridge."

**Tilly Lawless:**

You're like a sticky beak.

**Amrita Hepi:**

I'm a sticky beak, yeah.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

I'm a constant sticky beak. Especially in the physical world. As soon as somebody's like, "I just started seeing someone." I'm like, "Okay, so what was the moment that... How did you get there?"

But she did a work where she found somebody's address book, and then got to know this person through going through all of... like calling all the people in his address book.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Oh, right. Yeah, yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

And then she also had another work where she had been broken up with via email, and the last line of the email was, "Take care of yourself." And so, she went around asking all these other women, "How do you take care of yourself? What do you do to take care of yourself?" And yeah, I feel like she's great. Lisa Reihana is another artist, Tracey Moffatt, *The Other*, that great video work that she made that was about looking at the gaze of I guess white people on the notion of the other through film. Which apparently, I watched that the other day, and I feel like if anybody they haven't watched that yet, they should watch it. But what I love about that, because it's like this supercut video, is that she never got any permission, or as the rumour goes, that she never got any permissions for that. And I've always been like, when people are like, "Oh, what about copyright or this or that the other?" And I'm like, "As if Hollywood has time to watch my piecemeal little video work, I'm just going to sample whatever I want."

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

"I'm Indigenous, move out of my way. I'm taking back what's mine." I don't know.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Amrita, that's so funny that you say that, because growing up as a little kid my mum worked in copyright at the time. And so, when I was like six years old I wrote this short story, and I included a Banjo Paterson poem in my short story, and my mum made me look up and find out whether it was legal for me to include that excerpt of short poem in my six-year-old story. So, I've always-

**Amrita Hepi:**

Oh my god, you fucking nark!

**Tilly Lawless:**

I know. I've always grown up with a hyper-awareness of whether you can use something or not.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Which is, look, I'm saying this now, I'm also such a magpie. I'm always like, "Yeah", I feel like I'm always collecting bits and pieces from other things to put into my nest. Maybe it's a bowerbird, I'm not sure. But that's interesting. I think it's something to talk about definitely. The kind of hyper-awareness around appropriation or around abiding other things or remixing things, or permissions or protocol. We are in the age of thinking about who was absent, and then who gets put back into things and under what storyline. And I mean, I don't know. I don't know. Do you ever get-

**Tilly Lawless:**

Paranoid about stuff?

**Amrita Hepi:**

Paranoid about that stuff? I feel like I don't. But then I'm waiting to be called out, I don't know.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Well, so much of my writing deals with... often it's based on real events. I will check with people before publishing anything just to make sure they're comfortable. But I mean, fucking I write about clients all the time and I don't check with clients.

**Amrita Hepi:**

No.

**Tilly Lawless:**

So, I guess, I don't know. But friends I'll check with.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yeah. But then how do you check on I guess... Yes, definitely check on friends and ... I'm always caught between like, how do you check on a memory? If feelings can be facts, and then what's in the real?

**Tilly Lawless:**

Oh, well I don't think you check that their memory is the same as yours. It's not fact-checking. It's saying, "Hey, I've written this thing, are you comfortable with me writing it even though it's my version of events?" That's like-

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yeah, do you-

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yeah. I would be like, “Do you make me sound pretty or heroic or brave? Because then it’s fine.” She was six foot three, very slim, tanned, long blonde hair. “Yes, you can publish that.”

**Tilly Lawless:**

I was going to say. Yeah, if you ever want some glowing review of you or something I can totally write something for you.

**Amrita Hepi:**

You were talking to me the other day about this reviewing.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Oh, God.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Reviewal process. And I’ve definitely-

**Tilly Lawless:**

Of sex workers, yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Of sex workers. I’ve definitely had some scathing reviews. But that feels like, “What the hell?” Yeah, can you talk to me a bit about that? And getting a bad review.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah, so I mean I don’t look at review boards anymore because they’re just fucked. And even when they’re good reviews of you they just go into such details about your body that it’s just disgusting. But I did have something really weird happen recently. I had my first complaint about me at a brothel for five years.

And this was such a bizarre experience because this man came in, and in the booking, I thought we had a nice booking together. He started crying to me, his wife had died nine months ago, and this was the first time he was having sex. And he really opened up to me. So, in return I opened up to him. And so, I was talking. He was like, "How did you start in the industry?" And I was like, "Well, I used to do erotic massage, but I can't do it anymore because I have RSI from all the hand jobs."

So, anyway. So, I'm telling him all this stuff. And we have sex, it's gentle sex, like whatever. And as we're having sex, I'm like, "I've just got my nipple re-pierced so be careful about touching it." Anyway I leave that booking thinking what a nice experience to have with someone. Then an hour later the manager goes, "Maddy, can you come into the office?" And I come into the office and he's like, "Oh, you've just had a complaint." And I'm like, "Oh, that's weird." Because I never get complaints.

And he drills up this complaint, and it's like, "Hi, I just saw Maddy, and these are the things that weren't a good service about her. A, she wouldn't give me a massage. B, she wouldn't let me touch her nipple because she'd just had it pierced." And then it was like, "What? You didn't even ask for a massage." It was just like you drew something from my personal conversation with you, which is that I have RSI, and include it in a complaint about me.

And yeah, it was that he couldn't touch my nipple, and there was one other physical thing he complained about. And I was just like, "Wow, am I just a body to you?" You're not realizing that when you book a woman... Oh, and the other thing he complained about was that... Oh, my God, so I was at the end of my period and there was a tiny bit of blood on the condom, and he complained about that. And so, I was like, "Okay, so you're complaining that you can't grab my nipple as hard as you want. You're complaining that there's a little bit of blood, which happens sometimes when you fuck a vagina. And you're complaining that I can't physically give a massage because I have RSI." I was like, "You booked a person, not like a fuck doll or something." And that was just so insulting. Also, because I felt like we shared this intimate experience of him crying.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Well, that is some more... for me I'm like, number one, it sounds like he needs to get a Fleshlight.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah, totally.

**Amrita Hepi:**

But number two, it's the things that you had confided in him, he's then reworked that into his own fiction for the review.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah. And I did wonder if maybe he went home and felt guilt and complex feelings about having slept with someone other than his dead wife for the first time. So, I was like, "Maybe he had to fucking..." People behave in weird ways with grief. I was like, "Maybe he needed to separate himself from the intimacy of that moment." But it was so weird, yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

So yeah, if you're listening, you're fucking cut. No I'm kidding. Yeah, I wonder sometimes what a bad day, or also in the realms of performance, how you can never... the impossibility of a measured review. And I know that... I don't write reviews because I think that from knowing the heartache that goes in to getting dance up, I'm never one to want to put the yardstick stick in. I think Vicki Van Hout is probably the best dance reviewer in this country. But yeah, I definitely had some middle of the road reviews. And I've wondered how did you get to that? And it's weird too, because sometimes I've read reviews that are bad, I'm like, "Yeah, that's probably a little bit true." And there's a feeling of pride and then also feeling of shame, and then... But yeah, the idea that it's the bloody, that there was a tiny bit of blood. And it's like, "What do you think the rest of me is made up of?"

**Tilly Lawless:**

It was also so weird, because he didn't even notice the blood. I noticed it and said, "I'm so sorry, there's a little bit of blood." And he said, "Oh, it's fine." And then he complained about it in the review. I was like, "What?"

**Amrita Hepi:**

This guy pulling at straws.

**Tilly Lawless:**

No, totally. Yeah, sorry.

**Amrita Hepi:**

I was going to say as well just because we've... I mean, we're going to continue talking for a couple of years making this work.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Just cool, be nice to finally get into the theatre with you. But before we close this out I would love for you to do a reading of some of your writings, just the most... I'll let you introduce it yourself. But yeah, just to finish up and to hear you perform your craft.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah, for sure. Well, I've got something ready that I wrote like, I don't know, like three weeks ago. And it's actually so funny because it weirdly fits in with what we're talking about, because it's all about absence.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Oh, my gosh.

**Tilly Lawless:**

And yeah, it's about missing partying basically.

**Amrita Hepi:**

You're a psychic genius prophet, amazing. All right. Take it away. Take it from the top.

**Tilly Lawless:**

Amazing.

*I miss queer club so much. I want to be peeing in an alleyway, not just posing in an alleyway. I want to be legs spread in a gutter, gravel dust to my arse cheeks, talking politics at 2:00 AM. I want to be legs spread in a cubicle too, with fingers inside me, or my fingers inside someone else. Don't even care, because neither of us can feel it anyway. What's even happening? Are we fucking? Are we making out? Do we know each other? Let's get back to the music.*

*I want to be thinking I'm in the best place in the entire world, covered in other people's sweat, ankles giving way at 3:00 AM. I want to be cunt out, voice hoarse, toes bleeding. I want to be smoking a rush joint, puff, puff, pass babe. Let's smash it so we can get back to this set at 4:00 AM. I want to run into someone I've met a dozen times before, and every time we forget each other's name and point, "You again?" I want to text a friend, "Where you?" And I want to sit with some strangers till someone yells, "Oh, Tillios." And I remember, "Oh, that's right, I was looking for you but I got distracted."*

*I want to be in my car, picking dried K crumbs out of my nose, listening to Kylie on the radio, and drumming my feet on the dashboard while a friend dances on the street beside me. I want to forget my responsibilities, be reckless, not look at my iCal for at least a day. I want to contemplate kick-ons, but then go back to mine instead because I've got a bathtub and we can chain smoke in it while the magpies warble and we wait for Woolies to open.*

*I want to get a call from someone at 8:00 AM going, "Babes, you still up? Come to Newtown." I want to be washing the dirt off my knees and untangling my hair, and I want to say, "No, but let's get ph together this week." I want to be feeling hot, looking hot, and pass through the crowd from hug to hug. "Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey. Let me lean on you for a sec or I'll topple in this heels." I want to be surrounded by my community. I want to be touched by my community. I fucking miss my community.*

**Amrita Hepi:**

Me too, right?

**Tilly Lawless:**

Yeah. Ah, thank you. There we go, I performed for an audience, right?

**Amrita Hepi:**

Yeah.

**Tilly Lawless:**

That was a performance.

**Amrita Hepi:**

That was beautiful. Yeah, thank you, thank you.

**Tilly Lawless:**

That's all good.

**Amrita Hepi:**

Thank you for this talk. I'm not going to bumble into anything else because I think that's a beautiful way to leave it. So, thank you, Tilly.

**Tilly Lawless:**

My pleasure. Are we wrapping up? Is that what's happening?

**Amrita Hepi:**

I think we're, yeah, I think we're going to wrap up.

**Tilly Lawless:**

I'm so literal. I can't read your unconscious physical cues from over here so I'm like, "What's happening?"

**Amrita Hepi:**

Oh damn, I thought we were friends, actually collaborators, so you got to give me a few more months, babe. Yeah, yeah. We'll wrap that up.

## **Reading List**

- *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf (1925)
- *Nothing but My Body* by Tilly Lawless (presale available in April, 2021)
- *Other* by Tracey Moffatt (2009)
- *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath (1963)

## Daniel Jenatsch & Matthew Griffin



*Daniel Jenatsch and Matthew Griffin. Images: courtesy of Daniel; by Ben Sullivan.*

I don't know Matthew Griffin well, we were in a group show together a few years ago. Since then we met one time and ate an incredible number of pastries and played a few games of bullet chess on our phones sitting across from one another. He's a very strong bullet chess player. Since then we've made a few unsuccessful attempts to meet and occasionally send each other the worst chess memes we come across.

I initially thought of Matthew for this conversation proposal because I thought it would be interesting to talk to Matthew about chess, especially because the theme of the conversation was to be about absence and performance, as any chess player knows, the absence of any one piece changes all possible moves. We didn't end up talking about chess at all during our conversation, but he told a very funny story about a teenage dance blunder.

– Daniel Jenatsch

## **About Daniel**

Daniel Jenatsch is an award-winning artist and composer, living and working on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung Peoples of the Kulin Nation. In 2019 Daniel presented his installation 'The Sheraton Hotel incident' at ACCA as part of the inaugural Macfarlane Commission Award. In 2018, Arts House presented 'Mysterious Illness', a CultureLab commission. Daniel has collaborated with artists including Jonathan Bepler, Kimsooja, Claire Lambe, Lucy Guerin, Atlanta Eke, Amrita Hepi, Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano and many others on award-winning compositions, films, performances, and installations, and video games.

## **About Matthew**

Matthew Griffin is an Australian artist currently living and working in Sydney. His work has been exhibited in conventional and unconventional forums in Australia and internationally, including museums and galleries such as the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney; Hayward Gallery, London; and on social media platforms including Instagram and eBay.

Matthew Griffin's practice engages a range of media including video, installation, sculpture, photography, collage and photomontage. Recurring themes in his work include body-object relations; the makeshift and haphazard as sculptural qualities; the contemporary ubiquity of cameras and the resulting difficulty of producing meaningful images in the post-internet age. In recent projects Griffin has examined the way humour functions in both a visual and narrative form, and the ethical dilemmas associated with the production of contemporary art.

## **Daniel Jenatsch & Matthew Griffin Conversation Transcription**

**Matthew Griffin:**

Hey, that's, anyway, but this has all worked out fine.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, hey did you get nine holes in?

**Matthew Griffin:**

Got nine holes in– well, I didn't, I had to skip a hole cause we were running late. I called up the golf course and then I don't know whether– have you played much golf, Daniel?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

No, I've never played a single round of golf in my life.

**Matthew Griffin:**

That's a tragedy.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Really?

**Matthew Griffin:**

That's a tragedy.

*[17 seconds of silence]*

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Hello.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Hello.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Hey.

**Matthew Griffin:**

How's that sweet moment of silence there that we touched together?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

It was beautiful.

**Matthew Griffin:**

I'm starting to understand what both Simon and Garfunkel were talking about there, because those 10 seconds where we touched it across the divide of the Internet that was magic. I couldn't envisage this situation.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Sure. Yeah. What Simon and Garfunkel would have done with Cleanfeed?

**Matthew Griffin:**

Oh, I'll tell you what, it would be different. It would be a different set of... It would be a lot of harmonies I think. That would be great if we harmonize this whole talk.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Oh yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Your lowest register you can get in, because I can get pretty high.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Oh yeah? How high can you get?

**Matthew Griffin:**

Well I can. Well you got to do a low hum.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Okay, I'll do.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah. Do it [*singing*]. Do that, do the Levis. You've got to do it on a loop though.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Right.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Well just do a sound and I'll harmonize. I'm pretty good at the harmonies.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. Right.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah. Okay go.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

[*Singing*]

**Matthew Griffin:**

See, you do that through the whole thing. No you don't do the whole song, it's not karaoke we're just doing harmonies.

This leads me on to something I've been thinking about recently. And I'll put this out there into the Internet, because maybe someone can make this happen. I've been looking a lot at footy club songs, you know when they win the game and they sing a song?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Are you familiar with this?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Well, I'm not super familiar, but yeah I'm aware of it.

**Matthew Griffin:**

But do you get the concept? Like when—

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, I get the concept. Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

When I win a game or something, I get in the room and then they sing this club song. Now what's strange is that the big teams have their songs, right? Like the main professional teams, but then the little independent teams, they just sometimes take one of the big team song and just change one of the words, but keep the same thing. Right? I've always—

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Is that for copyright reasons or?

**Matthew Griffin:**

No, no, no. Nobody comes up with a different song. You know what I mean? Like they go, "We'll just do it because we hear the Richmond song on TV. So we'll just take the Richmond song or whatever."

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Do you have a team?

**Matthew Griffin:**

I do have a team, but that's not the point. And I don't want to say what team I go for. This is the thing that I think is crazy, which I guess we'll get into with other stuff hopefully. But I think this is... I really enjoy singing, or this concept of singing, but particularly this idea of songs that you carry around with you. So particularly sporting songs. So I think it's a huge loss that teams don't write their own songs for like little country clubs and stuff.

For example, when I was at high school, when I grew up in the country, our song was just North Melbourne's song with the name changed. Surely someone from the club could have made up this thing. Now this gets me to my point, which I wanted to talk to you about. Because you might be the guy, you're a sound engineer guy.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. Right.

**Matthew Griffin:**

I believe that we make you, and I'm putting this out there for anybody that's got some small sporting team that might like this. First of all, I would encourage them to write their own songs. But second, I would like to forward my services, and for you Daniel, I would like you to maybe help, and you can tell me if you'd want to be part of this. But I would like to write a song for a small sporting club, but it's got four part harmonies. You know what I mean?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah—

**Matthew Griffin:**

So like at the end of the game, people will go and... Yeah. And then people go, "Holy smokes, you got to wait till Wagga Wagga Thirds wins the game because this is it." This is incredible choral performance. Wouldn't that be great?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

That'd be incredible. Yeah. I could just imagine the whole stadiums of crying football fans.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Well this is the magic. This is the other thing, is that then the fans, when they sing it at the end you encourage them to learn all the parts as well. So when there's some old, somebody that's got a deep voice because I love singing the baritone section, and then you've got small kids singing, prepubescent kids singing this beautiful high pitched... What do you call that? What's the top notes? What's that? Soprano?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Soprano. Is that it?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, I think so. Yeah, but there's also a child soprano too, but I can't remember what that's called.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Is there? I don't think. They can't have that. It seems just like excluded by age.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, pretty much. Yeah. Once you hit puberty, you're out. You're off the team.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Do you remember, this leads me to something else, but there was on *60 Minutes* years ago, there was... Wait, how old are you? If you don't mind me asking?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

I'm 35.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah. Maybe you missed this. Was *60 Minutes* a big deal when you were a kid?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, it was a bit of a big deal. Yeah. But not really for me personally, but I remember it felt like there was the news and *60 Minutes* and that was kind of it.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Did you grow up, where were you in the city?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, I grew up in the Blue Mountains.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Okay. Did you have all the channels? Because in-

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, we had the channels. Yeah. Right. Two channels damn.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yep. We had the ABC, then we had Channel 8. Which was like a mix between-

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Channel 8?

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah. Bits and pieces of the other one. But I remember this, I still remember this—

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Between Seven and—

**Matthew Griffin:**

Seven, Nine and Ten. They just take a bit of each of them. But what was funny is I still remember that was until I was in about year seven or something. I think they changed it over. You got the other three. But I remember still in like around that time, you had to, the kids at school had to write an essay, like a paper thing about the best moment, the most important moment in history. And one kid, there was a name for whatever they call the changeover they have in all the channels. And a kid wrote this paper about that. People were talking about various history, like world war two or whatever, and all these incredible things. And then this kid had written about when we got all the channels. It was quite funny.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Wow.

**Matthew Griffin:**

But what I was going to say is, so *60 Minutes* was this incredible... It was seen to be a much bigger deal then than what it is now, because it's rubbish. But the big yarn event, or whatever, I guess it was George Negus. Who were the other people, can you remember anyone else on there?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

No, those are the only two that ring a bell actually.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Well, I think they're the cream of the crop.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. The golden years of *60 Minutes*.

**Matthew Griffin:**

It was great, because it was real journalism at that stage. But there was one, there's a few that I remember, but one particular one, that was about this kid that had the voice of like a choir singer that had this, must've been this super gifted child soprano that you talk about. And I remember it very clearly because I go through the whole thing and he sung, and I was from like this, I had not really much access to classical music when I was young. But the thing that always I've thought about recently, it's come to mind whenever I think about this kid, is this moment where they're talking about him and he's got this whole voice of an angel, the greatest voice ever. And then they ask him, "What's going to happen when you go through puberty?" and he cried about it.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Wow.

**Matthew Griffin:**

And his voice sort of broke up a little bit.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah right.

**Matthew Griffin:**

And it was very powerful TV.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

And that boy's name was Matthew Griffin.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yes, exactly. I wish I could tell it to someone the other day, because we had, I went to a Catholic school and we used to do a thing in the choir where we had to sing like at church or whatever, and you would just move your mouth without the words coming out. So it appeared to the teachers that you were singing, but I was too scared to sing. So I wish I was that boy.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Right.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Have you ever sung in a choir?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, I have actually. Yeah. When I was living in Berlin about 10 years ago. I don't know quite why I had the idea to join a choir, but I joined an actual church choir. I think I just wanted to learn German a bit better and to... I was just surrounded by all these kind of wasted Berlin artists.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah. That is wild.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. So I'd kind of I'd get up in the afternoon hung over, and join this church choir. And sung all these hymnals with all these weird German people.

**Matthew Griffin:**

I kid you not, and it's going to sound like I'm making this up, but I got goose pimples when you said that. I literally have goose pimples right now.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Wow.

**Matthew Griffin:**

I suddenly got a vision of you in a choir. Because you're quite, not shy. What would you say? Reserved.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

I think shy is fair enough. But shy isn't really a word that you'd give to adults, I think, that often.

**Matthew Griffin:**

No it's not. I guess shy feels like that's something you should come out of, or it's almost an insult, isn't it?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Like reserved is like a fully functioning way to be in the world. When you say a kid's shy, it's like, Billy's a bit shy, but we're giving him karate lessons.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, exactly. That was actually me as a kid. Yeah. We'll get him a guitar and maybe he'll figure it out.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Now, tell me how many people were in this choir?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

I think that was about, it was a pretty big group. There was about 20 people, I'd say.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Oh great.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

And they were mainly older, they were proper Berliners. They were just like people who'd lived through the Berlin Wall coming down, and had kind of been there for a long time. Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

And how long were you in this choir for?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

I was in the choir, it was called the Taborstraße Choir, I think. And yeah, I was in the choir for about nine months.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Oh Yeah. I mean that's—

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

I hadn't thought about it much, but when Catherine and I, my wife and I were living in New York a friend of hers who was an older lady, was in a choir and would make us come to the Christmas recital thing. And the first year I had to do it, I was like, "This is going to... Who wants to go to this? This is going to suck." But it was incredible. The thing of a group of people, and not that they were gifted singers, but just having 20 people do this thing is awesome.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

I love it. And I'm surprised it's not bigger as just a concept. I don't know why the kids aren't doing that.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, totally. Yeah. Well, I think these football songs are a good place to start. Because the hardest thing is getting the people together.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Well this is the thing, I remember, I forget who it was. I remember a Scottish artist talking about, I think Roddy Buchanan or someone, was giving a talk at school and they talked about the greatest thing that they learned at school, at art school, was to sing. And it was through when you're in a lot of those European, and I mean the football culture places, because the songs are so a much bigger part of it than what they are here in Australia, like the teams are always singing, that you get over your shyness of singing in public. And that this concept of that you sing in a group is quite empowering, and lost a little bit like people... This is why I think when people... My pet hate in the world, there's many of them, I'm trying to be positive, is karaoke.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Really?

**Matthew Griffin:**

I hate karaoke. I hate it as a concept. I hate people's enthusiasm for it. Like when people go, "You should see me at karaoke, I'm incredible, let's go to karaoke. Wait till you hear me sing *Born to Run*" Like big deal. Like get up in front of 12 drunk people that have no interest in what you're singing, they're all looking at being booked to wait for their turn to do it. I think it's like symbolic of a lot of the problems in the world, where this delusion that people are paying attention to what you do.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

But, which leads me to my next thing. My idea was "choiraoke."

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. Whoa, that's really funny that you mentioned that, because one time I was working with a group of people in Brussels doing something. And we were all living in this warehouse together. And things would get a little bit loose sometimes. I was obsessed with karaoke and had kind of found that you could download every single song that's ever been written basically in a karaoke version. And I'd just been for months like torrenting thousands of karaoke songs. I think I ended up getting like 20 gigs of karaoke songs, which at the time was a lot—.

**Matthew Griffin:**

That's a great name for your biography.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. 20 gigabytes of karaoke. Yeah. But anyway, we came up with this idea called "Convivioke", which is basically what you just said. It was group karaoke, and we'd all just basically scream the songs together.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Perfect.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah. See that's the move where you go, which is what when this woman would ask us to come and see the choir, she's not asking us to come and see her. She's genuinely going, "This thing is incredible. I'm kind of part of it but you're not going to hear my voice in it all, but it's definitely worth experiencing the whole thing." I'm all about that. My other idea, my business idea for karaoke was, they probably have this already, but I think stand-up comedy karaoke. Where you just, the jokes are written, it's all like famous routines. I always thought that you could easily do that where someone just gets up and does Eddie Murphy, delirious or something.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. I mean, I guess that's kind of what TikTok is a lot of the time, right?

**Matthew Griffin:**

Wow, you and your TikTok. You've been waiting to put in TikTok. You're always going on about TikTok.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

I don't know anything about TikTok.

**Matthew Griffin:**

You've got to go and check out TikTok, it is the decline of Western civilization. It is the worst thing that ever happened in the world. It's terrible. It's unbelievable. But, I guess you just start feeling old, but it's a crazy phenomenon, TikTok.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

I can't get my head around it.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

I have the app on my phone, and every time I open it up, 30 minutes disappears and I don't know what happened to it. And it's just gone forever.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Well, but at least you were dancing for 30 minutes, Daniel. And it's great that you were recording yourself, and getting that out there.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. It's hard to perfect those videos.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah, the transitions they get you. That one where you throw the shoe up in the air and then it lands on your foot and you're in a different outfit, I think with the TikTok, the interface of it, the video recording, the video editing in it, that stuff is wild. That's incredible that you can do all of that stuff so simply. What I'm confused with is why everybody does the same moves. You know what I mean? Like it's all the same joke over and over again.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. But maybe it's a bit like the choir, but distributed evenly over time. It's like they want to be a part of the group activity, but-

**Matthew Griffin:**

No.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

No.

**Matthew Griffin:**

No, no, no, it can't be. It's completely different to that, because it's closer to karaoke than a choir. You know what I mean? You're still going, "Hey, look at me, do this version of Phil Collins' *Invisible Touch*." As if that's going to be, just the act of doing it is interesting. I get why you're singing *Invisible Touch* in the car, let's say, right? And I get why karaoke works, if you're drunk at a bar and you just want to do it. I'm talking about the enthusiasm for it, which I just never quite got. You know what I mean?

**Matthew Griffin:**

Like I understand that if we were just right now, you bursted into *Invisible Touch*. I don't even know how that goes.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. I don't know how it goes either.

**Matthew Griffin:**

*[Singing]* Wait a minute how does it go? Something like, *[singing]*. Is that it?  
Yeah. That's it?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. I don't know.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Do you get what I'm saying?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. I kind of kind of do.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Anyway. Sorry. I'm bumbling a bit there. I've gone off tangent. What were we talking before that? About you in the choir? Why were you in Berlin?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

I moved to Berlin because my partner at the time wanted to move to Berlin. And I was working as bicycle courier, and I knew that there were other bicycle couriers in Berlin. Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Great. I would never have picked that. So you were a bicycle courier, choir singer.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Geez. You're hiding these... This is interesting. Okay.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, I was I was just saying in the car this morning, I was just like the only thing I ever actually identified as specifically, I would never, like, I'm so embarrassed to say that I'm an artist or I'm anything else, but I definitely at the time was like, "I'm a bicycle courier." I lived and breath bicycles.

**Matthew Griffin:**

That is wild. What were you on, like a fixed wheel, right?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. Yeah, of course.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Of course.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

I don't understand why the bicycle... because in my mind, as just a regular person, gears on a bike seem like the greatest invention ever.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. It's a pretty good invention.

**Matthew Griffin:**

It's unbelievable. It seems like you're stepping backward, it seems like you're going about and then someone else goes, "No way. I'm only delivering packages on a penny farthing."

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yes.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Or whatever. Or a unicycle. What are you doing?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. That's exactly what it's like basically. I think it's just like, there's one legitimate reason why you would choose a fixed gear over another kind of bike, which is that there's way less maintenance and it's very solid. The chain is not going to come off. You're never going to have to change it. It's just kind of stuck like that forever, but that's kind of the only real argument. But I think the main reason why couriers like fixed gears is because it's just hardcore.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah. So what, did you have the little bike shoes or toe peg things?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. I had the bike shoes. I had a few different bike shoes. Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

That is wild. Do you have a little fixed gear tattoo somewhere? With a little cog hidden.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

No, no, I never got no—

**Matthew Griffin:**

And little Colnago logo or something?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

No.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Are you sure, or you just don't want to tell the World? I understand.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

I literally just looked at my arm to check, but I'm pretty sure that I don't.

**Matthew Griffin:**

That is wild. So wait a minute, did you do that in Australia as well?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, I did it in Australia for like seven years, I think.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Wow. Is it still big, bicycle couriering?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

No, not really. At a certain point, because most of the deliveries we were doing were contracts and banking and stuff like that, and now that that's all online, I really don't see many couriers around. There's a few that I recognise from back in the day, but there's not that many. They used to be like 20, at least.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Is there a little signal that you do to show them that you used to be a courier? Like a little secret head nod or something?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

No.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Did you use to have one of those little hats?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, yeah. I had one of those little hats.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Well guess what, you're going to love this, this digresses into a story. I, it goes back to the little choir singer as well. Part of the thing about this kid crying about, worried about puberty, like just I'll try to hold that off. I was like a crazy late developer. I was really small, like forever. So I was just begging for puberty. And so to have this kid upset that it was going to happen, it was a kick in the guts. Where I was going, "What are you doing?" Anyway, hut the one joy of that is that I was a rowing coxswain. Friends of mine—

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

You're going to have to explain what a rowing coxswain is.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Okay. So in rowing, there's the rowers, and then there's a little person steering the boat, another little person. Not always, because sometimes they don't have it. But because the rowers are facing backwards, they get someone facing forwards to be able to tell them if there's anything and to steer. Usually because of the weight distribution, they want someone really small.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Because of my late developing, I was tiny. I was asked by some family friends to become a rowing coxswain, right? And I was like, "Yeah, whatever. Yeah, sure. I'll get into it." This was when I was in about year eight as well, seven or eight. So it was at the time when kids were getting pretty big. I played football a lot, but I was just getting beat up by these men at that stage. I don't actually know when people go through puberty, but for me it was like year 11 or something. It was crazy.

**Matthew Griffin:**

I was like Doogie Howser at school. So I got this exchange student who was much smaller than everyone. But anyway, whatever. So we used to train on, we only had a little Lake in the town that I grew up in, but I would travel all around Victoria and we'd... I think it's called like King of the Yarra or something, or head of the Yarra or something. I won all these races just because the pair that I coxed, who were the family friends, they went on to going to the world championships and stuff.

They were real good. I was terrible. I hit a bridge once and we still won the race. It was crazy.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

You had one job.

**Matthew Griffin:**

I had one job and I hit the bridge. It was terrible. But they were so good we just came back and won. Anyway, I guess the success started going to my head. It was that time when I was sort of into skating, and I thought of myself as a bit punk rock and a bit different. I was kind of too cool to be a coxswain. So I started wearing–

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Too cool to be a coxswain, do you have that as a tattoo?

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yes I do. Yes I do. I should get that. We should go get tattoos together. That'd be great. What I started was wearing one of those, because my brother was into bicycle riding at that stage, and he gave me one of those little hats that they all wear that became cool again. A little, remember Look, the brand Look, it was called.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Oh yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

That was like a Mondrian pattern.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, they made the first full carbon fibre bikes, Look.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Right, don't geeky out on something. Specifically this.

I don't know what they did. All I know I had the Mondrian pattern on it, and Look across the top of it. I started wearing that whenever I was in the boat, and then I started getting them to write my name in the little catalogues as Nat The Hat.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Whoa.

**Matthew Griffin:**

So I'd turn up to like, Warrnambool, and I feel that I was a little rock star, "Yeah Nat The Hat. Oh Nat The Hat's there." Because we just won, we'd win everything. Anyway, so I always felt like I was king of the little rowing club, and then a girl that was another, she was a little bit older than me. She looked a little bit like Winnie Cooper from the wonder years. She started wearing a hat. She had gone and bought one of these little hats as well and started wearing it. And I was crushed. I was so embarrassed that someone was stealing my thing that I just stopped turning up. I was like, I'm over this. I can't have someone—

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Whoa. And that was the end of your rowing career.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Well yes. But then guess what? This is what's amazing, so I only did it for one year, it gets to the end of the year, the women that I used to be coxswain for, call me and go, "Hey mate, you got to come to the of year shindig, because you've won coxswain of the year." I'd won the most races, and I was like, "I don't want to go." And they I said, "Yeah, please come." And I was like, "Whatever, okay I'll come." But I was trying to be real cool.

So I turn up to the clubhouse thing. I come in late, wearing my hat, of course. I've turned up just around when I know they're going to announce it. There's like about 40 people there, and they go, "Okay. And the winner of the coxswain of the year is Matthew Griffin." I go up and collect this trophy and then I'll walk off stage. But as I'm walking off they go, "Oh Matt, do you want to say a few words?" And I went, "Yeah, sure. Whatever." And again, I'm thinking I'm super cool. I've got the hat and everything. I get to the microphone.

I go, "Yeah. I just like to thank..." And I start crying, like an Academy Award speech. Like I'm weeping. And everyone in the room's going coxswain of year of this one little club. And I'm going—. I was blubbing, and I couldn't say anything. I'm going, "[gibberish]... I'm sorry, I just couldn't get." And then I left stage, and everybody was like, "What was that? What happened?" And then I walked out, and I've never been back. Isn't that a wild thing to happen?

Yeah. I've always wanted to go back, because my name, it was on this big inaugural... What do you call it, the big trophies where they give it every year? What's that? Like an.. not inaugural, the first one, right?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Annual.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Whatever. They put your name on it, blah blah. And I've always wanted to go back to the clubhouse just to look at it, but I've never done it. I've never done it. I'm going to do it next time we go back. But anyway.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. No, you have to do that.

**Matthew Griffin:**

So are you still riding these bikes?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Well, I just actually I didn't ride a bike for like eight years or something. And then I just bought one a few weeks ago.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Is it a fixed wheel?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

No.

**Matthew Griffin:**

It is.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

No.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Is it a mountain bike, is it an electric one?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

No, it's a road bike. It's like a custom made, not made for me, but it's a Cecil Walker, the Melbourne bike maker.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Oh yeah.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. It's really nice. It's actually nicest bike that I've ever had.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Is Cecil Walker still with us, or is he crazy old or dead?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

I really don't know. I think it's more like a brand than it is like one maker. Because—

**Matthew Griffin:**

But it was a man.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. Cecil Walker—

**Matthew Griffin:**

He was a person.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

I believe so. Yeah. Because there's another local maker, Jim Bundy and Peter Bundy and the bikes are actually made by that guy.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Oh, okay.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Like if you get a Jim Bundy it's made by Jim Bundy.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Are you real teched out, can you fix them?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, I can fix them. Yeah. I can put them together. Yeah. Bicycle mechanics, it's kind of like a jigsaw puzzle and there's only 20 pieces or something. It's not the same as fixing a car or something.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Well, that seems like you might be on a technicality, be able to get past Scott Morrison's lockdown because he said that jigsaws were like an essential thing during the lockdown. So you could argue why you needed to go down to Repco or whatever it is to get... Oh, it's not Repco. Whoever sells the bike parts these days. Is Repco still a bike now? Do they still do Repco bikes?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

I don't think so.

**Matthew Griffin:**

That was my first bike, a Repco one.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Nice.

**Matthew Griffin:**

We used to have to ride them crazy. I was thinking about this recently. I grew up outside of the city of Fairway. And so to get to school was 10 kilometers on a bike. When I was like 13, it seems like quite a long way.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. That's a pretty long way. Riding 20 Ks every day.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah. Back and forth on a wee country road. Wild. Well, that's that.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Was there anything weird about the road?

**Matthew Griffin:**

Well, just that you'd go, you know how parents now are worried about their kids being out like away and not being... So you think, "Gee, we're out kind of in the middle of nowhere." In the boondocks riding along. There used to be one guy, you'll like this, he had one leg shorter than the other where I lived. And so he'd made a bike that one crank was way longer than the other. So he could ride it. And he's a champion bike rider in Bendigo as well, I think. My dad said he was a champion. Maybe he wasn't. But he would go crazy fast on this bike. And it was like a fixed wheel as well, I guess, because of the crank system or whatever. But it would also have, I don't know whether they have them anymore, but you used to be able to get it at Aussie Disposals. It was like a little bag. It was kind of made out of a yellow, not canvas, I guess. It was a bag, a simple bag that had a strap on it. Kids all use to have it. It used to be—

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Oh yeah. I remember those.

**Matthew Griffin:**

You know the ones?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, yeah. I remember you'd draw like this Stussy-S on it, or whatever.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yes. Yeah. So this guy used to ride the bike with the one leg in the long crank, the one leg going to the other and big crank. And also instead of wearing the bag over his back, he would hold it out with his arms straight out to the side, with the bag hanging there, like the justice for all album cover. I like Lady Liberty or... Not Lady Liberty, whatever. The blind justice thing holding the weights. And so I'd be like bumbling along in the middle of nowhere. These roads where no cars would ever go. And then this guy would come and he'd be grunting, like fly past me with these hand held out like so. It's like a David Lynch film.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. It's a very striking image.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah, I wonder where he is now. Now tell me, what are we meant to be talking about today? Is there specifics?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

There are some like topics. Yeah. There were some suggested topics.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yes. Absence.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. And text.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah. And what else?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

And—

**Matthew Griffin:**

There was another one I couldn't think of it.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. I think it was practice or something. I could bring the email up again.

**Matthew Griffin:**

No, no, no. Don't bring it. I think it's—

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Do you want me to read it, because I could read out the email.

**Matthew Griffin:**

I just think we've covered in any way because the text, I guess you talked about riding on those canvas bags. Absence, the shorter crank, I guess, could get the absence of a... I don't know. I think we've covered that in any way, right?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

I don't know. Had you had anything that you wanted to speak about particularly?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

No, not in particular. No.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Good. Because if you haven't, I have.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. Well I did—

**Matthew Griffin:**

And I'll tell you.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Okay.

**Matthew Griffin:**

No, no. Wait. You said I did what? I just—

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Well yeah, I mean you did—

**Matthew Griffin:**

I don't want to hog this mic but if you leave me dead air, I'm getting in Daniel. I'm just going to hog it up.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Well, yeah. When I talked to you a little bit about this proposition, you did mention that you had a story, but you never told me the story. So I've had such a lead on this story I'm really would like to find out what the actual story is.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Okay, it's great. And I feel like it's been a good lead into it because it involves some of the things we've talked about here, about my late developing, about my fashion sense. And mainly it's great. And *60 Minutes* is involved. And I thought it might make sense for this, it's a pivotal moment in my life. And I talk about it sometimes, well I don't talk about it. Recently I had to give an artist talk and I mentioned it as well. It was a real pivotal moment in my life. But I'll tell it, and please stop me anyway through here because we're going to have to have many things to kind of digress to, I believe. But the starting point is *60 Minutes*, right?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Okay.

**Matthew Griffin:**

They did a show, one of their episodes was about break dancing. And this is in, I guess, whenever break dancing took off. Now, I think you're too young to remember this. Because I was at primary school, this came out, and the only thing that I've seen similar to it since is when, you know Fortnite, when that first came out a few years ago and all the kids were doing those dances on the street. Can you remember that? Did that click with you? They all started doing the flossing or whatever. It became cool for kids to dance, which was awesome. I loved that.

You'd be at places at a restaurant, you'd see a group of people dancing. I love dancing. So I think that was a positive thing from the Fortnite stuff. And it made me think back, the only other thing that I can remember like that was when break dancing first hit. It was unbelievable. No one could get their heads around it, but it just took off like wildfire. And anyway, they had this... Wait. Did you break dance? Can you break dance?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

No, I never have, I wanted to say broke danced.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah. I think you can. All the cool kids say that.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

No, I've never attempted to break dance at all. No.

**Matthew Griffin:**

What, so you can't moonwalk?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. I don't know if that's technically... Is that a break dancing move? Is that from break dancing?

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Right.

**Matthew Griffin:**

No, no Michael Jackson I think stole it from some break dancers. I don't know.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. Right.

**Matthew Griffin:**

That popularized it, but it's a big one in the... Well don't tell me that, that wasn't one. Because that was one of my moves. I was doing that, the robot thing, that duck dive thing. Is that what you call it, duck dive, where you jump up and your chests... The worm, I think it's called. The caterpillar or something.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Oh yeah the caterpillar. Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

But wait, can you moonwalk? Moonwalk's a great thing to learn how to do.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. I think that I can moonwalk. Yeah. I think that's a-

**Matthew Griffin:**

Is there any way, don't know how they're going to the interface for this when they put it on the Chunky Move thing, can they have video of you moon walking?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah, we could send them a GIF maybe afterwards.

**Matthew Griffin:**

That'd be great.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. Instead of-

**Matthew Griffin:**

It's giving.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. Because they wanted some bio pictures, but we could just send them GIFs of us moonwalking, maybe.

**Matthew Griffin:**

I think that'd be great. Because I think that is still a thing. I did it for a friend of mine's kids the other day and they were dazzled by it.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Really?

**Matthew Griffin:**

It was amazing. Yeah. They're like 10.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Wow. Really?

**Matthew Griffin:**

Because it is hard to do. It's not hard to do, but I don't think kids practice stuff as much as I... I grew up in the country, right? So you go like, "Yeah, I can juggle. Of course I can." Because we're stuck there doing nothing for all the school holidays, you just learn how to do something. Which I don't know whether people do anymore. But anyway, whatever. So when this break dancing thing came out, everyone was crazy for it, like everyone at school. Now I was in grade, I guess, four or five when this happened and they had this break dancing competition at school. Which is crazy to think actually, because there was such a short turnaround from when this got shown on *60 Minutes* to when they had a competition at school, like we're talking two months.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah. And where were you? You were out in the rural kind of—

**Matthew Griffin:**

No I was in Bendigo.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Oh Bendigo.

**Matthew Griffin:**

The city, which was big enough. I grew up further out on a little farm, but that's where I went to school. But there was kids. So we have this break dancing competition, it's not a big school. It's a little primary school. And me and two of my friends enter it. I think we were called the Electric Fingers. I can't remember whether we were the Electric Fingers or someone else, but that was the name that stuck.

That was like, “Oh, the Electric Fingers.” Anyway, we get up. Because you’d only ever seen this on this stupid 60 Minutes thing. It was crazy basic our dancing. They just put on like that *Electric Boogaloo* soundtrack, or whatever, and we do a bit of top rocking and then do a bit of robot, and we couldn’t do anything. I could do sort of the backspin, and sort of that dive thing, but nothing. Anyway, we win the competition, right?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Wow, congratulations.

**Matthew Griffin:**

It was a big moment. It was pretty good.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Did you have a speech?

**Matthew Griffin:**

Thank God no. That would have been incredible. The crying at the speech, it’s unbelievable. I’ve never had anything like it since, it was like a pure, just emotional breakdown. Anyway.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

I kind of want to unpack that crying moment a bit more, I have say though. I’m really curious about it.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Well, the only thing that’s been similar to it, I’ve had it two times in my life. There’s that. And one time when I was older, way older, I was probably 16, 17. I was 16, I think. I had to go and get my hair cut because we had this family reunion thing, or there was some formal thing. And my mum had said, “Matt.” My mum’s always obsessed with my hair and presentation, which is crazy because I’m very unpresentable. But my mum said, “Matt, you’ve got to go get your hair cut. I’ve made a booking for you to go get it cut.”

Now, usually I would just get, at that stage, just get like a crew cut, like it all shaved. And I said, “No, I’ll just go to the barber guy that I usually go to.”

She goes, “No, you’re going, I’ve booked you into this proper hairdresser.” I go to the hairdresser. I’d never been to the hairdresser before, right? The whole thing was weird. I go in and I’m dealing with this, hairdressers in Bendigo at this stage of my life were like, that’s where all the popular girls went and did that as a trade as well. So it’s that kind of chick, and here I was a 16 year old guy and I’ve got this 18 year old Bendigo beauty going to give me a haircut. So I just take a seat, and I’m already feeling anxious about it all. And then she goes, “Oh, okay.” And she takes me over to start doing the hair and she goes, “Oh, we’re going to wash your hair first.” Now I’d never had my hair washed, like the barber doesn’t do it. And so I was like, “Oh yeah okay. Yeah it’s cool.” And I was trying and be cool. I feel socially awkward anyway. I go in. She starts washing my hair and something about the sensation of having my head, the top of my head wet, but the rest of me made me weep exactly the same as when I had that... And so she starts doing it, and I again started going... like whimpering. And uncontrollably as well. And no, I wasn’t emotional at this stage, but physically. And so she was going, “Are you all right?” And I’m trying to be cool as well. Like, “Well, you know, I think it’s just because my body is inclined, and I’ve never felt this—.”

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

And tears.

**Matthew Griffin:**

That’s already weird enough. And then she goes, “Come, we’re going to cut your hair.” And she goes, “How do you want it?” And I say, just shave it, please. Just the number two all over. And she goes, “Whoa.” And then they go, “Oh no, surely you don’t want that because it’s not what you do at a hairdresser.” And so we have this back and forth where she keeps cutting and cutting. So it took ages. And then finally she shaved it as well. It was just a very weird interaction. Well I don’t know. I digressed anyway.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

That’s what happened there.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

So I win the break dancing competition.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

You win the break dancing.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Now they give me a certificate that I won the break dancing competition.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Wow. Is this you solo? Are you in like a breakdancing crew?

**Matthew Griffin:**

No this is the Electric Fingers. This is a crew.

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Oh the Electric Fingers. Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

This is me and two of my friends, Michael Purdy and Paul Sexton, I believe, my childhood friends. So we win it. I get this certificate, which is just a photocopied bit of paper on coloured paper that they've sort of signed. It's like a pathetic primary school certificate, right? I take that home. I stick it on my wall. Now, I grew up in Bendigo. My cousin grew up in Melton. I don't know, are you familiar—

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Where's that, is that in Victoria as well?

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah, but it's like Western suburbs, I'd want to say. It's out in the-

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Oh right yeah, yeah. Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

And it seemed very cosmopolitan to me when I was a kid. But then when I went there later in life, you went, "Oh, okay. This is a satellite city almost from Melbourne." It was pretty rough, really, but not... Way more zhooshy than where I grew up in a way. Way more like a city. Anyway, my cousin who was my younger cousin, he idolized me. I used to do that thing... I don't know. Have you got cousins or brothers and sisters?

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Yes. Well, no, I have an older sister.

**Matthew Griffin:**

Okay. Older sister I don't know whether it works for. I'm thinking about the way that like my brother, I have an older brother who I just idolized. So when he said, "Those are the cool sneakers." Then I was like, "Oh those are the cool sneakers." So when he gave me that hat, it was like, "Oh yeah, that's little cool hat." And I think for my cousin, I would try and do the same thing. Like you'd tell him what... This skateboard's the one that... That's the best one, or this is a-

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

Right. Yeah.

**Matthew Griffin:**

So sort of that macho, dumb thing. Which it's funny as you get older you think, "Why would I care what someone else's skateboard." It's just kind of a strange, the whole psychology of that's quite weird. Anyway, but I guess I always tried to be a bit of a tough guy around my little cousin. And so he was like, "Whoa, you won a break dancing competition?"

I was like, "Yeah." I was trying to be cool again, like, "Yeah, I won a break dancing competition." And I'd talk up how good it was. He's like, "Oh great."

**Daniel Jenatsch:**

I did the worm, and I did the—

**Matthew Griffin:**

Yeah right. And I was like, yeah. And it felt legit, because everybody had seen this stupid *60 Minutes* documentary thing. We're all like crazy down for it. And I was like, "Yeah, yeah, I did the worm. We're the Electric Fingers." All that stuff, whatever. Anyway, and he was all suckered into... He thought that was great. Never really thought about it again. Anyway, a year later, or six months later or whatever I'm down... I used to go and stay with him down in Melton during the school holidays.

And I'm there, we're watching... A school holiday, so we're sitting there in our tracks. And I was, my mum, as I said, was always trying to get me to cut my hair and worried about my clothes went clean. So I'm like this brand new track suit thing. And I used to have crazy blonde hair as well. So I've got it all in a little bowl cut. So it looked like a kid, of one of those American TV shows. It's the craziest, like not a bad boy at all.

I'm sitting there, we're watching TV. There's a knock on the door. My auntie goes, I'm sitting there eating popcorn or whatever. My auntie goes, answers the door. She comes back in and she goes, "Hey, Matt, it's for you." Okay. Who is it? She goes, "I don't know. There's some people here to see you." I go out there is like a posse of about eight kids, like bad-ass kids. Who were only about 14 with tattoos and stuff, just bad kids. Like graff kids, graffiti kids. And they go, "Hear you're like a Bendigo champion breaker. And we challenge you to break on. You're on our turf."

And I turn around and my little cousin's there, and he's like nodding his head. He's told everybody in Melton that I'm the champion Bendigo break dancer. And these guys are all doing that pose where they like stand cross-armed, the legs sprayed it out in their Reebok pumps or whatever. And I'm in my brand new tracks and socks and I'll go, "Yeah, hold on. I just need a second. Yeah, sure." And I go. And I'm thinking, what am I going to do? This is crazy. Because I can't break dance like they do on TV.

## **Reading List**

- **60 Minutes: Bronx Breakdancing** uploaded by Richard Tropea (February 7, 2017)

## Megan Payne & Hannah Brown



*Megan Payne and Hannah Brown. Images courtesy of Megan and Hannah.*

In 2017, the New York Times published a questionnaire: 'The 36 Questions That Lead to Love'. It was used as a tool for dates, the playful idea being that if you exchanged answers to these questions you wouldn't be able to resist falling in love (mutual vulnerability fostering closeness). In the year we've had, isolated and apart, the image of being on an in-person date doing this questionnaire makes me feel nostalgic for the intimacies and capacities of previous years.

I asked Hannah Brown to be my conversation partner because I worked with her circa 2017 and I wanted to fall in love with her outside of a work context, where 'falling in love' can be falling into platonic love or friendship, developing a deeper intimacy or knowledge of, and with, someone. I also know her to be an eloquent and exact communicator (which is a pleasure!)

## **About Megan**

Megan Payne lives on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. They have presented work at Judson Memorial Church for Movement Research (NYC), Gertrude Contemporary gallery (Naarm), PS Artspace (Walyalup) , 215 Albion Street: Neon Parc, Bus Projects, TCB art. Inc, Testing Grounds (Naarm). This year Megan presented a radio show, *Land Swimming*, together with Oonagh Slater and hosted by Bus Radio (Bus Projects Gallery), collaborated on Becky Freedman's (Sui Zhen) Chambermaid Hi-Vis commission and continued studying Professional Writing and Editing at RMIT.

## **About Hannah**

Hannah Brown is a young professional, passionate about creating social change through movement and community action.

In 2015, Hannah graduated from the Victoria College of the Arts with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Dance). As a volunteer, she taught dance at residential camps for young adults with mental and developmental disabilities. Motivated to explore her passion for movement as a holistic modality, Hannah has since become a proficient yoga instructor. During the covid lockdown she ran weekly internet yoga classes. Hannah hopes to continue growing as a yoga teacher in the future, focusing on making movement accessible and accommodating to individuals with diverse needs.

Currently balancing work as a receptionist at a chiropractic centre, Hannah also does administrative work for a youth focused NFP that runs programs for various marginalised community groups.

# **Megan Payne & Hannah Brown Conversation Transcription**

## **Megan Payne:**

Hello, and welcome to a conversation between myself, Megan Payne, and Hannah Brown.

Before we properly introduce ourselves to you, we want to acknowledge that we are on stolen land, on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. And we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

We also want to pay particular respect to the people of Djab Wurrung country, whose sacred land is under current threat and being wounded by the Andrews government, with some sacred trees already irreversibly destroyed.

So, Hannah, I thought we could begin by formally introducing ourselves to one another, and of course, listeners, as we are right now, today. How does that sound?

## **Hannah Brown:**

Yeah, that sounds really good.

## **Megan Payne:**

Great. And then as we go, the frame of formality will probably fall away a bit.

## **Hannah Brown:**

Yes. I think so.

**Megan Payne:**

So, I'm Megan Payne. I'm currently on Wurundjeri country. I work with dance and writing. Though, currently the term "work," it's not so relevant coming out of restrictions. I'm receiving JobKeeper as a sole trader so most of my dance projects are very differently embodied right now and happening more in virtual spaces, remotely.

One of those has been hosting a radio show called Land Swimming with Oonagh Slater. And I've realized through that that I really enjoy talking and sharing myself with other people and then learning new things about the person I'm speaking with. So I've learnt a lot about Oonagh through that exchange. And I'm also a writing student and I'm working on a fiction novel based on my grandma who is a werewolf. In the story she's a werewolf, not in real life. And I'm working again as a salon assistant. So as restrictions are easing, I'm back there, and it's quite nice. I'm touching a lot of people again, massaging their hair, and I feel really excited to be in the thick of activity, but also feeling protective of the space that I've had during lockdown.

**Hannah Brown:**

I find it so intriguing that you are a salon assistant. It seems such a strange job to do, to be touching people's head, because for me, that's such an intimate thing, but for you, it's your job. And I just think it must be such an interesting thing to do.

**Megan Payne:**

It's really relaxing. I have more preferred heads that feel really good against my fingertips. But also, all the soapy studs and the water make it different to just going, "Roar," and touching people's scalps.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yeah, which is a bit weird sometimes.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. And it's pretty intimate. It's a really tactile form of intimacy.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. But also very transactional, because it's a job and people are coming in – that's the service you're providing.

**Megan Payne:**

Exactly. Yeah. I don't have a whole heap of choice. I couldn't refuse it.

**Hannah Brown:**

No.

**Megan Payne:**

I've agreed overall to do it.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. And also, the book that you just mentioned, what's the title of it? Does it have a working title?

**Megan Payne:**

The working title is *Joanie*, and my grandma's name is Joan, so, that's been the inspiration, pretty direct. It's also based on my grandma, but none of the characters in it are myself or my other family members so it is very fictional and otherworldly.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yeah, it sounds intriguing.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. One day, hopefully you can read it, in very many years' time.

**Hannah Brown:**

I would love to. Yeah. All right. Well, I'll introduce myself too, and spend a bit of time talking, so I suppose people can acquaint my voice with me as well. And so, I guess the hard facts of who I am is I also live and work on Wurundjeri country in Australia, Melbourne. I work in reception and admin positions, and I've also done retail in the past.

One of those jobs is very recent for me, like within the past three months. And I got that within the context of COVID-19 lockdown in Melbourne, as just a means of escaping my home and just very deliberately finding a job so that I could leave and find a change of scenery, and to continue to connect with, I suppose, just the people who come into to the clinic, to the centre, to connect and have chit chat.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. Which is so relatable, sorry to interrupt.

**Hannah Brown:**

That's okay.

**Megan Payne:**

It's so relatable now that I'm back in this casual work position and what I'm gaining from that. I really understand that you wanted to seek that out during the lockdown.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. I suppose that's a diversion from the course I had planned for this year for myself. I also, I suppose, dabble in movement, and by that, I mean, I in the past have been a dancer and danced, and this past year, also was doing studies in yoga teacher training and qualified, graduated earlier this year.

But I'm a very still person at the moment in that I'm not moving a lot, just because I find I need motivation to move, and with studios being closed, there's just not really the place to go to do that for me at the moment. So this has not turned into a grocery list of an introduction. Maybe I'll get more, just stop pointing with it. But—

**Megan Payne:**

I mean, I'm really enjoying it and I'm finding it incredibly relatable. The image that was coming to me was, it's not very motivating when the only form of activity we've been able to do in Naarm is exercise, but you can only leave the house and then return. It's not visiting a studio. So that makes a lot of sense to me.

**Hannah Brown:**

And when the return is so dictated, you have one or two hours in which you have to be back home at the end of that, because that's just what the restrictions were, to now to not have that, or even before lockdown, to have no deadline, no curfew. It changes, I find, how I relate to wanting to move and feeling the desire to do that, rather than, "Oh, I should, because I've very literally packaged this portion of my day in which I can do it.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. It can't be so spontaneous and there can't be plans that offshoot from other plans. It's got to be pretty preplanned.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. Which is quite funny, because in planning on what I was going to say one of the things I scribbled down was that I'm a creature of habit. And so having said all that I've just said, I am very much a fan of routine and having places to be at certain times. I like to be quite organized, I like to be very punctual. I just love safety and assurance, which when you're given that in spades, it's interesting to see how you respond to it.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah, definitely.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yeah. I suppose other things, little fun things about me, I have had a few COVID hobbies pop up, so I've just started to learn how to play guitar, not very good yet, I've begun to read again, because that's something I did years ago when public transport was a part of my every day, but when I found myself just in my house with all of my time, I'm like, "Oh, I just don't know that I want to pick up a book." But I've begun that again. I've begun to cultivate time for that.

**Megan Payne:**

Well done. It can be quite difficult quite difficult.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yeah. And I've also gotten into video games, and I get very competitive at being good at things. So I'm trying to get really good at video gaming, which, it's a work in progress.

**Megan Payne:**

I'm also fiercely competitive, to the point where, when I was younger, I would probably be in the camp of those annoying kids that avoid things they're not good at.

I don't think that's a very commendable trait for human beings. It's not very generous, but I'm just so bad at video games so I don't even think I would be able to go there, but I love that you are.

So, listeners might've been able to glean that we have some knowledge of each other from outside this conversation. It was in a pretty formal setting that we got acquainted with one another. Hannah, you mentioned you were a dancer, or you could probably say you are a dancer and collapse the past into the present, but I didn't really know you at VCA where we both trained very well. And we met probably more officially through working at the same physiotherapy clinic for several years.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah, until 2018. And when I was given the brief for this conversation, before I even thought about what topic I wanted to address within the themes, I just immediately thought of you, Hannah. I've always been really positively struck by your conversation style. I really admire it. I won't describe what I admired about it now, because I don't want to put you off and make you feel like you have to live up to my impression of your past self, but I will come back to this at the end and share my compliment to you.

**Hannah Brown:**

And can I just say, I find it really funny that you think that of me, because I mirror that to you, in that I recall, just from working with you, that any time we would have a conversation that slightly deviated off just the business of the running of the clinic, I had so much space and attention for whatever you had to say. It was just so interesting all the time. And I'm really excited to explore what we are going to explore today, whatever this turns into, as an opportunity to reconnect.

**Megan Payne:**

I love that. I love the slight compliment in that as well. And the theme of past selves, as you were touching on, is going to become very relevant to the topic of the conversation. So just to give listeners some context, the themes that I was invited to dive into was anything encompassing absence, performance and text. That's a huge span. And when I was thinking about the nexus of all three, I started to think about dreaming, and specifically about sharing your dreams with other people. And that act is very intimate.

It's very reflective, because you're reflecting back into your dream, and then opening that space up for someone else to imagine into. It's obviously also sometimes quite indulgent and a bit annoying, which is probably why I didn't settle in that space for a conversation topic.

But the nostalgia of sharing dreams reminded me of this questionnaire that was circulating the internet in 2017. And I think it was most notably published in the *New York Times*. But it was marketed and titled as '36 Questions to Make You Fall in Love', and it was used as a tool for dates, almost as a key or frame to get to know someone more deeply. And the playful idea was that if you exchanged answers with each other to all the questions, you wouldn't be able to resist falling in love with the person you are conversing with.

That's not what I'm setting out to do with Hannah. But in a way it is also, because I think falling in love could be expanded to be thought of as falling into platonic love or friendship and just developing a deeper intimacy and knowledge of someone. And I think when you work with people, but they're not necessarily a part of your social life outside of the workplace, sometimes you can be quite curious about them and want to get to know them more deeply. So, I thought this questionnaire would be the perfect frame for that.

**Hannah Brown:**

Absolutely. And just to touch on that, I definitely have this nostalgic idea of having admiration for you from our time working together. It might be relevant to say that we were the only two receptionists at the centre, so it was you and me. And so in terms of how we interacted, it was very just insular between us two to organize things, and to just be communicating the day-to-day logistics of things.

**Megan Payne:**

Definitely. There was definitely a–

**Hannah Brown:**

And–

**Megan Payne:**

Oh, sorry. I was just going to say a baton passing back and forth exercise, which is intimate, but also a bit repressed within the context. Yeah.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. Yes. Absolutely. And when it is about work, your personal stuff has to be secondary, and so, yeah, I'm really excited to explore these questions, just to be able to peek behind the curtain of who you are, especially with an idea of who I remember you to be from three years ago when we really last genuinely interacted.

**Megan Payne:**

Yes. And that actually is super relevant, the people that we were about three years ago, because when I think of this image of doing this questionnaire and being in an in-person date or a friendship date context, it feels very nostalgic. I'm just focusing on the 2017 date, because that was when it was most notably published. But it makes the intimacies and capacities around that time feel a lot more golden in retrospect. And I also think it's interesting for me to think about how I might've approached the questionnaire differently in 2017, and–

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. Especially when the comparison being made to now, 2020, which is such a... it's just been a really strange time.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. And I think even though there's been a lot of separateness and apartness... they're same thing, Megan, but I feel like I've been more willing and more interested and craving being more open and vulnerable with people. So there's also been this type of closeness and intimacy that I've reached in friendships, even though I haven't been physically proximal with certain friends.

And I did ask Hannah, prior to this conversation, whether she had heard or done the questionnaire before and you hadn't that's right. Isn't it?

**Hannah Brown:**

No. I was vaguely aware it as a thing, but never looked at it myself and so these questions are very new to me. I have them open on a tab on my computer and I'm about to glance at them for the very first time.

**Megan Payne:**

It's a bit different for me, but I haven't got through all of the questions. I haven't looked at them since 2017 except the first two, because it's hard not to. But I think if you had read them, I would have asked you how you felt, if you had read them in 2017 and if we'd also already read them before this conversation. I think I would have wanted us to do a little summary comparison about if we related to them more or less now, and think back to what we were doing in our life in 2017.

But, I thought we could instead just dive right in, and with each answer, reflect on how we would have answered in 2017. And then in that sense, we're going to be introducing ourselves to listeners and to one another a little bit in 2017 and a little bit now.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. Yes.

**Megan Payne:**

Does that make sense?

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. To me, absolutely.

**Megan Payne:**

Hopefully to listeners too.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes.

**Megan Payne:**

Okay. I'm opening the tab now as well. So there's 36 questions. They're divided into sets. I think we can just alternate. Can I ask you the first question? Do you feel comfortable with that?

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes, please go right ahead.

**Megan Payne:**

Okay. So, I think they start more light and they'll get more involved.

**Hannah Brown:**

Okay.

**Megan Payne:**

So question number one, given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?

**Hannah Brown:**

Wow. Yes. My answer today is my mum, because I haven't seen her in months. In months, like six months. And I would like to. I would like to see her. I would like to see my whole family, of course, and to maybe say my mom over my dad or my sibling is not so diplomatic, but I find more connection with her, so she is who I would want to have dinner with.

**Megan Payne:**

That's a beautiful answer.

**Hannah Brown:**

Whereas 2017 Hannah would think, "What are the celebrities that I admire?" I'd probably say, "Oh can I invite someone who's dead? Do they have to be alive?" I'd be trying to find all of the grey area in this question to pick the perfect answer. And it would probably be someone so unobtainable that I would never otherwise get to meet. But my answer today is my mother.

**Megan Payne:**

I love this answer so much. So glad I asked you this question. And I think it just connects with our current situation so perfectly, and this concept of... I won't talk to all of your answers, but this concept of trying to think of what isn't currently possible, and the way that it gets more unwieldy and more, not splendid, but yeah, the answer of 'mum' is just very grounded and very honest and really rings true.

**Hannah Brown:**

And I don't feel self-conscious at all in that answer, whereas anyone else I might propose, if I tried to be a bit, I suppose, a bit more abstract with that answer, I'd probably be quite self-conscious of, "Well, have I picked the right person?"

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. Oh, the word I was trying to think of wasn't splendid, it spectacular. I would try and think of something spectacular.  
Hannah Brown:

Yes. Yes. Something impressive, someone impressive to dine with. Absolutely. I'm really excited that I get to ask you this next question, because I think... Actually, I don't want to preface what you'll say, so I'll just go with it. So question two is would you like to be famous, and in what way?

**Megan Payne:**

Okay. So, if I think about myself in 2017, I probably would have liked to be a pop star, if I'm completely honest. I recall being on this drive with some of the dancers that I was working with Russell Dumas, who's a choreographer, if listeners aren't aware. And I remember David Huggins asked me if I'd prefer to be famous working for something more superficial and silly, or be doing some really meaningful work but not be known. And I didn't take the question to any social activist context. In my mind, I was really just thinking about what I'd find more enjoyable in a probably pretty selfish way. No, for sure in an entirely selfish way. And I just was like, "I'd definitely like to be famous."

**Megan Payne:**

Now, I would still love to be famous, but I think it's more because I really enjoy interacting with lots of people and... No, I can't be too silly about it. I actually do just like the concept of fame.

**Hannah Brown:**

In what way?

**Megan Payne:**

Oh, I'd want to be a famous novelist. Easy.

**Hannah Brown:**

I feel like literature is so enduring for those who are famous for it as well. Fame in other contexts can feel quite fleeting in comparison, I feel.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. I also think that just the word famous and the question is quite fanciful. It's not a deep desire of mine. I'm not going to work at it and I don't believe it will happen, because I don't think I have the type of writing style or ability to write fluff that's going to lead to fame, but if I just had to draw a part and say yes or no, definitely yes. I'd love it.

Okay. So, Hannah, before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you're going to say and why if so?

**Hannah Brown:**

This feels such a read, because, yes, I do. I have to. And I suppose, because I work in admin and reception work, a lot of the phone calls I make are very repetitive, so in a work context, they are rehearsed often. So that suffices. I suppose in social calls, I do not rehearse what I'm going to say because there is less pressure to be professional or performative and just sound good. And even in the context of this conversation, to not have tried to pre-empt what I might talk about has been quite challenging. I think that's because just the way I think is slow, and actually this might be a bit of a deep dive, but something I've been really interested in discovering this year is just talking to people about the way they think, how their brain works, because I feel like I've identified for myself recently I don't have an internal monologue.

**Megan Payne:**

Oh, that's really fascinating.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yeah. It's just not the way my brain works. And it wasn't until someone was like, "Wait, people don't have an internal monologue?" that I was like, "Wait people to genuinely have an internal monologue?" If you've ever seen an episode of the TV show scrubs, that's probably someone's reality. But I was always just like, "Wow, what a great narrative gimmick."

**Megan Payne:**

I love that –

**Hannah Brown:**

And so, to bring that back to the question, yes, I would have to rehearse it because I need I think by vocalizing, and so I have to vocalize to be sure that what I'm going to say is right.

**Megan Payne:**

Definitely. And that would have been the case in 2017.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes.

**Megan Payne:**

So that's a nice constant. I'm hearing a bit of wind in the recording. I don't know if that's okay.

**Megan Payne:**

I'm sure it's fine.

**Hannah Brown:**

It could be me.

**Megan Payne:**

It's probably nothing. Anyway. So I think... Oh, yeah, the way that people think is so interesting. I was in an author conversation recently, just listening to it. And the author was saying that she didn't have the capacity to imagine and visualize things. But she-

**Hannah Brown:**

That's for me too. I can't visualize things.

**Megan Payne:**

It's really interesting. She wrote really visually, but she was really attuned to rhythm and the sound of language. So, that was her version of her approach. My brain is very visual. I do feel I have somewhat of maybe inner monologue, but it's super disorganized and I have to write down how I feel or talk it out with people. So, if I'm ever going to have a serious conversation, I draft little messages and stuff. But hopefully this territory will be touched on again, because I think it's really ripe.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. I feel like there's a lot we could get into on how people think, so maybe we'll pause that and see if it arises a bit later. Shall we jump on to question four? So, Megan, what would constitute a perfect, and perfect is little squiggly lines, perfect day for you?

**Megan Payne:**

Ooh. Okay. I can definitely answer this now. I think just a swim, so where I've moved my body and I'm feeling the resonance of some movement. And I think also the deep breathing of swimming and just putting your whole body into a different body of water makes the rest of the day perfect for me. A day where I got to do a bit of writing and I felt like I'd made some progress with some ideas in the story. And probably also had some social connection, whether a really good phone call with a friend or a walk with a friend, or a wine with a friend. Pretty tame stuff, just some wholesome living.

In 2017, I would've probably been really fanciful in the way that I answered this. It's actually really hard for me to know how I would've answered this. I feel like I don't know, which is interesting in itself. I think I was a lot less in touch with myself, and I think I would have had some humorous answer. And also it's relevant that I would have been giving the answer to someone. So, I wonder if I would've been able to be really honest and mundane with the answer. I think I would have maybe had some sort of answer relating to going on an adventure or something.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. And maybe I'll just say to that effect, I feel like I would, because in the context of this questionnaire, answering this to someone who you are potentially looking to find a deeper intimacy with, it can be really hard to generate what a perfect day would be, because you're spelling out to a person, "This is my expectation that you need to meet," or maybe you'd even just tailor what you said so that it would include that person.

**Megan Payne:**

Oh, definitely. Yeah. And how rambunctious or introverted the person was might affect your answer.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. Yes.

**Megan Payne:**

Hannah, when did you last sing to yourself or to someone else?

**Hannah Brown:**

Quite recently. My desire to learn guitar, as I mentioned earlier, has come from actually growing more intimate with one of my housemates who owns five guitars and 20 different pedals and has a full setup. And so I had the desire to pick up a guitar just to have a connection with this person. And how that relates to singing is one day I was singing, and this person said, "You have a really lovely voice." And it's the first time I trusted someone and I believed him that I did have a nice singing voice.

And so now it's something we have continued to do, where he is teaching me guitar and we're singing together. And it's a very intimate thing. And I'm now just more prone to singing in the household generally and around the home. And it's just something I never would have done before, certainly not in 2017. I haven't sung in the shower since I was probably five years old, but it's something that I do quite a lot now, and it's something I really enjoy. There's something so freeing about being able to express myself in a way that... to sing pop songs, for example, or even folk songs, you're given by artists the words and the chords and notes. And so you can use them as vehicles to sound out feelings. But you might not to, or I might not be able to myself put into words.

**Megan Payne**

Oh that's so beautifully expressed.

**Hannah Brown:**

And so I've just been really enjoying it as an outlet in, well, just for everything, just all of the feelings of the last six months, because in being in lockdown, I think I have been feeling things more intimately and more intensely than I normally, would because you're just alone with yourself and your thoughts and your body and your feelings a lot.

**Megan Payne:**

I'm actually smiling as you're saying this, just because I think what you're saying is so beautifully articulated, and just the way that you're given all these tools as vehicles to express yourself, I'm reminded of sometimes how I might be in the shower. I sing quite a lot in my home and I think that's a testament to the fact that I feel really safe here and I can be myself. I really noticed when I'm in an unfamiliar space, I don't have that tendency or that comfortability to be able to break into song.

But when you start singing a pop song or any song that you haven't thought about for a while, it hasn't been in your head, but it somehow relates to your deeper emotions that might be bubbling below the surface, it can give yourself away. Do you ever have those moments where you start to sing in a particular way, and you're like, "Oh, actually I might not sing that song publicly right now; it's too close to home," or something.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. I know exactly what you mean. I have a few of those.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. I feel like we're up to question six and we've got a few to get to, so this is just a reminder to myself to not feel resistant, to just keep on going through this.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. Yes. That felt like a very expensive answer for something that potentially was quite simple.

**Megan Payne:**

Please don't hold back from expanding.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yeah, I'll try and keep track of time too as we continue. So with that said, here's question six. If you were able to live to age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?

**Megan Payne:**

This is such an interesting question to me, because initially I'm like, "Oh, definitely the body," because... initially I'm thinking that you would go back to your 30-year-old mind, so you'd lose 60 years of material and wisdom, but perhaps it's more about cognitive function. It's actually hard for me to answer this question, because the same goes for bodies. If you had the body of a 30-year-old, would it be your 30-year-old body? Because although that sounds incredibly appealing and you'd probably get less ailments and maybe aches and pains, you'd also lose a lot of body wisdom. God. I don't know if I can answer it.

**Hannah Brown:**

Do you think you could have answered it a few years ago?

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. I don't know if I'm being too hard on myself, but I think I was probably more vain. I've also passed 30, but I hadn't passed 30 in 2017, so I probably was holding 30 up as a scarier number than it is. As a guess, I'd say I'd retain the 30-year-old body. But, yeah, I want to ask the questionnaire author more about this question.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes.

**Megan Payne:**

Hannah, do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?

**Hannah Brown:**

I feel like I did once, but when I was a child. I think I thought I would drown, because I used to be quite drawn to water in the way that I interpret you are now. I think I've lost a bit of that, though. I don't seek out swimming as much as I once did. We're talking when I was five to 10 years old.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. I'm sure the love of water ebbs and flows. I just wanted to say that.

**Hannah Brown:**

That's very poetic.

**Megan Payne:**

Just a bad pun.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. I wouldn't want this to be true, and I don't want to say it and it now be a jinx on me, but I ride my bike a lot. And so I think if there were to be a way I would die, at least in more of a short-term than I would like, because I mean, it's so weird to talk about death of like, "When would you like to die?" Never, but also at some point, but who knows when? Anyway—

**Megan Payne:**

Well, you can take it in whatever direction you like, but I think it doesn't have to be something that could happen in the short-term.

**Hannah Brown:**

No. No. Okay. I suppose what I mean is the biggest threat to my life presently is I ride my bike a lot, and so being hit by a car or a truck, or there being an accident in which I'm doored, or some scenario where I come off my bike badly enough that it is quite critical. And, look, that could not be the case. I could have something else happening in my body or life that could just come out of nowhere, but that's the threat I'm most aware of at the moment. So I think that will be my answer.

**Megan Payne:**

Okay. Well, I'll accept that as your answer. I don't think in any way it's a jinx. And I think if it's a hunch, it's possibly more on the side of you know that you need to remain really cautious in that environment, and it's a useful caution to continue to possess. That's the angle that I'm going to summarize it as.

**Hannah Brown:**

Okay. the next question, Megan, name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.

**Megan Payne:**

Okay. That's you, because I think it's the conversation partner.

**Hannah Brown:**

I see.

**Megan Payne:**

I don't have a romantic partner, so I'm going to try and project. I think it's more interesting if I make it between you and I.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. Yes, let's do that.

**Megan Payne:**

Okay. Well, I'm going to base it on things that you've already exposed to me. I also like to feel safe, and as much as I like to declare that I like extravagance and boldness and spontaneity, none of those things are mutually exclusive to safety and security, but I really do like routine and regularity and safety and all of those cozy, reliable things. That's one. Two, we both danced at VCA, three, this is just me moving through the questions to get to the next. We both worked at Middle Park Physiotherapy.

Hannah, for what in your life do you feel most grateful?

**Hannah Brown:**

Oh, dear. That feels such a big question. Maybe I won't take it broad. I'll try and narrow in. I think just my ability to function, because it could be worse. I could have less mental or physical ability. Not that that's a bad thing, but I'm grateful for what I am capable of. I'll say that.

**Megan Payne:**

That's a really nice answer. I'm happy with that.

**Hannah Brown:**

Good. Megan, if you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?

**Megan Payne:**

Oh. I had a really good childhood, and recently I had a psych appointment, I think it was, or no, it was a doctor's appointment to get a mental health care plan. And I had to do a questionnaire, very different to this questionnaire, on the phone with the GP. And I think she just needed to know how I'd refer to my childhood and if there was any traumas. And I categorically said that weren't, and I have a really vivid memory of my childhood, which I think speaks to my presentness in it.

I think that there was maybe mild homophobia in some of my childhood, probably just to do with it being due to the lack of exposure, not in any direct way, and definitely not in any direct way coming from my parents in terms of their ideology, but just if there were any queer people, they always stood out to me. Or just in the way that maybe very conventional forms of life, living, family and sexuality were presented as the norm, and a norm that was celebrated. Yeah. I don't know. That's a really big answer, though. What I mean is the answer that I would want to give would take a bit too long.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. I sort of agree with you there. I mean, just what you're saying, I feel that perhaps racial stereotypes reinforced a lot, and I wish that that weren't the case, too. So yeah. It's interesting. I kind of agree with you in a way there.

**Megan Payne:**

Oh, yeah, because you do have to unlearn those things, and it would be great if you could not have to.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. I think the next question's a bit big, to be honest.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah, let's skip it.

**Hannah Brown:**

Shall we skip it? Okay.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. So then I read you 12. Yes. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?

**Hannah Brown:**

Probably to have magically learned another language.

**Megan Payne:**

Ooh, I love that. Do you know which one?

**Hannah Brown:**

I probably would say French, just because it's a dream of mine one day to live in Montreal in Canada, and at one point I did a year of trying to learn French, but I found it really challenging. So to just have that one day would be excellent and not go through the pains of learning it.

**Megan Payne:**

I love that. That's such a good idea. That's a really efficient plan as well. That would be a really useful and in-this-world skill to have.

**Megan Payne:**

I actually told my whole workplace, the salon, that I'm going to learn Korean. So now I have to do that. The reason I want to learn Korean is because I watched the Blackpink documentary on Netflix, and I got really obsessed with them. They're four female young singers. This makes me sound very creepy, but they have a beautiful friendship. And I'm going really off track now, but what was most compelling about them as a band, because they are quite manufactured, is their friendship. So, I want to learn Korean so that I can read the song lyrics and sing along to the parts that are in Korean.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yeah. I think that sounds quite an innocent want, to just be able to read something that you connect with. It's so specific, and in that way, I feel like it's quite innocent.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. I would agree with that, I think. Okay. So we're up to set two and there's three sets, so maybe we can try and be really disciplined and go through these a bit faster.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. I'll ask you this one. If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future, or anything else, what would you want to know?

**Megan Payne:**

Oh, gosh. I would have in 2017 wanted to know so many things. I was in such a space of being confused and restless and out of touch with how to check in with myself and trust that the future would work out.

So I was often consulting tarot cards, but in a frantic way, where I also didn't fully believe in the power of those things and still don't, but I think they're useful tools sometimes to reflect feelings back to you.

But that's not answering the question, Megan. Okay. So in 2017, I think there would have been a lot of things that I would have wanted to know, and they would have centred around themes of will everything work for me okay, which are very universal. Now, what would I want to know in terms of the truth about myself, my life, my future, or anything else?

I'm not going to be able to narrow this down in the time of this interview. Interview? Conversation. But it would be something to do with, I think we're living at a really critical moment in history, and I don't think I would want to miss the opportunity to help in ways that I could. And I have some doubts about being in the creative industry, because the pace of what you can offer... I'm not producing things that people are reading at the moment yet. And my audience, not only is it not large, it's non-existent, so just the pace of writing stories that maybe deliver themes and messages in really subtle ways.

I don't know if that's enough, so I'd probably be consulting with what else I could do and not wanting to misstep or miss opportunities for what that could be. Yeah. I think that's my answer.

**Hannah Brown:**

Okay.

**Megan Payne:**

Hannah, is there something that you've dreamed of doing for a long time, and why haven't you done it yet?

**Hannah Brown:**

I know the answer to this immediately, and then I thought what's something else I could say, but no, I'm going to be very honest, and what I've dreamed of doing is reconnecting with dance, ever since I graduated from university, because at the time the fact was I just had to get jobs to start earning money to start paying for things that I needed and wanted. I just wanted to move out of home, so I just had to pay rent, so I just had to have income. That's the why I haven't.

**Megan Payne:**

That makes sense.

**Hannah Brown:**

And also money and time. I need the money, I don't have the time, and if those two things weren't a factor, I probably would have stepped back into the dance world and committed to it a lot more fully. And I still feel on the periphery of the Melbourne dance sphere, but the dream is certainly to immerse myself back into it. And on one hand, right now, I'm very grateful that I've just been working, because I have experience. It means I was able to get a job during COVID, but away from that, that desire is still there. And I don't think it's going anywhere. So it's something that I would certainly want to do.

**Megan Payne:**

It's really nice that that came to mind so quickly and that you have articulated this to the listeners and the world, and maybe in some ways you're gently, playfully holding yourself accountable to that desire, which also in no way I think there should be any judgment on the why haven't you done it yet either, because I don't think that's a rush, and it's not like it's something you have failed at doing, you just haven't done that yet.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yeah.

**Megan Payne:**

I love that answer. Thank you for being so honest.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. What is your greatest accomplishment of your life?

**Megan Payne:**

Oh my goodness. Okay. I think the greatest accomplishment of my life has been... It's not a thing that I could hold and draw a border around and say, "This is where this accomplishment begins and ends," but I think the process that I've been on going through quite a large breakup last year has been a huge accomplishment and I'm really proud of myself. Yeah, I think that's it.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yeah. That's huge, to step away from anyone who's been a big part of your life, and to do that in a way that is the best thing for you as well. That can be really hard to gauge in the moment on something like that. So, I hear what you're saying.

**Megan Payne:**

Thank you. I also think it's a nice moment to reflect on the concept of accomplishment, because I didn't actually choose to not be in the relationship. I didn't make that really clear call, but I would still completely denote it as an accomplishment in my life.

Hannah, what do you most value in a friendship?

**Hannah Brown:**

It's hard to narrow it down. I would say, I think having fun and the ability to be fun with each other is a big thing, but that's probably secondary to, and it's a tie between trust and non-judgment, and I think those things tie together quite importantly, but certainly to have trust in someone is vital. And also, if someone judges you, I just feel like friendship is so unstable, and basically, it's not friendship, I think.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah, unless it's because you've actually caused them harm or caused harm. If they're judging you for you, then that's not true friendship.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. I agree. I really agree.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yeah. What's your most treasured memory?

**Megan Payne:**

This is such a hard question. But I'm too focused on the concept of me having to choose the most treasured memory, but I could just choose one, and it would probably still be one of the most.

I think that memories that become treasured are ones that I revisit and then rebuild and firm as being able to call upon them. So they're actually probably really early memories. A really beautiful memory that I have is being in the garden of our rental property that I was at with my parents when I was three.

And Dad picked a little seedling that was growing rogue between some bricks, and it was a peppermint tree, and we planted it into a little seedling container. And then we moved around a lot and had a lot of different properties before we settled into the house that my parents still live at when I was 11. And we'd always carry this peppermint tree in a pot plant around. So they're one of my most treasured series of memories.

Mum ended up, I think, well, kind of killing it, but by mistake, I think. She just didn't water it. But I was cycling my bike the other day, and I was like, "Oh, it'd be so nice if that peppermint tree was still alive," because I still had this other peppermint tree, and it looked so good and big and happy. And then I thought, "No, I can remember it in my mind, and that's okay." I mean, less okay for the tree, but for me the memory is okay.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. That's really lovely.

**Megan Payne:**

Thank you. What is your most terrible memory?

**Hannah Brown:**

I almost want to veto this question, just because I think it carries a bit of a trigger warning for listeners. And we're also nearing the time when we need to be finishing, too. So it might not be a good moment to open a can of worms.

**Megan Payne:**

Definitely. Well, I thought we could go 'til 10 past, which makes no sense to listeners who are just listening in at their own clocks, but makes sense to you.

Yeah. But if we don't get through all of the questions, I think that's okay, but let's veto it. If you knew that in one year... I'm going to veto that too, because I feel like you're getting all the difficult ones. What roles do love and affection play in your life?

**Hannah Brown:**

Large ones. Certainly. I think I love very hard when I do love, and I think I receive quite large love in return because of that. I receive what I get.

And I think I quite deliberately try to be as loving as I can and putting love out into the world, rather than trying to, I suppose, just not be that and not do that and not conduct myself in a loving, kind way, compassionate way. Affection, I see and hear that word, and I think physical affection, it's just the link that I draw in my absent internal monologue brain.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah, the association.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yeah. So, to be affectionate is, I just think physicality, and I think I am quite a physical person and I love to receive physical affection too in moderation, I suppose. But—

**Megan Payne:**

I love that you add in moderation.

**Hannah Brown:**

I think that's important—

**Megan Payne:**

Can't be constant.

**Hannah Brown:**

No. You need space sometimes.

**Megan Payne:**

Definitely.

**Hannah Brown:**

I suppose I can very easily wrap that one up as saying, yeah, they're big in my life.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. I'm wondering whether we just do a few from set three. So for listeners, that we'd be skipping the next three questions, just so that we're dipping into the final set. Don't think we'll finish them all, but yeah, if you want to just ask me one from then and we can keep going through.

**Hannah Brown:**

I'm going to ask you 26, so complete this sentence: "I wish I had someone with whom I could share..."

**Megan Payne:**

I wish I had someone with whom I could share my body, sometimes. Yeah. I mean, off the back of love and affection and how you're relating affection to be physical and tactile intimacy, I've had a really good, solid period of just being with myself and loving myself. And now I'm just so hungry to go on a date, and then that lead to another date and that lead to another date and then be in a relationship. And so it's my body in just, I wish I had someone with whom I could share myself with in a romantic partner sense.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yeah.

**Megan Payne:**

Okay. Tell your partner what you like about... Oh no, I'm going to skip that one. Share with your partner an embarrassing moment in your life.

**Hannah Brown:**

Oh. Goodness. I mean, I have been embarrassed. This isn't one moment; nothing springs to mind, but I just know that I get very embarrassed about mathematics and my inability to do it well, advanced or quickly, which is just a very funny thing, because when it comes to handling money in a work context, or when you have to do some quick math about something and there's other people present, I just get so flustered and embarrassed at just how math seems to elude me as something I can ever be good at. I know that might sound a very shallow answer, but it's quite a deep-seated embarrassment.

**Megan Payne:**

I don't think it sounds shallow. I know that kind of feeling of when you're having to carry out a task or a type of capacity in real time and someone's noticing you do it. It makes me feel like I'm a teenager when I'm in that situation where you're just hyper-aware of everything.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yeah. It makes me feel so young and juvenile.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. Yeah. It's very transportative in a not positive way.

**Hannah Brown:**

And it feels like it gives almost a power to the other person, that they are seeing a weakness of yours, a vulnerability, which is a trivial thing. It's just maths, in my case.

**Megan Payne:**

But you don't get to announce it as a vulnerability. It just gets to be exposed while you're trying to attend to a task.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. Yeah.

**Megan Payne:**

I reckon we've got time to ask one another one more question each, I think, yeah.

**Hannah Brown:**

So, I really want to ask you this one, because I just think it's such an interesting thing to ask people. When did you last cry in front of another person and also by yourself?

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah. It's a really good question. I think that in 2017 I cried a lot more in front of people, but I think I was often getting more fleetingly upset and I didn't feel like I was exposing me processing something really deeply. I was just having a moment of emotion boiling. Hannah, it's a really hard question, because for all my profession of how much I love openness and vulnerability and emotion and feelings, and I feel like I write about those things all the time, I'm actually really bad at crying in front of people, which everyone is, hence the question.

**Megan Payne:**

Okay. The last time I cried by myself was probably two weeks ago, because I remember messaging my housemate, Camille, saying that I'm crying in my room, but please don't come in because I don't feel being comforted, which is quite funny, because I think Camille was not even going to come in, I just needed to tell someone. And in that sense I was crying in front of Camille, but in this very removed way.

Another thing that I did when I visited my grandma's retirement home over the summer holidays when I was actually able to go to Perth was I just got so overwhelmed when I left. And it wasn't really about her; it was just all these other emotions related to breakup. And seeing her struggling was a little bit of a vehicle to release those, but not to frame it as though I was using her difficulty to express my emotions, but in some ways I was, but I got into the car and I recorded myself crying and just talking and maybe giving this type of verbal monologue about how I was feeling.

And I've played snippets of that to friends, because we were researching and doing this crying project, but me exposing that documented material of myself to the friends wasn't really important as part of the research. I think I was just feeling being a bit vulnerable and open, so I was like, "Look at this video of me crying." Yeah.

**Hannah Brown:**

That's so interesting. When you were talking about how with your housemate, you messaged them, I think whenever I cry, I don't want people to see me cry and yet I always feel like I just want to be discovered in an upset state to be comforted. It's such a weird thing, but I'm always like I want to be found, but also there's something about... It's not true, but I always think I'm so ugly when I cry that I don't want to be seen. It's such an intimate thing to have to share with someone to cry. And I think it's so interesting as well that you almost journaled yourself, what you were feeling with your grandmother, that you recorded yourself to just capture that.

**Hannah Brown:**

Sometimes I wish whenever I was in the highs and lows of emotions, I have captured that, which is something I'm not in the practice of ever doing. I don't take pictures or write things down, but you just have this faint, fuzzy recollection of these moments that are huge. And so they become anchors in your life.

**Megan Payne:**

It's hard to know, yeah, how you were, because you're feeling them so acutely. Yeah. This last question might have a brief answer or it might not, I'm not sure, but I think it's fitting, because of the theme of how, at least for myself, I think in 2017, I might've engaged with this questionnaire in a lighter way and maybe on a date as a vehicle to show off or to come across in a certain way. And in that sense, maybe it would be more jokey, more playful, think of this questionnaire in a bit more of a corny light, and especially coming out of lockdown, I'm really, I think, just hungry for opportunities to openly and honestly spill myself and share myself and also receive that from others. So, we haven't reached the end of the questionnaire but question 32 is what, if anything, is too serious to be joked about?

**Hannah Brown:**

I would say a lot, actually. I don't really know how to articulate this succinctly at all without keeping it very abstract, which I think I will do right now. There is a lot that I think should not be joked about. And I think people are like, "Oh, why so sensitive?" But sensitivity is the only way to respect all people and everything. And so, when a joke is made at the expense of someone, I find it not funny. So anything that puts any person, any body, any system or race or structure or location, anything, that is belittled, I don't agree with and I think should not be joked about—

**Megan Payne:**

Sorry.

**Hannah Brown:**

That's okay, just a sec, I think that's a really deeply embedded part of culture, though, of socializing, even in the way that millennials create memes. And I feel like sometimes that's my way of consuming news a bit these days. I'll look at memes and I'll be like, "Great. I have a complete sense of what's going on in the world," because of the sarcasm and nihilism that's injected into this medium, both of just, yeah, joking about things that are actually really serious and should be taken more seriously.

**Megan Payne:**

That's not an abstract answer at all, because when I was accidentally interrupting with— and wanting to say I think it's really clear, really true, a really important answer. And it reminds me of that early question about what do you wish had been different in your childhood? I think it's maybe more what you wish was a bit different in, unless embedded in your culture, which is this capacity to and willingness to belittle people. Yeah. Thank you.

Thank you so much, Hannah. I think we should wrap the questions up there, but you've just been so generous and honest, and I really, in a non-condescending word, want to use the word congratulate, but also to both of us. That questionnaire, actually when you take it honestly is really quite huge.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes. I'm surprised we ever thought we would get through it in an hour, because it's so big. And I know that with you, I can speak quite lengthily, which isn't that the case when you talk to everyone. And I want to say that I've really enjoyed having this platform to share with you and connect with you on things that I otherwise probably would never talk to you about. So, I've really enjoyed this.

**Megan Payne:**

Thank you. Yeah. And we can always finish it off another time in person.

**Hannah Brown:**

Yes.

**Megan Payne:**

Yeah, so thank you so much. Thanks for joining us for a conversation between Megan Payne and Hannah Brown, *36 Questions to Make You Fall in Love*, where we referred to a questionnaire and each answered questions from the perspective of our 2017 and current selves.

I want to thank Leah Landau for approaching me with this opportunity to shape and share this conversation, and *Chunky Move* for hosting it and making it possible, and also ACCA's involvement. And especially you, Hannah, for agreeing to chat with me and being so generous.

And here I want to reflect on Hannah's conversation style as I promised I would in the introduction say that you've always had this super impressive, crisp way of exactly expressing things, where I'm just floored and left completely knowing that there was no other combination of words that could have expressed what you were saying so perfectly. And I felt that was present throughout this whole conversation.

And listeners, if you have enjoyed the conversation today, or if you've fallen in love with either or both of us, please feel free to reach out via our social media accounts. For me, I'm on Instagram at @I-M-B-R-I-N-G-N-S-X-Y-R-A-T. And then, Hannah, how should they reach you?

## **Reading List**

- **'36 Questions that Lead to Love' by Daniel Jones, The New York Times (2015)**

## Rhiannon Newton & Tema Milstein



*Rhiannon Newton and Tema Milstein. Images: by Sheung Yi HIAP Open Studios; Iceland with Storied Seas.*

In their *Activators* conversation, Tema Milstein and Rhiannon Newton speak about modes of communicating and experiencing human participation in ecological crises and restoration.

Rhiannon is a dancer and choreographer and Tema is a former journalist and now university associate professor whose work focuses on the intersections of culture and ecological relations. Together they discuss the role of the arts, embodiment, Indigenous knowledge, and storytelling in how we make sense of our relations within the more-than-human world.

Drawing attention to utopian and dystopian approaches, they discuss the idea of an *Ecocultural Identity* and how this might help us understand how humans are already always entangled with their environment and other lifeforms. Thinking through how people express, perform, or hide a sense of one-ness or connectivity with non-human life, they consider how we are disciplined by practices of spectatorship in theatres, theme parks, and the wild.

## About Rhiannon

Rhiannon is an Australian dancer and choreographer who grew up on Dughutti land (Kempsey) in regional NSW. Her artistic work draws attention to ecofeminist ways of understanding bodies as inextricably entangled with the environment. From her current base on Gadigal land (Sydney) Rhiannon makes contributions to the community and culture through creation, performance, collaboration, teaching and curation. She leads the artist-run venue, ReadyMade Works and the lecture-performance series, Talking Bodies. Her recent projects include *Explicit Contents* (Sydney Festival 2021); *Long Sentences* (Liveworks Live Dreams, Sydney 2020, Baltic Circle Festival, Helsinki 2019); *Place Without Form* (Trois C-L, Luxembourg 2019); *Choreographed Readings* (Dance Massive, Melbourne 2019) and *We Make Each Other Up* (Dancehouse, Melbourne 2018).

## About Tema

Tema Milstein is an associate professor of Environment & Society at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, and convenor of the Master of Environmental Management program. Her work tends to ways culture, society, and communication inform - and are informed by - environmental relations. In her research and teaching, she examines issues that are deeply important to how we exist in the world today and into the future, with a particular focus on the different cultural meaning systems that shape our ecological understandings, identities, and actions, and on the ways we create a destructive status quo or bring about restorative transformation.

She is a former Fulbright Scholar and her research interests span the globe, examining ecocultural meaning systems, ecotourism and endangered wildlife, environmental activism, and ecoculture jamming. Her recent edited books are the *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity* (2020) and *Environmental Communication Pedagogy and Practice* (2017). She has taught at universities in Australia, Italy, China, New Zealand, and the United States. Her first career, before becoming an academic, was as a print and public radio journalist.

# **Rhiannon Newton & Tema Milstein**

## **Conversation Transcription**

### **Rhiannon Newton:**

Hi, my name's Rhiannon Newton. I'm on Gadigal Land today of the people of the Eora Nation. I'm here chatting as a part of the Activators Program with Tema Milstein. And I'll hand over to you, Tema, to do a bit of an introduction of yourself.

### **Tema Milstein:**

Great. Hi, I'm Tema Milstein. I'm joining from the unceded land of the Gadigal and Bedegal people of the Eora Nation. I pay my respect to Elders of this land past, present, and emerging. I'm specifically calling from where UNSW stands on that land.

### **Rhiannon Newton:**

*[Affirmative]* Mm-hmm, cool. I'll mention that I'm also in Camperdown in my rented apartment. Tema and I met I think at the end of 2019 through a conversation I was having about starting to be interested in doing some research. I'm a dancer and choreographer, and have been working in Sydney and various places over the last 10 or 15 years. Some of my growing interest in how performance and the creative arts relates to how humans understand and relate to their environment and care about what is happening to our environment got me interested in learning more about these things, and that's I think what led me to you, Tema, and actually coming into relationship with you as my supervisor.

### **Tema Milstein:**

Yeah. We met just before the bushfires, before COVID. I think what both of us do is so intimately related with all of the much more tangible shifts we've been feeling in our bodies, out of our bodies, and how that's all related.

My background is, I'm an ecocultural scholar, and I specifically focus on the ways that we all communicate about the more-than-human world and our place in the more-than-human world, specifically looking at this through a cultural lens and seeing how we constitute realities in that way and transform realities and reproduce realities. And so I'm really excited about this conversation.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah, cool. I thought I'd start off our conversation by maybe talking a little bit about your background in journalism, and how that led you to be working in ecocultural theory and how— From my position in the arts, there's definitely a lot of work being made in this time and over the last decades about more environmental issues. I'm guessing, I'm thinking about the role of the arts, the role of communication in how we make sense of what's happening in our world in these times, and maybe to ask you to talk a bit about your journey into that.

**Tema Milstein:**

Yeah, sure. Yeah. So I was a journalist in print media and also public radio for, I don't know, 13 years about, and then I decided to go into academia, because I wanted to be able to go deeper than I could in journalism. As a journalist, I was really interested in social and cultural justice issues. And then as I shifted into scholarship, I realized, Oh, there really wasn't a place at the time for environmental reporting. There were no environmental beats when I was a journalist. And so, shifting into being able to have that space in academic work to go into the ways that social and cultural and environmental issues all inform one another, it was just really exciting to have that kind of space, and also being able to teach, at the same time as doing research, is a wonderful thing about academia. So there was— I found a lot of parallels actually. Because as a journalist, I'd go out and listen. I was curious, and I'd ask questions, and I do the same kind of research. I go out, I listen. I'm curious, I ask questions. I do ethnographic work, but I'm able to do it longer and in a more nuanced way, and I'm able to look for patterns like, what are the repeating themes in— Instead of a story, a moment in time or news, instead I'm looking at, what's the foundation for why we are where we are?

What are the deep premises we live by that we may not be aware of, that we may not be directly voicing, but it's also what we're actually co-creating all the time with each other? So I was able to get into this more abstract space that I think is really important to get to, because it allows us to see our cosmologies or the structures that we live by, right?

**Rhiannon Newton:**

*[Affirmative]* Mm-hmm.

**Tema Milstein:**

Yeah, so that's how I got there. And then, I was looking at first, I just needed to pick a site so I could look at this. I picked endangered orca whales, and all the people who were drawn to them, and all the different sectors who are drawn to them. That was in Canada and the US on the Pacific Coast. And so I'm still doing that study. It's been about 15 years now. And so just looking at how do our relationships with the more than human world, especially charismatic megafauna who are endangered, we've captured. All these amazing things have happened with orcas, and they're still here. And then how do we talk about our relationships? How do we understand them when we're around these other animals? And then from there, I've just gone down a long interesting road for me at least in lots of different sites.

Where I'm from originally, New Mexico— and I'm looking at mestizo or Hispanic Indigenous relations with land, looking at the same in Oman and Iceland and Ethiopia and New Zealand. I'm just moving through different places around the world to look at ecocultural meaning systems and dynamic shift. And then I've also really been drawn to environmental activism. I've been studying that and also looking at, how do we bring about transformation, whether it's through our teaching or our acts? Right now, more than ever, and I think this is one of the things that's really interesting in talking with you and what I'd like to look at next is, just how do we help create space for a transitional moment that we all can experience right now? I think with the elections in my origin country, in the US, I think there's a real hopeful feeling that major change is possible right now.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

[Affirmative] Mm-hmm, yeah.

**Tema Milstein:**

So, yeah. So I'd love to hear what you think about in terms of the arts and dance, and just how your practice informs this or is informed by all this.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah. I guess over the last couple of years, I've gone from thinking about the work that I make as something that is maybe starting from something that's in a social kind of situation that kind of makes sense of how we make sense of how dance works or how the nature of the theatre event works. And then in the last couple of years, I've just, through my own reading and growing concern about what's happening in the environment, started to think a little bit more deeply about how dance as an art form works in relation to the world, and obviously noticing that there's lots of work being produced and literature being produced that tells us all the information that we need to know about what's happening to our world, and the statistics, and particular examples of events that are dreadful and these versions of the future that are really hard to even get my head around.

And then wondering about, okay, well, it's not working. Something's not working in the telling of these stories that are painting this picture of catastrophe. Why isn't it having effect? Why can't I feel it, or why doesn't it feel urgent? Maybe it does, but obviously it doesn't for a large part of the population. So then I was like, well, obviously, that's something to do. It's not just comprehension in the kind of cognitive. Someone says this is going to happen, why don't I panic? Then I started to think about— I read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which was just one of those things where you go like, ah, it's to do with how you position it politically, who's implicated, how you make things visceral and paint the picture that this is your— The same way that if a car is coming at you and it's going to hit you, that your whole body goes into some sort of responsive, ah, and all those sensibilities of flight and the nervous system reacts in this very speedy way.

Then I tried to get a bit more into, what is it that dance knows in this embodied way of relating to our environment that might be able to play some sort of role in the way that we tell the stories and then able to process them through the body?

**Tema Milstein:**

Yeah.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah. Anyway, that's a long way around where my interest in how the arts or dance in particular can relate to some of these issues that you're talking about. I don't think that's definitely not the only way. I think it's in dialogue with science fiction literature that tells these bizarre stories about what could unfold as well as hard data and more detailed information. Yeah.

**Tema Milstein:**

Right. One of the things– I think it's interesting. Because if I was listening to this, I'm just going to go from how I listen to things right now. I'm avoiding things that are extremely depressing. I'm wondering– Just whoever's listening right now, thanks for listening. We will talk about probably some depressing things, but I also want to really be clear that I think you and I are both working on, how do we get beyond that numbness or the avoidance? I'm speaking for myself. I teach about it. I read about it. I write about it, but I'd be like, don't go for it, do it for entertainment or time off, I guess.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Sure.

**Tema Milstein:**

And so I think both you and I are– Look, I kept trying to dive deep in order to fully understand, and not just cognitively but emotionally in an embodied way, where we are right now, why we are where we are right now, so that we can move through it and get to another place.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah, absolutely. Maybe that's a good point for me to— You've mentioned it in passing, this idea of the ecocultural or the ecocultural identity, which the book that you've just published is based around. I think in one of the topics that we were given to talk about for this conversation was absence.

**Tema Milstein:**

*[Affirmative]* Mm-hmm, interesting. Yeah.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

I guess with this idea of the ecological and the cultural brought together in order to describe identity or our sense of who we are, I went from reading some of your stuff. I understand that the cultural factors that form our identity to do with our social relationships, our sense of community, our education, the principles that we live by. I guess somewhere down the track, those things, those cultural phenomena are embedded in a sense of place and the environment that has given rise to those particular factors. Then I wanted to ask you about what then— Putting the ecological jammed up against the cultural, why you feel like that's needed? What sort of absence? Obviously, at least putting the emphasis back on how our relationships to place and the particular species and others that are in our more localized or place-based kind of situation. Yeah.

**Tema Milstein:**

Great, yeah.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Maybe just to give you a chance to chat to that.

**Tema Milstein:**

Thanks for a reminder about other themes that we're talking about.

Absence I think is such a powerful thing to talk about, because we're usually pretty aware of what's present, but we're usually pretty unaware of what's absent. It's in those absences, it's in those silences and in the invisibilities that different possibilities lie from the everyday and they're repeated in the status quo.

So ecocultural approaches, I think, are really important, because they are all about understanding that whenever we're talking about culture, and really, in every sense of the word. The shared community cultures, the ancient ones, the pop cultures, the culture in terms of the arts, that all of that is also ecological. Every kind of culture and all those processes are ecological, and that's invisible. The ecological aspect is generally absent. It's unstated. And in it being absent, nature, if we want to call it nature, but just the entire world outside of the human, whatever the purely human is which doesn't exist, the ecological is just muted. That is a reproduction of the status quo, because we have a binary at the heart of the culture that's colonized the rest of the world, the culture that is dominant and dominating that there's a binary where humans are separate from the rest of the living world, even the rest of the nonliving world, that we're somehow exceptional and not part of the planet, that we're just here on a stage set that happens with what we call the environment.

And so ecocultural studies is all about realigning humans as being ecological creatures, and that everything we do always has an ecological aspect. The book we've been talking about is called *The Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity*. It just came out with my co-editor, José Castro-Sotomayor. It came out a couple months ago. There's 40 authors on it from around the world talking about ecocultural identity and understanding and looking at case studies. There's some really, really interesting things in there. Hopefully, people will ask their libraries to order it. It's an expensive book, but I think it's a great thing to have in libraries right now to help us rethink who and what we are.

So, the idea is that, if our identities are cultural and social, we also need to understand them as always ecological. That doesn't mean how environmentalist are we, or how green are we. It means that, even if we're none of those things at all and quite the opposite, those are ecological identities too.

There are destructive ones, and there are ecological ones. They're having an impact, and they are less or more in relationship with understanding that we're ecological. But they're always having an impact, because we're always acting in relationship. And so, I feel like— Actually, one of the things that you just brought up when you were talking made me think about this. So I was staying— Part of this is dystopic, but also part of it is utopic.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yep.

**Tema Milstein:**

But when we think about— So we have to have dystopia, which in many ways we're living in. Also in many ways, we're living in a utopic moment. We have to have that dystopic reality in front of us so we can understand, what is it we don't want, and what are the problems here? And then, okay, what is it we do want? What do we have right now in place? Or what have we had for thousands and thousands and thousands of years that really works and as a species? And what do we need? What's not here right now in terms of dominant culture, and what needs to shift? I could go on and on about this. The one other— And I'm not going to— The one other thing I wanted to mention is, you were talking about my chapter in *The Handbook of Ecocultural Identity*. It's all about the absence. It's about the absence of ecocentrism. Ecocentrism is the ideology or the worldview that humans are just one part of many, many related parts that make up our ecosystems. Ecocentrism is what we're aiming for now. It's what we need to take on. But it's pretty absent. It's a risk to show that you're ecocentric. It's to show that you're different from the norm. It's to be dismissed and considered not really a legitimate voice. If you are Indigenous, you very well may have a cosmology that is your community's own cosmology, that is highly ecocentric and has all sorts of intact belief systems and knowledges and relationships and belongings that give you a way to talk about this in a way that actually is highly heard as legitimate right now, which is really important.

If you're not Indigenous, or if you're many, many, many generations away from your Indigeneity, it's really difficult to have a legitimate voice that's ecocentric right now, because dominant culture recreates what is dominant. Dominant right now is anthropocentrism, human-centredness and human exceptionalism and human superiority and mastery over the rest of the world. And so what my chapter was looking at is how does that– This isn't simply a top-down dynamic, this is a dynamic that we're all involved in. You can think of it as in our everyday interactions that we're involved in this, whether we're silencing ourselves and making that absence of ecocentrism, or we're doing it to others. We may be doing both most likely. That's how culture recreates itself and reproduces itself and makes it so there's not as much change happening. But then again, culture shifts when there are risk takers, when there is a movement, and more and more people start to embrace another way. And so that's that moment we're in right now. We're in that moment of, how do we move from an anthropocentric dystopia to an ecocentric utopia, and not utopic fantasy, but a reality grounded in wellbeing.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

*[Affirmative]* Mm-hmm. So I remember in one of our very first conversations, I think I was trying to– I was reading literature around Anna Halprin. It's quite– A seminal dance artist is responsible for a lot of the shifts in dance that happened around the 1960s that was very much synchronized with a lot of the environmental awareness that was happening in that time. I was reading this book of hers, and she's talking about that movement is aliveness, and this language that I was like, yes, that sensuousness and connection that comes through a sense of being in motion, and that as aliveness as agency that is something that is both within the body but also moves through it from things outside of the body.

And then I can remember saying to you, “But I know this stuff is not valid. It's hippy-dippy, and I don't know how to talk about it in these other settings that are not danced, where I'm not in a studio with colleagues where we can have these loose conversations.” I appreciated you picking me up on this self-censorship.

I noticed it's a lot of what you're writing about in relation to identity is where we are able to express our sense of connection to the world around us and not. I think there's something interesting. I think your point about how in the wild, on a kayaking trip or a boat tour, how these expressions of people spin stuff when they see animals is sometimes policed in a bit like, Ooh, that's a bit too much. But then in other settings, like the circus or a dolphin show at SeaWorld, even I think in more domestic relationships with animals, that these sorts of expressions are okay. And then I was thinking about that in relation to performance and the kind of practices or habits that we have around modes of relating, and that entering into a theatre setting means, okay, I open up, I'm allowed to— Anyway, I just wondered about those kinds of dynamics that support or the kind of habits that we have around when we're allowed to feel and when we're not.

**Tema Milstein:**

Yeah.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah.

**Tema Milstein:**

That's so interesting. I also love how you said "loose conversations", because as someone who studies communication, it's so interesting how we start to verbalize. Where do we have the space to be different from the norm? Where do we have the space to do that? And then, how that draws attention to how communication is a social force or reproductive force, or how it can also be a transformative force? When we are having loose conversations, there's possibility. There's movement. But our more every day scripts aren't loose. Other ways that this comes up, how we express the tightness actually or the routine, how we communicate and how that is constricting, it doesn't slip off the tongue. That something doesn't slip off the tongue. It's not something you've practiced a lot, and therefore, you hear all the time, so all the people wouldn't understand, right?

**Rhiannon Newton:**

[Affirmative] Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

**Tema Milstein:**

I think there has to be— There's a story in that chapter that I talk about with one of my students who— She's an out lesbian. She's butch. She's a firefighter, and she's fierce in all of those non-normative identities. This was a while ago when this happened with my student—this was 15 years ago. So she's this brave person breaking boundaries, had gotten to a place of comfort in who she is and being that person in an outward way. We had this conversation where we were in Seattle where it rains a lot. Everyone who lives in Seattle knows that when it rains, the worms come out of the ground and they cross the walking paths to the sidewalks during the rain.

And at first, when I moved to Seattle, I didn't understand what was going on. I was walking in the rain, and I just saw these liquid stripes going across the sidewalk. I had to stop and look closely, and I realized, Oh, these are worms and they're actually moving. They're using that rain for that mobility to move greater distances. And then I was freaked out, because I'd been walking on them. And then I looked around and everyone was walking on them. So I was having this conversation with my student about like, "Oh God, the worms are going to come out." But no one ever talked about that. This is the first time I'd ever talked about this with anyone, because it's an ecocentric thing to notice.

And to say it out loud is also to label yourself as paying attention to something beyond the human world. And she said, "Yeah, it takes me forever to walk home when it's raining, because I stop at every crack in the sidewalk and I lift up the worm and I put them in the grass so they're not going to be stepped on. And if anyone walks by, I just pretend I'm tying my shoe." And I missed a beat, and then she missed a beat, and we looked at each other and started talking about that. The fact that she's this brave person who's able to be different from the norm in other ways, but she wasn't—that anthropocentrism...

There's homophobia. There's sexism. There's all that means for your life. But then there's anthropocentrism. And that is so big, because it is dominant across culture. There's very few subcultures you can belong to that are ecocentric. They exist, but you have to go way out of the norm. And so, that was so interesting to me. Actually, it was that interaction that started me really thinking about performance, expression, and just the idea that we have to have a fierce gentleness right now if we're going to be different as a species, across our species, if we're going to be different now on time and not just mindfully but embodiedly, being fiercely gentle, being permeable and vulnerable. And so that brings me to the performance aspect that you were thinking of, because a lot of this has to do with performance, right?

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah.

**Tema Milstein:**

We're performing anthropocentrism all the time. We're performing normativity all the time, and gender and all the other things, sexuality, whatever else we're performing. But you brought up something interesting from that chapter. I'm going to just try to weave it into dance and art, and I'm going to take it to a point where I am not going to be capable to do that and you will. So you brought up that, one of the things I've found in my research is that it's okay to, "ooh" and "aah" and applaud together, or have this emotive reaction when you're at SeaWorld when an orca is putting— Is being forced to create a spectacle, and that there's a performance that's expected. The people who arrive expect this performance. Everyone has bought into the fact that this is a spectacle performance, and this is how you're supposed to react.

But in the wild, when people are around wild orcas and have a response that is emotive, what I write about a little bit is the "orcagasm," what locals call it, orcagasm. That these are collective on boats and on land. People are just like, "Oh." They emote together. It's very not conscious.

It's very embodied, and people don't hold back until people tell them to. There's very few people who applaud. I think I've seen it once or twice. And that's like, what are you doing? Why are you applauding? But there's also lots of, stop acting that way usually through jokes or making fun of.

So that's the difference between the spectacle and the situation. There's the Situationist International out of Paris in the middle of last century who were all about, how do we change the spectacle for society into a society of the situation again, where we're open to moving through space, to having situations happen through relationship, through meeting, through meeting place, through meeting other people.

And so, what I'm trying to get at here is, because I think art, I think dance, especially dance maybe, because it's alive, it may sit in this really interesting space. If people come in expecting a performance, so they're more open to ideas and expressions that they would otherwise not be open to as much in their everyday lives. But at the same time, it's a situation, because people are engaging with it. If they're not the person who's performing, they're open to perhaps change, to having their minds change, or to having their ideas change. And so it's not a spectacle, it's not where people are passively audiences, but instead, it's a place where everyone has some interactive— There's a name called spect-actor. There's a term for this where you also are acting. You're actually participating in this in some way. And so I want to bring that over to you and just ask you, does that speak to you? How does that especially speak to shifting ecocultural relations?

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah, part of my attention is still worrying in this description that you've given of the expectation of spectacle and I guess the degree of expectation, that say you would enter into that performative situation where you know the dolphin is going to jump so high or something. It's almost the gratification of that expectation that is where the expected or condoned response is going to come from.

**Tema Milstein:**

Right.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

And then, I think I'm thinking about the different in relation to habits of then engaging in theatre, and maybe also thinking about, what it is that we seek out when we seek entertainment or something else, which is maybe what you're talking about more in relation to a situation where I don't quite know what I'm going to experience and that I guess the bravery or courage or thrill-seeking kind of efforts that that puts on me as the more passive audience member, because I also know myself. That moment when a performer says, "And now, there's a participatory aspect of this performance," my whole system goes like, "Oh." I think these are interesting things. It's about uncertainty. It's about what you've described as openness to change to something unexpected taking place where— And that discomfort that can happen in performance and be that really transformative, beautiful sense of collective journeying through a thing that hasn't happened before or has never quite happened in this particular way, because there's some very tenuous element that's taking place. So I'm thinking about what those stakes are that are set up in some performance situations. Maybe it's to do with uncontrollable elements.

And then to loop that back to— I guess I'm thinking about, what kinds of practices train maybe this sort of ecocentrism that you're talking about, but also in the social realm? If we did more improvised arts or something as children, would we be more open or have more methods for dealing with uncertainty and trusting our own instincts and our own emotive first responses to thing and develop more comfort in our own emotional range or something? Yeah.

**Tema Milstein:**

Interesting. That helps. Immediately, it's making me think— Everything you say is making me think lots of things. I'm jotting down.

But the last thing you said really brings me to enduring Indigenous cultures that very much have– I don't want to homogenize or romanticize or essentialize; it's difficult to talk about Indigenous cultures especially if you're not Indigenous. But in many Indigenous cultures I'm familiar with here in Australia and in the US, dance in movement is part, is central, right–

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah.

**Tema Milstein:**

... in terms of social and more than social relations. And that childhood and just moving through these rites of passage, or– that's a pretty Euro way of thinking about it maybe. But just moving through these stages and having these introductions and these knowledges become part of you that really are not part of our dominant Western education system at all. I grieve that. I have two kids, and I'm seeing them move through these perfectly acceptable public education systems. I ask them what they do every day, and it's none of the things I want them to be doing. It's none of the things that I feel like are– I'm really glad they're learning how to read and write, don't get me wrong. But I want them to be having experiential ethical belongings with each other and with the land and with the water, and that's not there. You bring up childhood, and I think it's a really important part of transformation.

And your whole like, okay, how do we take some of the things we're doing in dance and are accepted in dance and move that into the social realm? I think it's a really deeply important question. It makes me– Actually, I want to bring up how you think dance itself can help bring about transformation. I know you have something coming up in Sydney Festival called *Explicit Contents*. I have the description in front of me. I'm just going to pull out a couple lines that I think are really interesting, and maybe you can talk about how. If this is just pushing it too far, that's fine. Just say that.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah, no.

**Tema Milstein:**

But I'm really interested in, how does the work all of us do, how is all the work all of us are doing right now, no matter what we're doing— And I think you and I are particularly focused on this, so that helps. But no matter what we're doing, how's all what we're doing right now bringing about a more ecocentric existence in a present and a future of mutual wellbeing? And so you have— some of the lines in this are— This would be January 6th through 10th at the Campbelltown Arts Centre.

*“The edge of the body has disappeared. The environment has seeped inside and come to live amongst body parts. The nervous system feels it's way far beyond the skin. Reimagining bodies as water vessels, techno chemical conglomerates and thermodynamic machines. This new work asks just what impacts our human bodies having on their environment, but what do these impacts feel like?”*

**Rhiannon Newton:**

*[Affirmative]* Mm-hmm.

**Tema Milstein:**

So can you talk a little bit about how you feel this might— If I'm not in the performance, but I come and see this in January, what do you want the audience to feel? What do you want them to walk away with that might go beyond being the audience and go into transformations?

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah. A lot of the things I've been thinking about relate to how the body as a material is kind of— They're flesh and these chemicals as well as energy, which is maybe some sort of chemical burning process that's happening from eating food.

In some way, I'm going a bit into this very materialist understanding of the body to make it less important or less different from the stuff that is around us. But then at the same time, also thinking about how the memories and imaginations and passions and desires that we have are also this similar big chunk of— Also really physical things that we've experienced through our life that sit in us, and are sitting in us because they're gathered up from the time that we've spent in the world and being pressed on by it as well as, at the same time, pressing on it.

So I guess with the duration of performance, what I try to do is let some of those seepages spill out into the space and create a sense of saturation, so that all the bodies that are there in that moment drift a little bit towards maybe the wateriness of their own bodies. So that if these dancers slow down enough, that there's some cellular kind of perceptual recalibrating that all the bodies have to do in the space in order to notice what's going on, because it's got so minute. So that then you have a splash of water drips onto their skin, that that visceral kind of moment of encounter is enlarged. You maybe feel it anew, or you reexperience your own watering as in relation to that thing that's touching the skin, and the nervous system of the audience finds its way into the nervous system of the dancer as they imagine what that sensation feels like.

Other things we've been doing this work with pressing really hard at the walls and the floor, and imagining that you might be able to push your way down inside the earth. There's these qualities of the body. It's hardness of its bones. It's the strength of its muscles that make me feel how some parts of the world are quite firm and solid. And then on this very material way, I feel how my body has those properties, but then also not. I'm this more fleeting partial thing that is not going to be around for as long as rocks.

**Tema Milstein:**

I love that. I love that. It's just liberating to hear you talk about it actually. It also reminds me of the fact that none of us do it all. You're doing, you're coming from your power place, your passion, your skills, your talent.

I'm like, okay, now, how do you make this a social revolution? No, that's not for you to have to do the whole thing, because it doesn't work that way. I think we're ecological. We all have our niches. I was just thinking, one of the neat things about this series is, there's going to be an artist who writes a novel based on— The first chapter is going to be based on these conversations. That's ecological. That's all of us relating and influencing the others and impacting the others and moving through us, and that whole idea of what you're performing is that. It's that relationality, and it's that impactfulness. It's reminding me again of absence, because what indeed has been absent from the dominating colonizing culture that continues to dominate and colonize, is that permeability, is that relationality, is what Stacy Alaimo, a US academic calls trans-corporeality, which leads to environmental ethic. If you're in that space, you also are part of that, is that you have a relational ethic.

One of the things, going back to the orcas, it could be maybe one of our touch— Not a touchdown but a touch giant mammal, touch the only matriarchal mammal, truly matriarchal. That's a good touch, touch mammal. Dystopic in that, when we think about permeability and the absence of that in the way we see the world, they really bring that to light because they're dying. The population that I've been around for a long time, the Southern Resident killer whales are dying for multiple all anthropogenic, all human caused reasons. But one of them is the persistent nonpoint pollutants or flame retardants that we don't need, because there are flame retardants that break down and don't pollute, and all the other persistent pollutants that we still use that we haven't ceased using because we don't understand or we don't face the fact at a policy level that were permeable. Those are all going in their breast milk. And so, their firstborns are dying, and the males are just dying when they hit puberty, because they have no way to let go of those pollutants. And that we as humans have those same pollutants in our breast milk, but just at lower levels because we're not the top— The orcas are bioaccumulating these through all— They're the top of the food chain in the ocean. And so they're bioaccumulating through all these different levels of little creatures eating— Bigger creatures eating— Bigger eating little eating littler. Anyway, they bioaccumulate to the point that they die from this trans-corporeality. And so that's the dystopic part of this.

And then there's a utopic. There's so much utopic too. Just the absence, the invisibility of the air to us or the invisibility of climate to us. But that once we become aware, just the literally second by second utopia of being able to breathe oxygen, and just right now being alive because we are breathing something that too much of society these days has become absent in terms of us thinking about it.

And so, breathing in oxygen and letting up carbon dioxide, which the green world needs, and that we're constantly in this beautiful flow of exchange. So I wonder if there's a tension. There's a tension between the dystopic right now that we have created, meaning we, meaning dominant culture and capitalism that is so intertwined in dominant culture and feeds it and reproduces it at a very strong level to make profit. That there's a tension between that dystopia that it's very difficult not to be part of and the utopia. If through dance, through art, through writing, through having conversations that are meaningful and deep and risk-taking, if we reside in that tension, then we no longer are absent to ourselves. And that changes our ways of being, that changes our ways of relating.

Because I think a big problem right now is we are absent to ourselves dominantly. We are so caught up in the spectacle. We're plugged in. We can't hear, we can't see, because we're looking at our phone and we're plugged into our headset as we're walking down the road, and we no longer see the people around us, or that rainbow lorikeet, or that bus that just came close to us. But if we can now be present to ourselves and if we can move into that presence, and again, ourselves being that expanded sense of ourselves, that in itself is going to change everything.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

I think that's very beautiful in a very clear way of stitching some of these different things together. Listening to you, I think about the amount of concentration that is involved in being present. I know in a moment like this of having a conversation where I'm bringing up things that I really care about, listening to you, and getting excited and jotting things in my mind about, Oh, that's something I want to understand more about.

I know that it has a hyper presence that is hard to maintain, but then I also know that that's the kind of sense of engagement that also fulfills me and makes me happy.

In listening to you, I'm thinking about those flows of attention and energy, how maybe a bit in relation to the idea of the trans-corporeality where you almost move beyond yourself or you extend what you feel as your body out into the world around you. So it's almost like leaving what you understand as yourself in order to be more deeply engaged in noticing the world around you or the detail of it or the sensitivity of it, which I guess brings me back to thinking about how culture works, and how after then, being engaged in that present thing where the concentration is really turned on that doesn't just lead to tiredness and then dropping out.

**Tema Milstein:**

Yeah, I mean it has to be feeding, right? I think that— I know there's this great performance space in Seattle. I think it's called the Vera Project, if I'm remembering correctly, that was all about how do we change performance so that the audience isn't this stagnant, passive viewership, but instead they're participants. They have devoted themselves to shifting that part of performance so it's co-participatory. I think that is very feeding. I've been to a couple performances there that I was like, wow, this is amazing. This is completely different. I left just, alive. I'm not as into it actually, being an audience member for performance because, well, I can get a lot from it, and I have, but if you're not the person performing, sometimes you literally just are sitting still to start with, and your mind might be going, but I think we need more than that too often.

And I was thinking your notion of hyperpresence, I'm super drawn to it. It's amazing how little it exists in today's world. It's not so amazing, because we're in a spectacle society where we're being sold things. And so the passive audiences are exactly what's needed for that arrangement. So being active, being a creator, being a participant is very different and very alive way of being. That means we start to be co-creators of culture again. I think that it really— And I know we need to draw this conversation to a close.

That as you were saying, I think it's also some muscles, not literal muscles necessarily, although in some cases literal, that we haven't— You brought up the word training earlier, right?

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah.

**Tema Milstein:**

That are kind of different. They've been disused there lacks, but I think that they're so excited to be used. And so that re-examining of who we are and what we are and where we are and how we fit and what our roles can be, that's an extremely revitalizing experience. It's how I see teaching. It's how I see some of my research. It's to have these kinds of sacred spaces where we get to do that together. There's this term conviviality. It's such a beautiful term, that being alive together, that also in being truly together and really relating, we also bring more life to ourselves. So I think in fact, it's a lot less exhausting than normcore life is right now, right?

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Sure, yes.

**Tema Milstein:**

Sitting in front of the computer most of the day or the phone, or being inside in your right-angled white walled box, that's really exhausting.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah.

**Tema Milstein:**

Yeah.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah, I love this. The idea of a convivial or conviviality has come up recently. I think that's a really beautiful— It has a lightness or a gentleness that maybe because that's something that you were talking about earlier, fierce gentleness that I felt was such a beautiful mode. It might be also a nice note to end on.

**Tema Milstein:**

Yeah, I think it is to be fun to be fierce and gentle. It sounds pretty great, especially—

**Rhiannon Newton:**

And convivial.

**Tema Milstein:**

... doing it with each other.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yes.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Hyper-present, convivial, fierce, gentleness sounds like—

**Tema Milstein:**

Yeah.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

... a great practice.

**Tema Milstein:**

Awesome, I'm in.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah, cool. I think we should maybe wind this up.

**Tema Milstein:**

Sure.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

And maybe just say thank you. It's been really fun and-

**Tema Milstein:**

Yeah, same to you. Thank you. Thanks for inviting me to do this. I'm excited to get out of this scholarship culture zone and talk about a bit or at least put my toe in to talking with you in this format of bringing in the arts and performances. It's very great.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah, likewise. I think it's super nice to hear how— The ways you're thinking about human relationships with other species and the environment is so already emotional and about communication with others and the practices that we have for being in the world as humans. I think there's so much that's— I think there's a lot of crossovers that hopefully is interesting. Yeah.

**Tema Milstein:**

Yeah.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Yeah, okay. Thank you very much, Tema.

**Tema Milstein:**

Thank you, we'll talk soon.

**Rhiannon Newton:**

Okay, great.

## **Reading List**

- *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance* by Janice Ross (2009)
- *Moving toward Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance* by Anna Halprin (1995)
- *Podcast of The Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity on Custodians of the Planet* (July 2020)
- *The Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity* edited by Tema Milstein and José Castro-Sotomayor (2020)
- *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson (1962)
- *Transcorporeal Tourism: Whales, Fetuses, and the Rupturing and Reinscribing of Cultural Constraints* by Tema Milstein and Charlotte Kroløkke (2012)

## **Tim Darbyshire & Amy Sharrocks**



*Tim Darbyshire and Amy Sharrocks. Images: Silvana Mangano; Ruth Corney.*

**Tim and Amy connect to the lands and waters, which both separate and bind them. In order to tune into one another from across the globe, they close down some senses and open up others. They discuss some of their parallel obsessions, such as bodies of water and the act of falling. Each of them reflects on what led them to fall, flop, crumble and dive into the kind of work they make. They consider some of the ways our world is falling apart at large and how we may be able to linger low before rushing to recover.**

**They speak about togetherness and collective visioning.**

**They speak about soft edges and porous borders.**

**They speak about attention to vulnerability.**

**They speak about exhausting thresholds.**

**They speak about monstrous mutations and choreography, as bacteria.**

**They speak about ethical waves taking form, one particle at a time.**

## **About Tim**

Tim Darbyshire creates expansive choreography and performances, which draw from visual, aural, spatial and tactile fields, whilst maintaining the body as a fulcrum.

He studied Dance at Queensland University of Technology (2003), attended DanceWEB scholarship program (2006 and 2009), completed Formation d'artiste Chorégraphique at Centre National de Danse Contemporaine (France 2006-2007) and obtained a Masters in Performing Arts from Iceland University of the Arts (2018).

He has presented his work in a range of contexts including Dance Massive (AU), Théâtre de la Cité Internationale (FR), Dansensus (NO), Teatro São João (PT), Noorderzon Festival (NL), Tanzhaus Zürich (CH) and Reykjavík Dance Festival/Everybody's Spectacular (IS).

## **About Amy**

Amy Sharrocks is a British artist. Her work spans over a decade of investigating people and water, years spent in careful observation, noticing the ways this extraordinary substance seeps through our experience. In large public artworks for hundreds of people and intimate one-to-ones, she has swum across London, doused the capital's rivers and travelled across Britain inviting people to step off dry land.

Continuously examining the architecture of a moment, Sharrocks' work is activist, questioning our systems and re-imagining the offer of cities. Since 2013 *Museum of Water* has been gathering with a chorus of voices, each drawing our attention to a different consideration of water and each other.

## **Tim Darbyshire & Amy Sharrocks Conversation Transcription**

### **Tim Darbyshire:**

Hello, listeners. My name is Tim Darbyshire. I am a choreographer, performer, artist. I'm currently recording this conversation in Reservoir, in Melbourne. And before I get too much further, I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Owners of the land in which I am making this recording. I would like to pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. I'm joined here with fellow artist Amy Sharrocks. Amy, would you like to introduce yourself?

### **Amy Sharrocks:**

Hello, Tim. Yeah, I'm Amy. I'm an artist. I make sculptures, and films, and many things. But mainly, I make live art, so I make work with other people. I'm speaking to you from London, in England.

### **Tim Darbyshire:**

Fantastic. So Amy, we did manage to connect briefly before this conversation that we're about to have. However, we haven't met before. We've never worked together. And probably until about a week ago, I wasn't familiar with your work at all. But as I said, we did manage to connect prior to doing this recording. And I think there were a couple of parameters that we were interested to set up before we get lost in different subjects. One of them for me was this idea of perhaps inviting one another to close our eyes and be in the darkness in attempt to tune into the listening and the speaking. So I might actually do that now. I've actually got my eye mask, my sleeping mask here. I'm just going to slip it over my eyes and see how long I last in the dark.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

Oh, you've got accessories? I didn't think to bring a mask. I am just closing my eyes, so I'll have to keep that force of will going throughout, resist the urge to see the beautiful sunrise that is right outside my window that I've been watching for the last hour. But we also spoke about how we might make an acknowledgement of water to accompany the acknowledgement of land. So I may, if I may, I'd also like to begin with eyes closed. And with my eyes closed, our eyes closed, to maybe focus, to try to pull focus on to the water in our bodies. To feel, if we can, the way it rushes around our bodies. We can feel it in the blood, in the bloodstream.

And if we can feel the, I feel like we exist in a constant state of evaporation, and so I wonder if we could bring our attention from the bloodstream to the edges of our skin, this largest organ of our body. If we could energize every pore of our skin from the insides of our toes, all the way up the outsides of our shanks, around our arms, and to our head. To breathe through every pore and to feel the water shimmering out and back in. And perhaps out to the trees, or atmosphere that surrounds us, outside of our buildings, outside into the wind and the air, to feel the moisture heavy in the air.

And then rushing through this world between London and Melbourne. I was thinking about this conversation and the fibre-optic cables that are making it possible, about whether we could think through the molecules of water in the air between us, through the catchment areas of the Thames and the Yarra. Across the oceans, the North Atlantic, the South Atlantic, the Indian Ocean, all these bodies of water between us, and feel how they connect through our pores, as we breathe out, in this conversation, and in, we breathe interconnected.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Thank you so much for this guided visualization. I'm certainly feeling a lot of water. A lot of humidity and moisture. It is quite humid here at the moment. There is a storm, or two, brewing. There's rain falling. My sweat glands are quite active, particularly in the palm of my hands.

I'm holding my earpiece into my ear with my left hand, and that hand, that same hand is sweating profusely.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

You could bring that into the conversation. I love this idea of a storm brewing. In England, it's very dry at the moment. We're heading into winter and we've just begun a lockdown that I know you have just emerged from.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah, to some extent.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

So for me, I'm very conscious of the parched-ness of this city at the moment. All the pools have closed down. The river where I swim, in the lake that is a kind of assisted opening, everything is closed. So now, I have to slip into rivers with one friend at a time. I miss the easy access of water. And every acknowledgement of water needs to acknowledge the inequalities of water, the ease of access for some and not for others, and we hold that in our holding of the water.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah. When I received this invitation from Leah to invite a conversation partner who I hadn't spoken to before, but who I'm curious to connect with, I posted a little experiment on social media, right? I said, "I'm looking to speak to avid fallers, people who like to fall. For example, parachute, parachutists, skydivers, hang gliders, and more." And a colleague suggested that I speak to you, as someone who is obsessed with the fall.

And so I looked into a little bit about what you do. And I mean, that element really resonated with me, and I'd love to speak much more about it over the duration of this conversation. But returning to the water, that was another striking parallel that I found.

You've done so much work with water, and hydro art, and pieces around swimming. And that also resonates with me, as I recently produced a series of works situated in a swimming pool in Iceland.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

It was so great. Yes. Falling and water, that's what I do. And sometimes I fall into water, combining everything. Yeah, I really appreciated, actually, the way that you, this kind of tentacular way that you put that out into the world. I suppose I navigate in my work through serendipity and intuition, so this sense of the chance encounter really resonated with me. I like responding to the offer of possibility without knowing where we're going, but just trusting that because we're the people here, where we get to will be where we were supposed to get to. That actually we were the ones who were supposed to meet.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

Trusting that that is a way of the world.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

So yes, I responded to say that my parents had met parachuting, so that I feel like I come from a long line of fallers, and I certainly consulted them in my work, when I began to make work around falling. One of the things my dad said, was that you had to relax into the drop; into the fall. That actually the fall wasn't the dangerous bit – it's the crash that might hurt you. I have been very interested in the possibility of training for falls.

We can't avoid the falls, they come and we don't know when they're going to come, and there's always an accident waiting to happen. But perhaps there was training we could help ourselves with when the time came, physical and mental training. I wonder about your training, as a choreographer, and how you have trained for your fall?

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah. Well, first thing I might point out is that I've had the same email address for around about 20 years, and that is [takeanotherfall@gmail.com](mailto:takeanotherfall@gmail.com), so feel free to get in touch. I think my fascination with falling, probably like a lot of dancers who are in their early training and in those formative years, at least in western dance training, there's a lot of emphasis on the horizontality, and the strength and power of upward-ness. I think you've pointed that out in some of the texts that I've read of yours. And even in those formative years, it felt a little unbalanced, actually.

Well, it's ironic, because all of that rebellion against gravity, or this idea of always standing up, and even better, jumping up and reaching great heights, it was so much about that in the dance training that I did. I found that frustrating. I mean, I like to stand up as much as the next person, but with all of the emphasis on standing and lifting in an upward direction, I felt it was only natural to pop the balloon, and to let it fall down, and to release, and to crumble, and to find where is the movement now that you've let it go. So that's where the email address came from.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

I like there's a kind of invitation in it. Like, in connecting with you, people are joining in on taking another fall. And that there's recognition that we come from falling, we continue to fall, and then, in the end, we'll fall down and won't get up. That's just another one, and another, and another, in a long line of falling. That is life.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

I draw a lot of comfort from that. It's like the sea, right? We go up, we go down, we go up, we go down. I agree with what you've been saying, that actually what I struggle against is the fear of falling. It's the imputation of shame onto falling. I want to un-shame our falls, and to... They may be so difficult that it's hard to rejoice in them, but actually, that's where the learning is, hard or not.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah. I kind of put that that thought bubble out into the world and that serendipity of speaking to a faller. It just struck me as something that is the right thing to be doing right now, particularly through this invitation, which encouraged us to consider what's working, or what's not working in the world at the moment, and what's missing, and what's absent. I don't know, for some reason, I came back. I returned to the fall and I just had a real yearning to revisit the fall, and to talk through the fall, and to observe what's falling around us at the moment. Because, I think a lot of it is. Have you noticed-

**Amy Sharrocks:**

Absolutely.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Have you noticed that? I mean, in recent months, that the gravity is, it's real?

**Amy Sharrocks:**

Falling has always been about the bigger falls, about a fall of an empire as well as the everyday falls, of falling asleep, or minding the gaps of our days.

This wholesale fall of civilization, at the moment, has really only served to expose how uncivilized our ideas of civilization have been. That this year has exposed the gaps more than any other year, the catastrophes. But it may have shaken us from our learnings and the kind of wholesale lies of our education.

Even in my lifetime, empire was expounded on as a good thing. And it's so shocking to think that we have to relearn this every generation, as Eddie Glaude said the other day. In this fall, if we can think about it, in the exposure of our systemic racisms and the pollution of our climate and water systems, violence and inequalities in the world have been only further exposed. They've always been here, but hopefully, in this fall, will come the change. All this death, and pain, and violence cannot have been for nothing.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah. How would you like to see us recover from the... Well, that's a big question, but why not just say it, to recover from these falls that we're experiencing?

**Amy Sharrocks:**

That's really interesting. I think of falls in many stages, that there is the pre-stage, the kind of contemplation of the drop, the rush of the fall itself, the crash, and the moment of letting go into the fall, but then the crash. But the part that is so often underestimated, is the aftermath. I think this is the part of a fall that we've all been encouraged to pretend is not there, that we've rushed to get up from.

So interesting, what you were saying earlier about choreography, and the support for straining upwards, to leave the horizontality. I suppose, what I hope for the world is that we don't rush to recover. I think actually, we need to stay down, we need to understand, we need to unpick so many of our systems and institutions. I believe in abolition in a way that I didn't last year.

I think from that, I think we need to rethink before we could consider getting back up. That actually, we have to rethink our criteria for care, our systems, our whole systems of borders – *wholesale!* – and exclusion, and this whole systems of law, actually, as well. This whole idea of legality and illegality, and as far as that also has been brought to include humans, but also the more than human world, we have to set up different connections of care. So I hope we don't rush up.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah, yeah.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

How would you-

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Just sit in the silence.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

I think these questions of resistance must be very strong for you, in your training as a choreographer, that actually, you're investigating movement, I imagine, but always questions of resistance, of holding the move and not letting go as much as you are relaxing? Maybe, could you say a bit about training for resistance in your body?

**Tim Darbyshire:**

My feeling is that it's about the threshold of things, which maybe reflects what you're saying a bit. Yeah, there's always resistance at the threshold. So much of physical training is about pushing something repetitively, and pushing it further and further past its threshold, until you can't push the threshold any further. And then returning to the fall, there's inevitably a moment when you need to let go and release.

And probably that moment of release is not always convenient. I haven't really actually thought about it in this way before, but in our brief conversation recently, you mentioned that you saw this giving, I don't know if giving up, or taking a repetitive movement to a place where you think it's going to keep going and then it fails us, it stops and it kind of conks out, like the engine dies halfway in the middle of 100 kilometers velocity. It just stops rather than gearing down and slowing down in a more predictable way.

That kind of choreographic score, if I can say that, does appear time and time again in my work. This idea of building on something, and repeating it, and establishing a rhythm, and cultivating it, building, building, building, and then inevitably, it disintegrates in different ways.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

That's so lovely. Also, it feels like you're talking about an architecture of loss. That we build rituals for ourselves, and then we hope to rely on them, and then they fail, and then we need new rituals. I suppose, that's interesting to think about as a training on a stage, or a kind of pacing for work. And too, I suppose there is a security in knowing that they are always going to fail us, and then we will always need to try new things, and to not be afraid of that, but to welcome in, I think you called it a crumble. But I like very much this sense of the inconvenience of it.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah. Yeah. I think in that state of threshold collapsing, and crumbling, disintegrating, and finding out our verticality has become horizontal, but we're still here, if we're lucky. I think that's a really vulnerable space that often leads to a real honesty, and a real connection with others. Because we've been through these things together, and we've let down our guard.

You've mentioned this idea of vulnerability a lot as well in your work, but also, the idea of porous soft edges, between people, between space between borders, having those, those soft edges, so that we can enter a shared vulnerability.

And I'm wondering, I'm just kind of sketching a little bit of a bridge here, perhaps, to our current space that we're experiencing, worldwide, which is the pandemic, and how so many of us are vulnerable on a mass scale, and how so much of our parameters have been restricted. I mean, our movement is restricted, our contact with people is restricted.

Sorry. And our coming together, fundamentally, our coming together, and our mixing, and our creating, and our togetherness is compromised, I think. Does that speak to you? Or can you say something about that perhaps in relation to your practice?

**Amy Sharrocks:**

Absolutely, I do. I think it is really crucial to have... I mean, I suppose this question of an embodied practice, to be present in our own vulnerabilities at all times, but also to understand that the world is, there's many people far more vulnerable and to always be trying to think with the most vulnerable. I always think that our systems should be like – disabled people should be put in charge of all the transport systems – the people who are most vulnerable in each area should be put in charge of that governmental department, so that it's like walking: going on walks, you walk at the pace of the slowest person, that the person who finds... that we all go together. And actually, the world is not set up that way in the slightest, and I cannot understand why. We've done this kind of weird thing, where we are people with all these vulnerabilities, and then we've built these institutions, that sort of, in order kind of to defend ourselves? Or that seems to be – But actually they're, in their very structure and nature, they are inhuman. And then when they have an impact on our vulnerable bodies, why are we surprised?

That actually, our whole systems need to be rethought with a knowledge of our skin and bones, the vulnerability of our bodies, the vulnerability of the world, the world systems that we... The pollution and extraction and this whole colonial attitude of how to use the world to accumulate and to use it as a resource.

I mean, it's so disgusting, it goes against everything we know to be true for how to live a happy, an interconnected life, and the joys from an ethics of love, as bell hooks would have it, how good that feels. So, yes, I think we need to live with an idea of the most vulnerable at our hearts at all times.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah. It makes a lot of sense.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

And the sense of porous edges, no, there's just nothing... So many systems just don't make sense in that way. 25 million people in refugee camps long-term around the world. How can we live? It's a kind of madness to think that there is any security for some, when there's none for others. I feel very strongly that in thinking about the water, we need to consider who's in the water, the geology of our ocean floors, and the history of the bodies that are lying there.

Who has access now? Who has to walk for water? Who has water security, is really a sense – if we don't have that, how can we expect to live any kind of fulfilling lives if our time is spent trying to access fresh water for ourselves and our family. So that's what I think, I hope, we can begin to work together on. On the sense of, perhaps, when we all have that, then I will consider the world might be in a space of recovery.

But there was a really other lovely thing also – it's funny how conversation stretches back and forth – I wanted also to bring in my mum's words. She's 11 years dead now, but when she was alive, she used to talk about the flop, the need for the flop. So my dad mentioned it, actually, for that moment of crashing on the ground, you had to flop. But mum used to mention it for the need of it in our days, to have a moment in our days when we let go, as an action of self-care.

She'd had a hysterectomy later in her life and this sense (maybe that might be a way of bringing also those questions of absence into our conversation as well) that actually she, in some way, she had to accommodate the absence into her body, that one of the ways that she needed to do that was to flop more, and in the lying down... I've never thought this either, but I think there is a chance, or what you called horizontal-izing earlier, that there is a chance to reach out to the world on a different wavelength, to literally change your geography. The angle of your body changes your relationship, cosmically and geographically. It puts you in a new relation with the world, and you will let new different knowledges in. I think that's one of the reasons that I am so interested in the after-fall. Don't rush to get up! Don't allow yourself to be down. And to be down in full view of others is a very different thing from hiding the down away. That actually welcoming in the down, and looking back at other people's, that kind of, there is a judgment implied in looking down. It's in oh so many of our language, this whole idea of a penthouse, the whole idea of kind of getting up. And it's one of the reasons I like going into rivers, because you go in and down, you're below ground height. Your eyes maybe at the light that the eyesight line with the land, and down and in, it feels like a really good way to get to know the world.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Sure. Can I ask, in all of this decomposing and crumbling...

**Amy Sharrocks:**

Composting!

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Composting, systemically perhaps, or perhaps hopefully. Where is your art in all of this? Has it also been in a moment of crumbling, and yeah, of lying down and flopping? Or where is it at the moment?

**Amy Sharrocks:**

Well, it's such a nice question, where is the art? I think about it a lot. For me, the art is in between us. It's something I consider a lot. What is the architecture of a moment? How do we impact it with our words, with our bodies, with our... Can we activate the whole of our body's edge and feel where it evaporates with the world? Where it blurs, where the boundaries are mixed, and behave with that width of encounter?

**Amy Sharrocks:**

So that in all my live art, or why I make live art, I make an art that's in between us. That we both shape, that changes because of the day, the wind, the seasons, the movement of the birds. When I was working in Western Australia, and Noongar people told me there are six seasons. This really changed so many ideas for me, who'd always had four. That actually, opened up these spaces for in between, what the birds are doing, what the winds are doing? I think less about the fish, because I come into less contact with them - But what can we be alive to in every moment - and how does that change us? What are the responsibilities of seeing more clearly? What if when we see things, that puts a responsibility on us to change things if they're not right? Otherwise, we are complicit. I live very strongly with that, those knowledges at the moment.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

But I think it literally is a sculptural shape, the air, the space of the air between us, and how it's impacted. And that, for me, is my training to be... It's a training of paying attention, of noticing every single thing I can about the moment that we make together, and seeing if we can consider that together.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

I wonder also, about, you said before we began that your headphones are not working in one ear. So for our conversation, that is in many ways about absence (which I was looking up, it comes from the Latin of, to be away, to be off) that actually, I've been thinking very much with this idea of what your left – I don't know if it's your left or right - with what one of your ears is hearing, that is not our conversation. I think that feels really pregnant for me, in this conversation of what else is present – what are we not hearing? Absence is never a vacuum. I think very strongly that actually, for every presence, we have to force our attention onto the millions of absences that are not there. The space that one of your ears is attending to is very much a part of this conversation, for me, of how, what is in there? What is being heard there?

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah. I can tell you about my ears' experience. My left ear is the one that I have the earpiece in, and it's a little bit loose, so I'm actually pushing that piece, applying some pressure, some resistance, pushing the threshold as it were. I've been pushing that earpiece into my ear canal, so much so that it's really starting to pinch and it's not very comfortable. Which, in opposition to my right ear, my right ear is, it's really listening to the same things, but having some more freedom, it seems. Enjoying a sense of relief. Yeah.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

I like that I'm having to hold my eyes shut, you're having to hold your earpiece in your ear. It's like hear no evil, speak no evil. We're like the three monkeys. I hope that our words are joining in with the care, that resistance.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Do you recall, when did we start this conversation? Time has escaped me.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

I can't open my eyes, so I don't know how long we've got, but I really wanted to come to a question of the monstrous, which I don't... It's a bit weird to be citing - my part of the conversation, I've brought up my parents a lot - but I wanted to bring up my mum used to call my dad, "Monstre," was her name for him. This idea of the monstrous that came up in your work and a little bit in our conversation, I wondered if we could talk about it a little bit about... I suppose it is this question of coming other. I had an impression of the way you work with bodies to make other shapes, to make bodies as waves. I had a really strong impression in your works, but the sense of coming together to make non-human shapes and then to return to the human, I wondered if you could say a little bit more about that and the sense of the monstrous.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

I'm going to try to say something about that. I'm just trying to really think about that question, actually. My feeling is that it's probably about the threshold again. As I mentioned before, across a lot of my choreography, there is a building up? There is a journey over and a state of trance, perhaps? A state of cultivating something, and prodding at it and, and cultivating it, manifesting it, pushing it. Pushing it to a point where there's that threshold.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

At that threshold, I think there's probably only a couple of options that I've become aware of at that liminal space. That either the system collapses, which we've spoken quite a lot about, or that it morphs, and regenerates, and becomes other, that it diverges. I think that's what's happening when you talk about the monster or the morphing into the otherness.

I would say in a lot of my works, they either become monster or they collapse. It comes from an internal place of tuning in and manifesting something. It's not a premeditated design, I don't think. It's like a bacteria that forms in the movement, I think.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

So lovely to think about it as a bacteria, especially in these COVID times.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

When you talk about it as a divergence, I feel so much of that talks to me about my practice of the digression, about the horror of straight lines, of the trammeling of our experience, and how that was proposed, always, promoted in our education systems. I feel like my whole practice has been an attempt to unlearn the tenets of this world a little bit that have been pressed on us, at the moment, are being pressed. Standing up for the digression, standing up for a bacterial movement that takes us beyond the human, what is that if it's not about a question of becoming porous, of morphing?

For me, becoming water, loosening the molecules of our edges, and for you, what you've talked about as divergence and morphing. I really liked that, I was looking up the... That's fantastic. I was looking up before the etymology of monster and it really just comes from the Latin of to remind, to show, to instruct, and teach, monere. It isn't until later that it comes to have an idea of dread, or a kind of danger, or abnormal in some way.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

I'm pleased that you said that, because yeah, just as I was meditating on the word, it didn't feel quite right associating that morphing as something to be feared or something...

Yeah, something grotesque and something that we should avoid. Yeah, so that's good that you said that.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

Yeah, I think it's really helpful and how that connects between the questions of inconvenience or the different shapes that we make this sense of the grotesque. I like bringing that into this idea of the different shapes that we make down or in. But there was something I... There was a feeling I had sometimes that actually a part of the monstrous, when I was looking at your work, is not only the way you use sound and light and movement to bring bodies into beyond human shapes, but also that there is something monstrous in actually how impossible it is to lose our shape. That actually coming back to the human, which feels very stark sometimes at the end of your work and we are returned to ourselves and the real monstrousness of this world now. That was a very strong feeling that I had.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah, but of course, we are never returning to point zero or to this idea of... We never return to the same place, actually. We're always morphing in some way, anyway.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

Yes. The impossibility of return, always going on.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

And yeah, I mean, right now, I think we're morphing probably more in an exaggerated way. Yeah.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

The wonderfulness of that. Anne Poelina, an incredible elder that I met in Western Australia, she talked to me about people being part of the wave, and it's really stuck with me. Every time I feel like, "Oh, I can't bear things."

You want to be more useful, how not to despair in this world. And she was like, “We don’t have to be the whole wave. We just have to be part of it. And then everything we say, or think, or do is part of this wave and helps to move the wave on, and brings other people into the wave.”

So that, actually, every single part of the wave is needed, the wind, the froth, the molecules far down the bottom, everything comes together to swell the tide and push the wave over the top. And that, for me, is a big, when I’m down, that is also my hope, and has been very much a part of this democratic process in America at the moment as well over the last week. It’s really been a marvellous demonstration of how every single vote was needed and counted. I mean, I know the process is not over yet, but the relief of good behaviour.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah, the wave has certainly formed, and this was definitely a swell that’s taking us into a new place.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

Then also, we need to be thinking of the set of waves too, the one that’s coming next, and after that, and after that, and the ups and downs.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Amy, I think we’re pretty close to one hour, from my memory, the last time I checked the time.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

Well, it feels right, doesn’t it? I still haven’t opened my eyes, but I–

**Tim Darbyshire:**

I've been peeping here and there. I feel like we're close to the timeframe that we should be in.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

All right, that feels good. We didn't have a ritual for ending.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah, well, did you want to add any final sound bites?

**Amy Sharrocks:**

I have opened my eyes and let in the day in London, in England. Maybe we just hold on to that last feeling of relief, of the powerful feeling of ethical behavior that actually we've all had. We've all endured four years of a vicious invective coming out of this man, and the party that supported him, and the kind of infection of that to come back to your bacteria, or our bacteria, in the world. The infection of his horrible way of moving in the world and how that was almost overwhelming. For me, I will finish by trying to hold on, to let this feeling of relief seep into my bones, and to hold it with me as a way of moving and working in this world. That actually, that's the way of working to uphold an ethics of love that will make this world a good place to be in for all, justice for all.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Yeah.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

How would you like to finish?

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Well, I would probably like to finish by just having a little bit of relief, a little bit of returning to the inward... To invite the listener, if they can, to perhaps close down some of the senses, whether that be closing the eyes or...

[silence]

Well, it was a real pleasure to have this exchange with you.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

It was a real pleasure. What a wonderful way to end. Thanks so much.

**Tim Darbyshire:**

Thanks, Amy.

**Amy Sharrocks:**

Thanks, Tim.

## **Reading List**

- *All About Love* by bell hooks
- *'An Anatomy of Falling' in Performance Journal Vol 18, issue 4, On Falling* by Amy Sharrocks (2013)
- *In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective* by Hito Steyerl (2011)
- Interview with Eddie S Glaude Jnr. on MSNBC (2020)
- *Noongar Stories on Water at Museum of Water WA* by Noel Nannup (2021)"
- *Recognizing the Martuwarra's First Law Right to Life as a Living Ancestral Being* by Anne Poelina (2020)
- *Significant Encounters* by Tim Darbyshire (2018)
- *'The Parachute Jump' in Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* by Georges Perec (1997)
- *'Toppling Dance: The Making of Space in Trisha Brown and La Ribot' in Exhausting Dance* by Andrew Lepecki (2006)

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