

Movement and Meaning with Gill Clarke

SPEAKERS

Gill Clarke, Kirsty Alexander, Siobhan Davies, Susan Benn, Unknown speaker

(Introduction: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021 over spare guitar chords)

Welcome to Independent dance. This talk is part of our digital library, which houses an extensive collection of material to read, watch and listen to drawn from IDs programme over the past decades. This talk is part of the crossing borders series, which ran between 2008 and 2018. And featured dance artists in conversation with people from other fields, including philosophers, scientists, geographers, and architects, the entire library is free to access at [independent dance.co.uk/library](https://independentdance.co.uk/library).

(2011 audio file begins)

Susan Benn

Welcome everybody to this um, adventure series of conversations which, before we say anything else I want to say to the people who have made it possible. Because when we started this idea with our first conversation a year ago, over a year ago, I didn't think any funder would really kind of understand how this process might work. And you'll read about it on the leaflets you're sitting on. So many thanks to the Arts Council for their managed funds, and their faith in us and the Jerwood Charitable Foundation who are I think, feeling that this kind of exploration is unusual for them, and worthwhile. So we're very excited. And Gill is the prime mover behind all of this.

Gill Clarke

But you have made it happen, I would like to say.

Susan Benn

Over to you and Kirsty Alexander to tell us what you think.

Kirsty Alexander

Thank you, Susan and just echo Gill's words that you made it happen. As Susan was intimating this movement and meaning lab programme began with a very particular experience and I was very lucky to be part of that were a number of movers and choreographers and sound artists and film artists and scientists and philosophers spent five days moving and thinking and talking, and very importantly, eating together. And I'm aware that the experience of that moving and talking and thinking together allowed my perception of the relationship between movement and these other disciplines to take on a

new dimension. Um and I think I would describe the lab as one of the beginnings as I feel there is a beginning before that beginning, which is your journey to get to inviting that combination of people. And I wondered if you could start by telling us a little bit about that?

Gill Clarke

I'd love to reinforce as well how the nature of the conversation of any one day would be so influenced by having shared the simplest movement experience together, it felt like it gave it to ground to grow out of that was both common but was experiential, as well. That felt really, really important. So I'm going to start by a very brief quotation from Nigel Thrift, who is our last speaker, because he says, "given that so much of what I want to outline is avowedly experimental, what I wouldn't say that I would say, not trying to be uncertainty, trying to open up something. Too much in the way of clarity should not necessarily be counted is a good thing." So I embrace that tonight. I'm also mindful of somehow trying to put a bit of connective tissue between these different strands. And some of you were here when Guy Claxton, the learning scientist, talked a couple of weeks ago. So I might cover a little bit less the cognitive science area tonight and really want to embrace something about drawing in the social sciences to the conversation, which feels really exciting, and perhaps, we've been, we've had a super appetite For any of the work that comes out of the cognitive scientists, it's like we've been lapping it up, I think as much as metaphor as information. So if at a certain point, you feel that that's an element I've missed out, or there's some missing pieces, then you must, let me know.

So, my journey, it was great, I was looking back at some notes for some research seminar. That was two years ago or so and realising how much those themes had been present, actually, for a long, while. But what feels key is that what drove the investigation was my role as performer generating material wanting to find more resource in my body. And then as teacher trying to communicate, that it feels that was central, it wasn't about all thinking, this is the interesting idea. Let me explore it, in movement. So, it's wonderful, actually, I can acknowledge some people in the room. So, starting to work with Sue Davies felt like opening a door that I'd been dying to go through, that was more about exploring the sensory body. So, I rushed in there with delight, because not many of you are perhaps old enough to appreciate but there was a moment when it felt like the, the technical, and the exploratory worlds were quite separate. And, as a, as a viewer, you could visit either, but almost as a doer, you had to make a choice, it didn't feel so easy to bridge that gap. Whereas now, my perception is that that's, that's easier through the work of lots of people I see in the room. And I wanted to credit Jeremy Nelson, which is wonderful when he happens to be here this week. So, one of the experiences we had quite early on with Sue, was, I think it was only like 10 days of morning class in effect. But Jeremy got us to do very, very little, but with very clear visualising of the movements that was happening through the structure and flow of the body. And I couldn't be struck how my movement changed in 10 days.

And a thought here, I've been thinking, I was interested in flow, I was interested in transition. But somehow I still had a sense of my body is in bits in a way that would sort of obey my orders. And something about finding my own structure and its relationship to ground as support just allowed something else to release and made me think, oh, here I've been thinking what I need to do is practice and repeat and da da da. So that also was an opening of a door to want to understand that connection further. Again, so many for so many of you that's that's present in the world, I hope and imagine. So

there was an interesting moment when I had a little bit of fellowship that was over quite an extended period of time and I thought, oh, what I need to do is go and learn a bit more. Add to my knowledge through information at some level. But, for example, when without face to face or moving contact, if I would follow my readings. So far, say, in cognitive science, the information became interesting, but abstract, it's like it no longer could make sense in the practice, which feels like that's the laboratory, that's the testing ground. And so therefore, it's interesting, but it's separate, not applicable in a way. And so I followed my readings from one reference to another reference in different areas and felt that what I was trying to do was use these tools to become more conscious and clear about what I personally but I feel other people inquiring in this area where we're coming to know. And those other languages helped me both find a kind of reference point or metaphor. And also, for me felt like, oh, if we're more aware of the language that other people are using, we can better translate what we do is so that they might understand. So that was a process. Something that's been really important to me, always, I feel, often the teaching is the frame for my research. So either as performer wanting to really resource the body and find, so for example, just this work on very clear, structured, we're layers of other things that were about sensory information and energy flow. But there was something also about how one's body sort of repatterning itself, then offers all this creative possibility. It offers a different way, just like Cunningham or Graham might, of thinking how you organise a body. And I thought, this is such an amazing resource in way with yeah, like, it's, it allowed ideas, and movements and language, movement language, to arise from the body from the exploration, and not start from a sense of, I intend to do this. So, I'll do it. So, then I wanted to talk a little bit without expanding the frame, which is how I taught tonight. I think still within dance, and I think we get a little bit kind of weighed down with this, sometimes we, we tend to think, oh, well, is this dance? We get a bit hooked up on that.

So this is a very crass appropriation for which I apologise, but I found it inspiring. Amartya Sen, wrote this book about the idea of justice and he wrote about how philosophers, for example, can get really caught up with the idea is, what is the ideal of justice? And they can go round and round in circles and not agree with each other. But then at the other end of the scale, perhaps in a quite pragmatic way. We could agree when we don't see justice present. That becomes very clear, somehow. So, again, apologies for the appropriation, but it felt to me like instead of getting hooked on well, is this dance or isn't it dance? Realising that at the other end of the scale, almost like I'm sure it wasn't a moment it was happening over many years. But when musicians started getting interested in the idea of everyday sound and not only sort of harmony and disharmony and the notion that actually, what's interesting is how we perceive sound. And that then becomes something that I'm interested in and can become my materials in a way. So I thought maybe there's something I feel about an inquiry that that, after all, to be living is to be in movement, to acknowledge those to acknowledge almost that, that delight and how tiny that root can be between not moving and moving. And, and how that is all about relationship. Whereas in a quiet Cartesian way it feels to me, what we often do is think, well, the world is out there, and I'm separate and I'll be in charge and control and I'll kind of hold myself up and together. And these parts of me that I think have parts and not a whole are being charged somehow still, these fragments, and I intend to do this and act upon the world. Whereas the notion that we are very grounded in relationship with the environment in conversation with the environment that's changing, constantly feels it relates us to ourselves to the notion of constant, even tiny adaptation that's going on all the time, in a way. And that was going to take me on to

Kirsty Alexander

Is that a process of co-evolution Gill?

Gill Clarke

Yeah. In a way. Oh, and that's, I was gonna say something about that.

Kirsty Alexander

What's coming into presence isn't just us, but the environment.

Gill Clarke

Absolutely. Yep and there's a real sense, even in philosophy and cognitive science now about how there isn't a separation, that we are part of that, us the world, in conversation. That's what I was gonna say just that, actually, one definition of intelligence would be over evolution, to be ready to adapt. And if we're not ready to adapt, then no wonder we're in a mess.

Kirsty Alexander

I think that, that's very interesting. So now the next thing we're going to talk about was evolution of the art form and how these ideas affect how we think about that, really?

Gill Clarke

Yeah. So this, this gets me to the, the notion of expanding the frame a little bit, and I feel we've been really I was gonna say, good, that doesn't feel at all the right word. We've had an appetite perhaps it almost feels to expand from the edges, to collaborate with artists in other forms, to work in film, to work in theatre, to work in opera or to work in circus. And also to be open to the work what if the work goes out of the theatre? What are those other ways it can meet its public in a shopping centre, or a wild site or a prison or that somehow that shouldn't any longer be a boundary and I feel that dance artists are really embracing those possibilities. But maybe there's another way, not sure how constructive this is of thinking, well, what actually if we were almost trying to expand from the centre outwards? And there feels something there and about this notion of perceiving movement in the way that movement becomes a resource of dance in the way that everyday sound became a resource of live music. So expanding the frame

Kirsty Alexander

Something.

Gill Clarke

Yeah, I'm talking too much.

Kirsty Alexander

I was very excited, because when you first started about before you worked with Sue, you talked about being interested in sensation, because you because of the demands on you, as a performer to generate movement. And then later on when you were talking about working with sensation, you talked

about movement arising. And I thought that was a really relevant shift from generating movement to movement arising in relation to everything else you've been saying. And I wondered if that's another of the way that we expand from the centre is to, to do with how we think about making, making practices, what's happening in the making?

Gill Clarke

And not to be any less rigorous about the form that might emerge? But where to arises from in a way?

Kirsty Alexander

Yeah. No, I'm glad you added the bit about not being any less rigorous about what might emerge.

Gill Clarke

I mean, I was so I felt that I was interested in flow and what happened between one movement to another so I was wanting to shift that hierarchy. But my sense, sensory feedback for myself was muscular. And so then, you know, I would have some sense in which, oh, well, this isn't working for me, or it's, this is where the hurt is, or this is where I've strained or rather than being able to release that, define something that was deeper, or that was integrating the body is the whole complex energy system.

Kirsty Alexander

Within a wider system so not just in the body yeah.

Gill Clarke

And it feels so clear that our sense of relationship to ourselves in relationship to the world is also then in relationship to other, it feels like it feeds the way that we perceive the world very clearly and suddenly don't see ourselves as separate from it. In a way

Kirsty Alexander

I think there's a, the dance scholar Suzanne Rabin talks about somatically informed dancers making themselves transparent to what appears from the environment. I think that's, I find that very useful way of languaging that but I think what you're you're seeing also is shifts what we think dance is beyond the artefact of course, there's never an artefact because choreography isn't an art artefact, and that's what's exciting about dance. But beyond that there's another dimension as well doesn't mean that that's not important. Yeah, there's another dimension as well.

Gill Clarke

So I got quite hooked up on this for a while the notion that we tend, again, in this rather Cartesian way to think of choreographic objects, almost as though we saw they are the things that is shown in public, they're talked about they're critiqued, as though that was what was primarily driving evolution, say in choreographic practice. And it struck me that actually how dance functions is much more like an oral tradition. We have encounters daily if we're lucky. With our practice, we have exchanges we have encounters that happen through movement. We each go away, affected by that and in a sense, everything that happens after is affected by that. So, it's something that's really daily process that's on

going, as well as, of course, your response to the world, things you're reading, ideas you come across. So I got curious about not only trying to perhaps make that more visible, but that it was kind of a currency that we have. It feels, to me really important that what we're doing fundamentally is resourcing our art making, but by the by, we are traders in an expertise of movement we're engaged with it at a level of detail that most other people aren't and that actually, that could be contributing somehow, in ways other than just the making of work. And I think it goes along with our notion of somehow liking historically to attribute, you know, the one author of the work, which has changed so much in terms of just the role that performers have in the work, it's not to belittle the choreographers role at all, maybe it makes that role a little bit more about facilitation of something to take place. And I'll come back a bit to that as social sciences, but also I realised in my own teaching that, in a way, perhaps I wasn't teaching dance anymore. That what I was engaged with, had some, sort of some values, some ethics that felt fundamental, and without which the, the movement wouldn't have reason to be there in a way. And they were a lot about a readiness, a readiness to adapt an openness. A curiosity of course, a sense of listening, listening to oneself, and also what's going on around one a sense of embracing individually inquiry rather than, and therefore teaching becomes about trying to set up situations where learning can happen, rather than transmit something that I might know and could possibly be briefly useful. But if you find it or something else for yourself, how much more empowering will that be?

And then on the lab, we came back to some of these things which was useful. The self as a rather inadequate way of talking about mind and body and body and mind. Our language just really doesn't help us about a notion of tuning. So, I think sometimes one criticism levelled that some of the practices we engage in is that they, they seem they seem more about self develop than professional development. But I would say it's, there's a real rigour to what we're doing, we're trying to just gradually tune, attune ourselves to what is happening in the body and how that's constantly changing. A sense of tuning in that that sense. The essential nature of experimenting, experiencing, rather opening up questions rather than finding answers. So the notion of embracing uncertainty and complexity and not knowing, and I realised when I'm reading this list, a lot of these things chime with how Guy Claxton talks about the conditions that intuition needs to flourish, which is not the kind of time which is about finding a very deliberate sort of more linear route to answering the question, but opening something up so that something one didn't predict might emerge, for example.

Kirsty Alexander

Can I chip in again, please?

Gill Clarke

Please chip in again

Kirsty Alexander

Just you said something, you said something really interesting there, which was, you talked about tuning. And I was struck by this idea of tuning into these values. And it seemed to me that tuning is a very different thing, tuning into something is a very different thing from appropriating it. So it seems to me a very different thing than gaining transferable skills, which we see a lot of in bullet points in higher education. You know 'how is your module going to allow your students to gain transferable skills?' It

seems to me this is something of a very different nature, because it's not about appropriation, it's about tapping into something. And, and yet, what that means is that those values aren't in a bag, and you take them and get them out when you need to apply them. But they're part of how you are in the world and how you respond to what you encounter So that's the resource you've been building up over time and that finds the route outwards, rather than it being an imposition. I mean, it's an interesting to me, I'm just fascinated by there's an interesting doubleness of direction there. Because in a way, it's it's part of who you are. So in one way, it feels more appropriated, because it's part of who you are. It's not just what you do. But it's part of who you are because it's what you do. There's a sort of, you know, it's tuning, tuning in, you can't have it unless you're tuning in, it's maybe only makes sense to me. But I find it very interesting that your language of tuning in, which I think takes it beyond how self development is normally talked about,

Gill Clarke

Right? Yeah, it's, it's that rigour of it, it's, it's to tune to become more discriminating. To become more clear, what are those decisions, one could make it any moment or not in such an explicit way, but to tune in through the, through the doing. And then let that find what other avenues that might go.

Kirsty Alexander

And I guess it's not to master but to continue asking questions, as you were saying.

Gill Clarke

So, I must read my Tim Ingold quote here. So, he writes quite a lot about learning and he talks about, there's not much we can do for the next generation in transmitting knowledge or knowledge seen as information. But what we can practice and facilitate is the development of skills of attention. And then experiences feed you and allow you to take that in different directions. So, it's interesting, this notion that a tuning might also be a pairing away at some level, like how to make the perceptual picture clearer. 'If the knowledge of the expert is superior to that of the knowledge, the novice, it is not because she has acquired mental representations that enable her to construct a more elaborate picture of the world from the same corpus of data, or even perhaps, a slightly larger corpus of data, but its data. But because her perceptual system is attuned to picking up critical features of the environment, that the novice simply fails to notice.' And it feels some of that is also going on at a non-conscious level. But if you think about how well in language for sure, we don't apply more and more rules more expertly. We actually acquire something through use. Or he talks I think a little bit about he talks a lot about crafts. If you think of somebody whittling on some woods, for example, they're constantly making adjustments to what happened in the last stroke, and bringing their prior knowledge and experience to that, but also really adapting in that moment, to now the wood is different, now I need to go with its grain, now I need to. So, it's working quite intuitively just put one brings all of one's knowledge to that process. I think he's got a little bit more, I can't resist, 'rather than having evolved capacities filled up with structures that represent aspects of the world, the human being emerges as a centre of awareness and agency, whose processes resonate with those of its environment.

Knowing then does not lie in the relations between structures in the world, and structures in the mind, mediated by the person of the knower, but is imminent in the life and consciousness of the knower as it

unfolds within the field of practice, which he calls the task scape set up to his or her presence, as being in the world.' And then he says, 'cognition in this sense is a process in real time, rather than speaking of ideas, concepts, categories and links Gatewood suggests we should think of flows, contours, intensities and resonances. This something about that I wanted just to read out. So, I go on interject for a moment, and then I should talk about *why the social sciences* kind of. That seems to lead on to me from that in that I'm interested in what, why they resonate in a particular way. I mean, you read Tim Ingold, that clearly does resonate, when almost doesn't need to ask the question, but I'm interested in how you arrived. I think it's partly this embracing of process of being in the moment as it's lived. And it feels like it has a lot of resonance with practices that are playful that are probably exploratory, improvisational, at some level, at some stage.

So, then I took, shall I launch? As I say, we've talked more about the cognitive sciences and our magnet towards that information. It feels we've perhaps embraced a little bit less the social sciences. I was drawn to this author, Bruno Latour, who, along with others developed this theory that they called actor-network theory, which is a bit of a mouthful. But it started off in a sense from being social scientists turning the lens on scientists. So, if I gave one example, what Bruno Latour did in great detail, is follow this journey in the Amazon. And they were really interested on the borderline between the rain forest and the other territory, and whether it was the rain forest encroaching, or it was the other where the border was in a way. And what he was pointing out was that traditional scientists who would tend to think okay, I have my ideas in my studio, no not studio, in my study. I develop a hypothesis, I go out and collect data. And then my interpretive work begins when I've got it all home. And what he pointed out was, there were so many stages along the way, when actually judgments and decisions were being made about, as in a choreographic process, right? between what I keep what I don't keep, at what point it stops being quite the particular thing it is to itself, it becomes a little bit of a sign. So, we gain by that in simplicity, at some level, we reduce the amount of detail the amount of variables. So, he has nice phrases like he talks about a 'chain of transformations' that go on through this process, and really acknowledging what is lost in what he's gained.

And I was thinking in a making process, quite often the might be something that I've generated, that for a while becomes a little bit more like it comes more abstracted from the particularity of me, it might become something that's then shared or taken apart or so it's, it's used in some way. In the end performance, it might not feel it relates to why I made the movement. But it's been there as part of a generative process and it it keeps changing the way it comes out, in a way. And I don't know that I need to say more about that. So, then there was another interesting researcher who also was really around this sort of group working with this actor-network theory, Isabelle Stengers. And she talked about, again, this is very much like our process in way our exploratory process, she starts off with a warning 'In the beginning, I suspect that a large part of the research that's been done with the ulterior motive imposing an answer on it, if only we were content to let the material speak.' So she talks about this scientist, Barbara McClintock, who was studying corn. And she was trying to set up situations that would allow the corn to object. She talks about the aberrant corn, and could I could I put it in a position where it's speaking back to me, which so much resonated for me with the process and also that she relished having the rug pulled out from her feet in a way she wasn't trying to impose some kind of answer on it, in a way. And by the by I came across this other scientist who wrote a really nice thing about what an experiment could be. He says this is Rheinberger 'an embodied disclosing activity that

transcends technical conditions, and creates an open reading frame for the emergent of unprecedented events.' Think I'd like to read that again. 'An embodied disclosing activity that transcends technical conditions, and creates an open reading frame for the emergence of unprecedented events.' Feels again, it resonates somehow with what we do. Go on.

Kirsty Alexander

So, it's returning experiment to experimenting rather than closing down. So, experiments become opening up rather than closing down.

Gill Clarke

Exactly. So then to take that on to a link with Nigel Thrift who's human geographer we've invited. And he goes quite a long way with ANT theory (actor-network theory). But he says, actually, it's just a little bit too closed. There needs to be more possibility in there. And he starts by saying that social scientists must share with philosophers like Deleuze one ambition at least, and that is to render the world problematic by elaborating questions to simply offer solutions is not enough. And I've got here to open be open to the idea that the material asked the question has a story to tell of its own. So he developed something that he calls non-representational theory, again, I think the labels shouldn't put one off. But he was more interested in what this wasn't than what it is. He said that the ANT approach was more able to describe steely accumulation than lightning strokes that might happen in this studio and he or the laboratory, and that he wanted to be open to those. He and he wanted to find a place where the imagination had a very creative, not had a role to play, that it wasn't only about letting the material speak. So, he talks about to try and approach ways of responding to the knowledge present with any moment as it happens, increasingly being drawn to both formative and embodied as well as linguistic tools. He stresses the disclosive power of performance as recognition of the fact that all solutions are responsive, relational and dialogical. He quotes Vic and Stein 'only in the stream of thought and life do words and other activities have meaning.' So that's about the laboratory in a way, it places an emphasis on classes of experience, that have been too rarely addressed, the productive, the interactive play, all those responsive activities, which are usually involved in setting up situations and are still to little considered, they're regarded as trivial. So, he talks about moving towards a poetics of encounter, which both conveys a sense of life in which meaning shows itself only in the living, and which belatedly recognise that the unsayable has genuine value. And can be felt on our pulses that you'd like that. We can see performance as a metaphor, which, which best expresses this poetics and which in its workings, in its workings out provides imaginative ways of, of dealing with juxtaposition ways that are more than just arranging things. So that's a little sort of intro to Nigel Thrift. And maybe just the last thing I'd like to say is, what I realised was really generative for me, in encountering some of these writings, was actually about the language they used. I thought, at some level, we're still trying to have ourselves accepted as being able to be a discipline. And so, I think we still again talk about objects and things. They feel very fixed somehow and certain and present. Whereas there's something about this language that moves into being dynamic and is all about verbs, and opening up possibility. And wouldn't it be great if we felt able to harness those languages from our own practice? Interestingly, I find some writing on film is really been exploring the sensuous for a while. And what why can't we, aswell.

Kirsty Alexander

Several things just in what you said there. I mean, one, when you're quoting Nigel Thrift, the idea of poetics came up and of course, poetry is both extremely specific, in the words chosen and the rhythm and the same time very ambiguous. Ambiguous. So, again, this is doubleness of specificity and ambiguity. And I mentioned that because also often you, you talk about, yes but with this openness, there's a rigour you know, tuning in is hard work, you know, we have to practice tuning in. And there's something in in that doubleness, of poetry of being really specific, and by deliberately ambiguous that I think, is very important. So I think Nigel Thrift is really on to something by talking about poetics. And it's interesting, you mentioned writing about film. Because you mentioned a nitrous withdrawal and Deleuze and because when Deleuze writes about film, he, he says that he feels the great filmmakers are doing philosophy. But they're not using concepts. They're using time images and movement images to do philosophy. So that when he writes about film, he says, I'm not theorising films. I'm articulating the concepts that film has provoked. And in a way I think that might be, I find that quite useful way to think about how we talk and write about movement and not theorising movement. I'm trying to theorise the concepts that movement provokes in it. So I when you said about the film writing that for me, reminded me of that I thought that might be something that wasn't enough was interesting. Yeah. Sorry I realised I got excited and talk loud. Yeah. Um, Gill, do we get to thank you at this point, before we go into questions. I won't abuse my position as the chair and ask any more questions yet. And we'll invite questions from the audience. Yes.

Unknown speaker

First of all, thank you. Thank you, hello. testing it. Because this is a huge body of knowledge that you've just transmitted. That doesn't come just from reading books. So thank you for taking the time for reading on our behalf to transmit that knowledge. And but I'd like to press you on something. And it's the question of justice. In that, it seems this tuning or honing this refinement, this accumulation somehow in this, you kind of pointed to it a little bit beginning to say we know there is injustice but the justice part?

Gill Clarke

It was more that I was appropriating the way that Amartya Sen had chosen to talk about these two poles of justice. So I felt I was appropriating his model in a slightly crass way to be honest, because, you know, the importance of justice in the world is

Unknown speaker

Very powerful and if this is sort of we're porous to practices that are social, or artistic or medicinal or legal, then we're porous to all those practices, which then makes us also porous to justice in a way.

Gill Clarke

Yeah, no, it's true. I think as something that's lived in away.

Kirsty Alexander

And I and I think also and I just appropriate depth and in terms of how he writes about justice as a negotiation between the general and the particular. And he, he writes about it in not allowing the, that there's a tendency for the universal to dominate, and but justice is sort of lived in the urgency of the

here and now. And it's negotiating the particular and the general in the in the here and now, which is there's an impossibility to being able to, you know, you can't quite do that there's a not quite, but I think so I think actually, justice runs through what you're seeing, said, not all the way because what you're seeing is about that negotiation and our practices about negotiation all the time. So it is in a way, a way of practising justice and responsibility.

Unknown speaker

It's a very interesting conversation.

Kirsty Alexander

So I think inadvertently, it was there all the time. you weren't appropriately Amartya Sen at all because it was there. Any other questions? Where do we pass the microphone next?

Gill Clarke

You can take a moment.

Kirsty Alexander

Otherwise, I'll just ask more questions...

Gill Clarke

Is there anybody who feels as part of the picture I somehow didn't elaborate on because I feel I was trying to provide connective tissue rather than go over areas that we'd been over a little bit before.

Unknown speaker

Very quickly, there was a bit which I found really intriguing about working from the edges.

Gill Clarke

Right. Right. I don't know if that's productive. But it felt to me that at one level were really open and porous to these other opportunities, these other contexts. But there's something about but what comes from the core of our practice, that we could expand in different directions.

Unknown speaker

I come from a completely different area, it's nothing to do with dance, it's surgery and looking at what happens in the operating theatre and there are movements and things. From the point of view of somebody who is deliberately looking at these things in order to create a performance or can you see dance going on when other people are unaware of it.

Gill Clarke

I think I could speak for many people in the room that they they are tuned to movement. So they would see in the operating theatre, both the sense of the embodiment the focus the attention made see this kind of distributed cognition happening between a team of people they'd see that spatially through practice, yeah, absolutely. Of course, you'd have to

Unknown speaker

And particularly with th hands, you know there are 8 or 10 hands all working together sort of doing this balletic movement There is actually very little, I think has been more powerful than watching somebody's heart in a surgeon's hands, and actually observing a heart coming back into motion. I can't describe anything other than being movement which can be done.

Susan Benn

I think this is more of a comment on the what I've learned from this extraordinary lab process over the last year. This notion of embodied knowledge, which I always thought it was the kind of magic thing that people in dance, know and feel and I'll never be like that and how amazing it's like being pushing your nose against the sweet shop window or something and not being able to have any and, and yet, the whole idea of embodied knowledge now means something very much bigger to me, and more elusive in that the language to describe it is hard because you either feel it. As a surgeon in the room, in doing it, you don't talk about it, maybe you talk about it later, or you write a learned paper or something but that's not the same experience. So I think the notion of embodied knowledge is something that needs more study more. Well, from my point of view, lots more labs and more experimentation. Because it's what we don't really understand enough about,

Gill Clarke

You were very clear about things you were noticing in your body differently afterwards, that would be good just to know...

Susan Benn

I went on this blind walk with Gill, with a blindfold in the middle of February in Dorset. And it was extraordinary it was, it reminded me of being two years old, when, when I remember my earliest memory of being two was finding a chameleon in Florida. And the feeling of this little creature, escaping out of my hand was just something amazing. And it was like that, everywhere we went, but it was different. Because I was conscious of the movement of what was happening, not just feeling or smelling or breathing. But how I was moving. And at the age of 73, to discover something like this, for the first time is pretty amazing. And sad, you know, how come I didn't know that before, you know, what's going on. So so that that was a very simple thing to do.

Gill Clarke

And what you noticed afterwards I found was. You said your body was talking to

Susan Benn

And then I noticed these things were happening sort of, I guess, spatial, one spatial relationships to other things like in the tube and getting on the bus and, and being in the supermarket on Saturday when it's too crowded. And all those things were completely different experiences. It sounds sort of banal and silly, but it was really profound for me,

Gill Clarke

I found that particular walk, really instructive, we'd been walking, I think to make people feel safe in the studio, like you might to begin with. But when Susan encountered unstable ground, it's like her system knew it had got to actively adapt. It's like the environment with a stimulus for your perceptual system in a way that you know, we make floors so that they support us, they hold us up, they don't encourage us, like a mossy hill bank to, to be in conversation with them in a way.

Susan Benn

Just one last thing about that, that the sense was a different kind of grounding. And you often talked, you've talked over the year about grounding. And how people who understand dance, have a sense of that, which the rest of us could find so easily, with help

Kirsty Alexander

I think, I think the rest of us have had we just lose touch with them from time to time.

Unknown speaker

It's interesting, you're talking about this, because when you started off, you talked about that processes that you all went through, physically, in the morning, and how different the discussions informed you after that, and I wondered what those things were. So here's one, were there other things?

Gill Clarke

Grounding certainly felt something. So they were very simple things like closing the eyes, like using touch using different senses. And how it was useful sometimes, particularly with sight to shut off sight. So one could open up the other. The other senses, but it was all it it came nowhere near dancing.

Kirsty Alexander

And with visual focus, I remember we worked a lot with shifting from very open peripheral vision to very specific visual focus as well. So again, it was this, this interplay,

Gill Clarke

and we did a nice thing with Giovanni that with just about having somebody a little bit under your heels and then a little bit under your toes and what a radical shift of perception that that can be

Kirsty Alexander

How different in distance people where if your weight was just slightly forward, or if your weight was just slightly back

Gill Clarke

and how they perceive their relationship to you, to them and very simple things. But it was partly the commonality of that experience. But certainly, it's sensory, multi sensory nature.

Kirsty Alexander

I've got the microphones. You have read, and you have information from literature and the social scientists and scientists and geographers. But I often hear you say, you want dancers to be at the table of discussions. So have you found or can you imagine situations in which we will be at the table in the perspective that you imagine we can forward this knowledge and, and be equal and have an exchange with some of these people who's spoken a little bit about embodied centres and I don't know, the right, right time to mention that

Gill Clarke

It feels to me it would be wonderful to have a centre sounds a little bit too fixed, again. But something that is initiated from movement practice, and draws in these other things rather than these interesting debates happening. And we're not even at the table. Because people perhaps have these assumptions about what dance is and they think it's about shape and line and visual composition in a way. So that's certainly one thing. And it's also about this gaining, I feel more, more confidence in artists articulating from their place of practice. But it's allowing that to connect up with these other disciplines in a way they might understand. But also really key, the different disciplines, the experts, if you like, that have come in from different disciplines, what they've really responded to very spontaneously in the moment, is just being this gift of an experience. So that feels like we have to keep that as our currency. And not always feel we've got to be able to talk about it. I think.

Unknown speaker

Just curious when you're talking about the point in your reading, where ideas made a transition for you into being interesting, but

Gill Clarke

abstract

Unknown speaker

abstract just nice ideas that somehow moved beyond where you were interested to pursue, or what you're interested to pursue.

Gill Clarke

I think it's this thing about always coming back to the laboratory of the self. And that that's the place of testing, if you like, in a way. And a lot of that, I think is about metaphor, actually. I think we would we all speak so often now about neurons firing and connecting. And so there's something even just about that as an idea that sort of feels like it can be feeding our practice at some level. But I think sometimes we think what we're taking is information, or is actually we often work through image not necessarily visual image but sensory motor image or. It's, it's giving time and space for that. I think.

Kirsty Alexander

Is there something about resonance as well, when when you're reading that something? Yeah, resonates with your kinesthetic experience or doesn't?

Gill Clarke

Or it's interesting, I've been a little bit heartened by thinking, oh, I'm going down a hole into this reading and then coming back to a teaching frame. And just noticing what finds its way in without any planning. So there's something that's, that's building up there. But it's it's never wanting to start with an idea and make it drive. What I might find an experience is not wanting to apply a theory, for example,

Kirsty Alexander

Something we were talking about earlier, and I realise I think I haven't brought up in my interjection. So I'll bring up now is oscillation, just the idea of oscillation. And there's something about the relationship between the moving and the reading or the articulating, which is beyond integration, or beyond applying,

Gill Clarke

And is emerging in the moment, as well.

Unknown speaker

Sorry what do you mean by that? What are you oscillating between?

Kirsty Alexander

I think what I mean, is that the I think there's something in the idea of oscillation, which doesn't stop, and that doesn't have a beginning and it doesn't have an end. So the hierarchy between the different kinds of activity, you can't, there isn't because there isn't an end.

Gill Clarke

And resonance perhaps sounds sometimes a ripple that goes in one direction, rather than it then feeds you something back.

Unknown speaker

Yeah I understand that, I just don't understand what the oscillation is

Kirsty Alexander

Oh, the way, the way ideas develop

Unknown speaker

isn't oscillation when you go from one thing to another, isn't that what oscillation is?

Kirsty Alexander

I think my experience of how concepts develop, or in this conversation, are that they don't arise from practice or arise from theory, but they are constantly changing as they meet as they bounce back and between

Unknown speaker

I'm also interested, sorry? Can these things happen at the same time? Can you be moving and thinking at the same time? Or do you always do stuff so blindfold and then you were talking about it.

Gill Clarke

Mind is, body is the instrument for thinking.

Unknown speaker

Yeah, obviously but in your practice, do you sometimes do those two things at the same time? Or do you always

Gill Clarke

Mostly,

Unknown speaker

Mostly, so this is very unusual for you to be talking in this situation?

Gill Clarke

Yes, it feels oddly schizophrenic, because I'm being interviewed and welcome this is who's gonna speak today.

Unknown speaker

Well, it feels pretty weird on this side as well. Something that has to do with movement and we're all sitting still

Gill Clarke

But it's also acknowledging that how we communicate with the wider world is through language, can we just find language that's closer, more closely appropriate to what we want to convey. And I think by understanding or by becoming familiar also, with languages that other people are using, we have more opportunity or ability to perhaps speak in such a way that doesn't feel is compromising us but might be heard and understood at some level, that we don't only stay in our little bubble

Unknown speaker

Which I'm not quite sure how to articulate. It has to do with performance. Because I've had the sense of this particular conversation being quite grounded in the practice. So, as I think about the practice is to do or perhaps, some kind of setting of research. And then I have an image of performances being something perhaps delivered or to be a different kind of setting. And whether in dance meeting these other sciences, I say dance isn't a science, but also it is. Have you considered this aspect, or yeah, the aspect of performance, what kind of role that that has, and perhaps also the quality of performance or what performance is being shifted.

Gill Clarke

Definitely, I mean, my driver was to want to resource myself as a performer to find ways, new possibilities, opening up for how my body might move. And this notion of being in process, that might

have a moment when it becomes a moment of performance, but maybe that's not an ending, either, that that's also permeable. That it embraces a presence in the moment, we've talked about a lot, that allows perhaps what we are noticing to become more transparent at even a sensory level, to, to allow the reading that we're doing of the body to be visible. But again, in in a, in a great specificity in a way to choose that possibility we have as performance. And then I would say, I don't see something that happens when I open the studio door and closes when I leave. It feels to me once you've you've your curiosity is, is captured by movement, by noticing in your own body by seeing in others by seeing choreographies in the world, actually that process your living. Constantly, I see Jules, at the back there a sound artist I can imagine. He's taking his ear with him wherever he goes, you know, and noticing sound differently than we would he's, he's tuned his attention to notice sound. And I feel we've done the same thing. So I don't see them as separate, in a way.

Kirsty Alexander

Is there also a way in which, responsibility is probably the wrong word, but in in the dynamic or exchange between performer and audience shifts?

Gill Clarke

That also becomes more two way

Kirsty Alexander

If it's not about object anymore.

Gill Clarke

And certainly could invite other ways of thinking about performance or where that happens, or what its relationship is, to its audience, is it trying to set up something that's more about experiencing something in space, rather than seeing something projected? A certain frame that it's it's a traditional theatre frame, for example, which isn't to exclude that as a possibility. But what I have noticed is how ones curiosity goes off in new directions in a way once one starts in the body, and it's proposing different things, different possibilities. I talk in teaching quite a lot about nothing is right or wrong unless it's going to cause you injury. The thing is to notice habit is useful because then we can embrace it or decide to do differently. But wouldn't it be wonderful if we opened up choice A possibility that we have to, to draw on as our palette. We expanded our palette in a way that help.

Kirsty Alexander

There's probably time for just one more question, if anybody has a quick question.

Unknown speaker

When you're talking about your teaching, moving off, somewhere else and that you thought you were, perhaps not teaching dance any longer. But the you were teaching something ethical. That just made me wonder what you perceived as the split or the difference?

Gill Clarke

Just around about the same time, I was, for the first time getting involved in what the idea of a dance formation might be, if you like, and the seemed sort of one school of thought that was thinking of it as training, and you acquire these skills that you can then apply. Or there was something else there was actually this is about education. And that feels to me much more interesting.

Unknown speaker

Yeah. Well, I mean, it's strikes me, somebody's always worked with a very clear and specific ethos, and that your work was shaped by philosophy throughout your career anyway. So I would advocate that it wasn't a departure from something other than perhaps other people's way of doing things. I think this these ideas of embodiment have been raised, I think we do, embody our knowledge or gaps in our knowledge. And we also embody our philosophies, it's maybe just a question of you've been talking about sort of raising awareness, raising consciousness shifting perceptions. So I don't see why we can't include ideas of ethics, philosophy, philosophical politics, within the realms of dance

Gill Clarke

Nice, we keep circling around to justice. Thank you. It's something that's one basic level of respecting the individual, and what they discover and what they where they might want to then take it, to not somehow try and hold it. Or to hold this space for that discovery, but to not to hold what you might do with it.

Kirsty Alexander

I'm aware that people may have other thoughts that continue after this time, or may have had a question they haven't had a chance to ask. So in a moment, before people are leaving, we do have these envelopes, which are not evaluation forms. They're just the opportunity to send in more more questions so that people's questions continue to be part of the process. So I will get these over by the door before people eat. But before that, I think that just really like to thank Gill for such an inspiring evening.

Gill Clarke

You can find a little bit more information about the events that have happened already in the PAL project. So do take those away and I have to say we just had a call for proposals for research that would be transdisciplinary in some way would have a movement element, but be transdisciplinary. And I haven't got to read them all yet but I was really excited by enthusiastic response to that call. And next week we have a break half term break and then after that as part of Sue Davies Commission's down at the barge house

Sue Davies

In which Gill has made helped make a piece so I'm

Gill Clarke

And if you're super lucky you might even see Sue performing but you'll see Kirsty and Helka and Fiona and the central part of our installation is a film that I made together with this with Lucy Skaer visual artist but as part of that on November the eighth we have what sounds really interesting talks about the

notion of what to curatorship might be and somebody who's working in a visual arts context, but actually feels they're creating you said something about choreographic polyphony I thought that was a lovely so do come along to that and I feel much more comfortable in that role. Thank you

Outro from Renée Bellamy 1:26:21

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