



# Autonomous flesh: autonomous stone with Laura Burns and Liz Rosenfeld

*(automated transcript)*

## **SPEAKERS**

Laura Burns & Liz Rosenfeld

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

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*(2019 audio file begins)*

## **Laura Burns**

Thanks for being with us. I'm going to talk a little bit about this broader project that I've been involved with for some years, why I invited Liz, and then we're going to both share different parts of our practice for a little bit. And then we're going to have a slight sharing of something that came out of our particular encounter and dialogue that has emerged through thinking about this talk and then we'll kind of open it up and be in conversation with us. So we're really wanting to kind of use this as a way of well, I speak for myself, but maybe you agree, of thinking with you about where we're at in our different practices. I think I'm going to read something and then I'm going to introduce our. I speak very slowly, by the way, sometimes. So that's what's happening. Don't worry about it. I'm fine, I'm fine. She starts with a name that I do not know how to say. It could be a triangle or the rise from a side of a mountain. It's more about where and when she appears and how I rely on her even in her absence. She has not surfaced for a while, but I trust she knows what she's doing. Or at least if she's not visible to me, then she must be elsewhere. Tending to some ground more urgent. Why does she disappear? And where does she go to when she's absent to me? I have to accept this autonomy on her part and I know her lack of appearance in this place does not mean her lack of existence in another. She has a right to be slippery. I found her in a field not far from Pendle Lancaster, August 2015, August 1612. The women who were accused were taken from the villages to the town, the route traversed along the river. There is nothing really here for you to see. I will tell you that strangle is a stone or that she has the possibility of becoming stone. From woman to woman stone to stone woman to stone and back to women and so on and forever. A way of practising edges, a particular route shuttling toward or away from or maybe I can say that she's an almost stone or a kind of stone, or type of stone, a kind of type of stone. She's a type of kind of stone almost stands in the field and closes her eyes although then begins to see. She sees a group of women in stones. No, she sees a group of women stones. No, she sees a group of stone women. No, she cannot see anything. She feels a texture pulsing, moving, shifting, being becoming back forth rebounding. She's standing in the field and she's standing with the women the stone women, the women's stones. No, I'm standing in the field with her and we're pulsing, moving, shifting being becoming back forth rebounding. We're standing in the field with our eyes closed. And then we begin to sink further and further into the ground into the layers of soil and sand and clay and bedrock until we reach the women becoming stones becoming women back and forth rebounding. It happens suddenly, it happens suddenly that we're no longer stones and stones are no longer women. It happens very suddenly, it happens in the place where they take the women along the river from the villages to the trial. It happens at night in the field under the layers of earth. It happens with our eyes closed beginning to see. It happens very suddenly and we immediately doubt we've seen anything, you and I, I and you, immediately doubting we have seen or felt anything. So this is a text that was written quite a long time ago and it's a way of thinking through this ongoing project that I have with a particular river in Lancashire, and these river stones that are with us, so feel free to pick them up, touch them whatever you want. And, okay, I'll say more about this project in a minute but I'm really, really, really glad that Liz is here with me today. And one of the reasons is, I think we're having this kind of common concern. I mean, I'm speaking in my own words, so you

might speak about it differently. We're having this kind of common concern about how to be in service to something that we might call nature or yeah, with all the problems of that word, but let's use it for now. And I guess kind of also a concern that I would say was what I feel to be often a very depoliticised making of work or way of regarding the non-human and the human like that that space can get really depoliticised and its forms of representation can feel like a lot of assumptions may be made that aren't out in the open or something. I feel as though we're both kind of concerned with that in different ways and I'm interested in the way that we might share a dialogue about that concern, but then our work like manifests in very different ways. So I wanted to be with Liz in this conversation, which is now also like, taking a little bit of a different turn, because we've started talking and then things change. Okay, so the picture that's gonna come up is a picture of the river Wyre, which is, it's quite a kind of small, in many ways, like non-eventful river, in Lancashire, this is very near to the source of the river. So I first encountered the river with a group of other artists, we were involved in a project that was looking at engagement with site when you when certain information was not available to you. So basically, we were blindfolded from the train station, and then driven to this site, we didn't know where we were and then we spent a week there, and we were camping and engaging in different practices and kind of listening to what emerged. I don't feel so comfortable using this word, so I'm going to say lots of different words for the same thing but I experienced kind of a series of images, or a series of visions, or a series of kind of choreographies of the virtual realm. And one of these images, the kind of starting image was of this group of women that were stones, stones that were women and I use women in a very expanded sense of the word it's not a biological category. So there was this entity that was both stone and human and the series of images that kind of came in, in that place, was of this trajectory from kind of stone human entity, to that severing of that relationship, and then a kind of future horizon of possible, imaginary becoming back together again, where the humans and the stones were kind of reorganising themselves into relationship. So there's this like, intimacy between stone and flesh that then becomes completely kind of, I want to say dry, but I mean, also just annihilated the autonomy of both entities. Then this kind of horizon of future place where there's a search for an intimacy again between body flesh and stone, but there's no easy way of finding that intimacy again. So I guess I'm thinking about that in terms of, ah I forget this one quite important thing. Okay, so these images came in, in this place and then subsequently, like we were left the place and subsequently kind of pieced together found out where we had been. And found out that we'd been in this area of Lancashire called Pendle, where those infamous witch hunt in the 1600s and it became a really infamous thing, because a lot of people all at once were accused and then executed, and now it's kind of the tourism of the whole area. So that whole, like infrastructure, economic infrastructure is now like also capitalising on that narrative in a very particular way. So another thing about this river is that all like a lot of the water from this region, which is basically this whole area called the forest Bowland in Lancashire, all of that water coming down off the Fells and into the villages and towns was then like, used to fuel the cotton factories during industrialisation. So there's this very, very, very intimate and not proximate, like there's no proximity between these things, there's distance between them, but there is a deep entanglement of the slave trade in that and all of the the triangulation of the theft of land and the theft of bodies that this river then gets kind of utilised into, like becoming part of that narrative. So all of this to say that it's a really, there's many layers of violence in the land there and any kind of practice of intimacy in relation to the stones or the river in that place it can't bypass those layers. So yeah, there's a lot there. The land is now predominantly owned by these huge estates. So it's like a bit, it's crazy. It's like, feeling like you're at the nexus of, the inauguration of property as like an idea, it's really, really intense. There's some, I can't remember what the law is, but it's like this area is completely owned, basically, by the Queen still, like it's nuts. So there's some public, there's some some kind of right to walk in public space, but a lot of being in this place requires like trespassing. So my practice is both situated here, going to the river and being with the river, which is many things. It's often boring, it's often really lonely, it's often quite scary, it's sometimes really exhilarating. I just don't want to romanticise that, like it looks like a nice place, but it's not that simple. I think this is one of the things that I'm interested in opening up today is what it does to like, be in a place of yeah, what kind of desire I might have for and with that place and within myself towards that place, that kind of, I find myself doing these different strategies to kind of place myself in some kind of, albeit relative precarity to kind of like spark this intimacy again, or something, yeah, question. So, yeah, so some of the practice is there, and then I'm exploring what it means to have a practice that humans don't see or that an audience might not see, and then the non-human, the river, the place, the stones become this kind of witness, and so then what am I accountable to? And how are the ways that I can track my accountability to this non-human witness? And am I, then? Yeah, what are the strategies that are used that are a way of listening to what might be an ethics coming out of that place? And what are the ways in which I project? What I want that to look like? Or imagine or speculate? And I think this is, yeah, alongside this question of intimacy and proximity, which I'm just going to say one thing about one, sorry, I'm jumping around a bit. But just one thing about this intimacy and proximity, if we think of these kind of images of the, this entity of stone, human, and then all of what gets broken, which is also a historical moment, right of colonisation and industrialisation, then the non-human and the human get kind of forced back together again, in this very violent ways. So there's a forced proximity, but there's no intimacy anymore. And then, yeah, and then so what do we do after that kind of thing? So then that brings me to this question of like, the horizon, this place of potential collaboration? And this question of how to kind of track accountability in that space, but then also, what would it mean for us to take seriously that these are political subjects? And what does it do to take seriously that, an understanding of that, or let's say, it can be

an understanding of that. But it could also be that you're like, performing a belief to see what it produces, as well become quite interested in that, like, you practice a belief to see what it opens up. It's not the same as believing. So then, this question of what opens up, if we take this seriously, that these could be political subjects is also to say like, what would it open up? If the performance of that belief also allows human bodies to be political subjects in different ways? And I'm going to end with this question that's maybe related to that. Oh, I will say, so some of the practice happens with the river in the place, and then some of the practice happens with the stones, and this is also something that we've been talking about. I stopped making work, but people would kind of go and see for a while, and that may be for many reasons, but one of the reasons is that I started feeling this kind of, like repulsion towards anything that was ecology and art. Maybe, yeah but I think this is really important to say that, actually, and really kind of wanting to go so far away from any kind of not, I mean, of course, far away from representation, but also far away from actually anything even kind of being seen to be that or something. And I think that's also something that we're interested in. Thinking through like the way our concern with being human in relation to non human has also led us both, like, away and relentlessly back or yeah, I speak for myself, that kind of something, drags it back. But maybe we talk about that in the discussion like why the repulsion? So anyway, I want to listen to you now.

### **Liz Rosenfeld (20 minutes)**

Thank you. I'm really happy to be here. Thanks for inviting me. I was really excited to come and be here with Laura because I think it's as an artist, it's also really rare that somebody who's in a PhD, process practice PhD and is also a practising artist and kind of in the state of questioning their practice, invites me to come and kind of like just, you know, experiment and talk and play. We had a really great afternoon in Laura's studio yesterday, kind of really questioning each other's practices, which for me, actually, that was the, that was it. So, I'm going to kind of talk through my give you sort of a quick overview of my work in regards to these questions of ecology that have been coming up for me in the last, I don't know, five or six years, particularly from a perspective of queerness, which is where I work and how it's kind of taking me from one place of. You know, how bodies are politicised to a completely different place of how bodies are politicised, but I should specifically say my own, I'm not really speaking to a kind of like general politic, I'm speaking from a very specific lived experiences specific lived desire. Just I wanted to start with this image, because it kind of frames everything that I'm going to take you guys through. So when I was here, about three years ago, I was the artist in residence residence at Lux moving image through the Goethe-Institute. I'm going to talk about the project that I did there in a minute. But while I was there, when I was focusing, I should say, cruising practice is a huge part of my work has been for 20 years. I'm a performance maker. I'm also a filmmaker, and I'm a writer. I guess I'm now saying that I'm a writer. And while I was here in London, making this film called The Fuck Tree, which I'll get to in a minute, my roommate in Berlin had gone to our local cruising Park. And what had happened was that overnight, the park or the city had like clear cut the entire cruising area. And it was really shocking, because this is like a known cruising area. It's not policed, it's somewhere that is actually like very much part of the ecology of this park the same way that cruising is an accepted part of the ecology of Hampstead Heath, it's part of the history of this park. There's like a whole naked area in front of it that is mixed gendered, and mostly mostly men, cisgendered men kind of occupy the cruising area behind the naked area, but it's like usually kind of like thick bush, you know, forest, and he came one day and the bush haha. It was clear cut, but somebody had erected kind of in protest this DIY gloryhole. And he sent it to me, of course, immediately. And I just think it's kind of this wonderful intersection of that, you know, we're talking about in terms of this like, relationship between like non-human ecology and like human intervention and human desire. And for me, this image kind of like, sums up. I don't know, it sums me up. I love it so much. And I think it's an amazing kind of like, also like co creation with a space that is that is holding space for this activity. Which leads me to so I'm going to just kind of go through the works. The Fuck Tree, which is what Laura, when we started talking about this, Laura was really interested in my relationship to the Fuck Tree, which is like for those who have a history of cruising in Hampstead Heath, which I know some of you do. This is actually like quite an iconic and historical spot. This tree is like famous around the world. I have spoken to cruisers internationally and everyone knows about the Fuck Tree and the Fuck Tree. It's uncertain how old exactly this tree is. But I mean, I when I was here, I actually met like a 90 year-old man who whose caretaker brings him down to the Fuck Tree once a week, just to be with it, because it's like been such an important spot. For him to feel like seen and, and, you know, to watch to engage. And I mean, I don't know if he's still with us in this human realm here and now but he was one of the first people that like really told me stories about his history, I mean, like really like 50 years at least of going to the Fuck Tree. And that just really struck me in the way that I learned about the Fuck Tree was also through a very good friend of mine, Alex Eisenberg, who grew up like really not like in Hampstead. And through his own kind of exploration, and of his queerness, and also the history of this tree, he grew up going to this tree and kind of knowing about this tree. And so he was the one that brought me to the tree initially. And so my personal interest in cruising, which I realised now, when I do these talks, I need to explain what cruising is because not everybody knows, it's generally the practice of looking for public sex. Historically, we know it mostly assists gay men looking for searching for engaging with public sex in various places, often parks, often nature, etc, and other venues as well. So, I have been engaging with cruising as a methodology as a practice in my artistic work, but also in my work as a human being and how I, and in my own kind of exploration of gender, and

sexuality. And it's really continued, you know, since I was like, really 20 years old, to be a very important route to understanding kind of how I move through the worlds that began through this kind of like desire towards feeling seen this desire to feel seen, initially in places that I was attracted to, but couldn't like pass in as like a cisgendered male or even as a readable male body, and kind of transformed into other things. And what drew me to the Fuck Tree is that when we first went there, I really I wanted to go during non-cruising hours, which is like daytime, basically, because I mean, like, you know, like, you know, the hardcore cruising, I'm sure there's cruising during the day, this is a quiet kind of open area, people are walking their dogs, and, you know, children are walking around and stuff. So, I haven't witnessed like full on sex, they're right in the middle of the tree in the day. But as I understand, once the sun goes down, there's like, you know, nights where there are like lines of man, like waiting to like, fuck on this tree. I started to go there a lot during the day, because I wasn't necessarily interested in kind of, like, I became not interested in the cruising activity for myself, and also less interested in the sense of like, infiltrating or making an intervention in a space that wasn't necessarily cultivated, or a community that was, you know, built for, like, necessarily me to access, which is like a politic that has really changed for me over time. It became about the tree as this witness to history, as a tree, that as a tree it's like held space, for, as far as I know, at least, like this 90 year-old man for half of his life, you know, but this tree, you can feel the bark, it's like used, it's, like worn by bodies, you know, like bodies have fucked on this tree. And it's amazing. And the first thing that was so kind of incredible to me about this tree was that I laid on it, I mean, you can see, it's, you can go to the next picture, actually, it's, um, it's a very special shape. And it was, I have to say, one of the first times, maybe ever in my life, that I felt that a living thing was like, effortlessly supporting my body. And, and this is something that I think a lot about in my own performance practice, because in the last few years, I've really embrace I've been very much embraced by kind of like a contemporary dance context, even though I don't identify as a dancer, and, and I've ended up working with a lot of dancers, and I think there's I mean, I'm based in Berlin for the last 11 years and there's been this big kind of turn towards contemporary dance wanting to like, you know, at least in Berlin, somehow embrace an intersectionality I have a lot of feelings about that, which are not necessarily part of this talk, but we can go into it later. But also, I'm a mover, I'm a performer and I'm also a Sagittarius who likes to just like know, things, you know, I like I'm an experienced junkie. And so when, like, all these dancers are like, "hey, let's dance", you know, I wanted to, I wanted to have that experience as a performer who also is a researcher, and a body based researcher, and also a filmmaker and a director who like, you know, works with bodies in front of a lens. So, I was really, really moved by this experience of feeling effortlessly held by this like alive entity. And for me, knowing also kind of this tree as witness to like, years and years of, you know, bodies, queer bodies, bodies, living bodies, dying bodies, like fucking bodies celebrating, was really powerful to me. And I felt very seen in this space in this cruising space in a way that I never felt seen in a cruising space before. Because usually, I'm like, the one getting kicked out of the dark room, or, you know, I mean, I have tonnes of stories, but there was something that shocking to me that like, in a way sex was not involved with this experience, it was simply about feeling embraced by this tree. I'm not going to actually show a clip of this film, because when I made this film, I explicitly made it as a companion piece to a work by Luther Price from 1989, which is an experimental film called Sodom, which looks at kind of he uses all this found footage of porn from the 70s kind of the like, what people refer to as the golden age of, of gay sexuality, you know, like pre AIDS. And what he did was is he treated the skin of the film with different kinds of chemicals, so that it would start to the emulsion would start to actually like, deteriorate. And it was almost like the film became the body. And the body is and it was very much his kind of like, it's kind of a memorial, it's a requiem, it's a memory, it was also a really controversial film that a lot of people didn't want to show because they felt that it was not kind of supporting the political cause of like, its activism at the time. And what struck me so much about that film, and then the tree, the Fuck Tree was really like I just made a portrait of the tree, there's no sex in the in the film. But it's really like this, like, for me this like, really erotic portrait of this tree. And then I treated the film stock that I shot on the same kind of film stock as him with like, my body fluids with come with blood, I buried some of it under the tree. So I sort of like eroded it with like, natural, you know, kind of like nature, rather than, like chemicals. And I see these pieces as companion pieces historically, and I only show them together. And it's also like a way of practice in my work is very much about like, taking films out of an archive that are not necessarily seen a lot or like recognising work of queer history that's not necessarily like, celebrated or known and responding to that, in this way that like brings it into a contemporary context as well, which becomes about kind of like, queer life after queer death and like witness of this tree witnessing that history. So, I also the Fuck Tree film left me with a lot of questions about like, how does nature inherit trauma, particularly like trauma that is coming from a human existence, but then through the cycle of nature itself, like, how does it deal with that kind of trauma? And then also, I got very interested in the theories of epigenetics, which is about how traumas pass through humans. Specifically, it started, it started focuses on like twin research and Holocaust survivors and ancestors of like descendants of Holocaust survivors which I am one and and then I thought, well, what is trauma? How is queer trauma inherited through queer people? That is not necessarily about a bloodline, but then many would argue actually, we do inherit trauma through blood, not all have us but you know, there's a lot of like very beautiful writing about like, relationship between people who are HIV positive relationships between people who have AIDS and like what that does in terms of like a queer history of trauma. So, these are just questions that came up for me when I was thinking about this project. And also like the immaterial projections that we put on to nature and the relationships of desire that I was having towards ecology and nature. And also this, like frustration of the fetishistic that

comes through that as well. And how we kind of like we assume that like, you know, like, I asked Laura, when we were talking about the rocks that are around this room, I said to her, "well, how did you know that it was like a consensual relationship, let's say, between you in the river and you in the rocks?" And like, I don't know that I was necessarily having this like, consensual relationship between me and the Fuck Tree, you know, but I felt really, I know, this sounds maybe like a bit woowoo I felt very grateful to find this tree. Because then it really made me reflect on how, you know, like, it really it kind of steamrolled me into this experience level. Actually, back to the materiality of flesh, let's really look at that, how am I working with the abundance, the materiality of my own body, particularly in the context of dance, which was like, has been, like, very challenging for me as like, as I would be referred to and contemporary dance and untrained body, you know? And, and what is this excess material that I'm working with? How is it making its own climate? What is the responsibility of taking up space that I am? Kind of, you know, consumed by and how do I use my body in that way? So, after the Fuck Tree residency, I went back to Berlin, and I made my first solo performance in Berlin, called 'If you asked me what I want, I'll tell you, I want everything.' Which was about all these questions about how we're creating climate with our bodies, about the excess of flesh, about different ways of creating energy, how body instead of turning to sort of nature is this, like sustainable in a kind of very science fiction way sustainable? Resource, actually, how is flesh or sustainable resource? Now I know, there are like 1000 questions that are related to that, that are about the problematics of that statement, because we're looking at the economy of this world flesh is, you know, it's sold, it's traded. It's smuggled, it's, um, you know, like, at the mercy of so much that it doesn't have control over. But, uh, so I started with this piece, and I'm just going to show you the trailer of it. And I would say this is really like an exploration of these questions that I was encountering that sort of like a domino effect. All these things that I'm showing you. The place that I started out with this work was that I was really interested in also not just this kind of question of like, what does it mean to be in like deep submission to kind of like ecology and nature and sort of like serve it? But also, like I said, how can we generate a kind of energy from our bodies that is useful somehow. And also really important, this concept that we are always strangers to nature, and that we are always going to be strangers to the climate. And how that also works into like, the anonymity and the stranger the importance of the encounter in cruising. And also, one of the kind of source researches that I did for this piece was I was interested in the idea of like, emotional burnout too, and I interviewed a lot of like, environmentalists, people working in different kinds of environmentalist work and activists, from people who are like shutting down coal mines to just like simply like, workers who worked at recycling plants and stuff and ultimately, what I was more interested in less than like what they were doing as these practitioners you know, in their practices or in their just like everyday jobs, but how they were feeling and what that emotional burnout was for them because really, all these conversations ended in them saying to me, I just don't think I can do anything to really change this politic. And I thought a lot about what I mean, that was one very kind of like inspiring research for me about this piece. And so what happened after this work, which I actually really think is like research, is it transformed elements of it transformed into a new solo, which I just did for the first time in September, called, 'I live in a house with a door'. And where I merged these questions of ecology and cruising and really explicitly queer sexuality into like, dance practice, generation of energy. And also specifically right now I'm really focused on theories of holes, and how holes conduct energy, which I'll get to in a minute, just holes, holes, holes, holes, holes, and I, again, coming to this realisation that actually, like I've always lived in this non binary body, but not necessarily, I don't really identify it in terms of gender. But for me more that like, this flesh that I'm like, carrying around with me, it's this flesh that moves in its own time and its own autonomy is like a non binary material that I'm living with. And what does that mean? And how does that how can that actually like, Where can I go with that. So I wanted to, I wanted to maybe just read a little bit quickly from the text of that piece, and then I'm going to show you one more thing, and then we're gonna open up to you guys. So the texts from 'I live in a house with the door.' It's a one hour piece, and it ends with this text called the shimmer. And then the kind of final scene of this performance, all the lights go out after I've done this very intense, kind of like 25-minute tantric breathing dance with my like, I call it a duet with my body. And I really work with the architecture of the flesh of my body and, and dance with my body, while I'm like breathing quite heavily. And I turn off all the lights and then a disco ball comes on. And I hand out all these microphone, microphones, flashlights to people in the audience that they sign up. So, the train up to the disco ball. So the only image, I have to apologise I have no documentation of this because the documentation team failed to document it. But maybe one day, it'll be seen again. Everyone shines a flashlight up to this disco ball. So, the only light is the shimmering light. So I read I'll just read you a bit of this. The Shimmer is a mysterious, invisible gas like substance that warps time and environments. The Shimmer is a prism, but instead of refracting light that refracts flesh DNA, it mutates all life forms in ways that humans can only interpret as impossible, moving and shifting time killing and regenerating ecologies that have already been destroyed by humanity's compulsion to survive everything. I dreamt about the shimmer. In my dream, the shimmer was a sparkling duvet of light, a multiplicity of genders like my own flesh, they are a material. They are stranger following me into back streets and alleys, empty parking lots public parks and toilet stalls. They came for me, cruising me, commanding me to submit I offer this stranger them the shimmer my flesh and the possibility of all its ambiguous holes. I am thirsty. On my knees tongue out. This material is begging to serve, to be used to be annihilated. In physics, the concept of annihilation is also a form of creation. It is defined by the combination of a particle and its anti particle, eventually resulting in a total conversion of the particles into energy. Is this what you need? I asked the Shimmer. I offer a fistful of flesh. I am touching it

right now. That's good. Go on. Join me. Touch your flesh grab on to it. I am. I feel it bulging between my fingers oozing out between my knuckles soft spreadable, excited, effortless and complicated, substantial and uncontrollable. Light and precise. I carry with me a luxuriance of material that moves in its own time. A collaborative material, a heavy material, a material of undeniable labour of effort. This flesh is poly relational and makes me submit to unconstructed. Time, a lexicon of codes forming a bodily language of need and belonging without words, a multitude of unpredictable hormones, a productive body of excess, an offering and a taking a material of its own a material I am forced to collaborate with, a nourishing parasite housed by the ecosystem of this body. Flesh is blood fat particles of unknown material, that is cellular woundable, healable and then woundable again, it is consensually marked, it is non consensually marked, abundant, unclear, untenable, unruly, it confuses me, I have a lot of it. This is how I imagined them touching me for the first time, transferring heat energy from water to air, the Shimmer, they try to bury their head in my flesh, as if it is a mound of sand. But flesh doesn't have the same viscosity as sand, viscosity, viscousness, viscous viscera. Enveloped by the Shimmer, I am directed into the street, I am instructed to lay on top of them, I imagine they're invisible appendages like hands and toes are barely escaping the borders of this flesh, which is beyond my control. Whenever I lay on top of someone, I think about how amazing it must feel, to feel a body, a body of weight, of unpredictable size, a body of a lot. I'll just move I'll just move on from there. But it goes into kind of like weather and climate and nature and all of that. But I wanted to just because we're sort of short on time, I wanted to share with you the trailer to my new work, which is called White Sands, Crystal Foxes. You guys are the first ones to see this. It's not done yet, it's kind of got a ways to go but I'm making this case for planetarium, specifically the Berlin planetarium that is also around a lot of these questions. So, it's a circle, it's a hole because you know, you imagine you're like sitting and looking at this in a 360 immersive experience. But basically, it's this kind of science fiction narrative of like, we are all stuck in this hole together. And while nature's actually like regenerating outside without us, and what can we do to kind of like, be in service to each other in this like, a kind of make, it's like a fallout shelter. It's a bomb shelter. It's a cruising space. But it becomes about that kind of like relationship of energy inside this hole of the planetarium. And then I just wanted to quickly share with you just what I'm doing now because I think it's like kind of an important. So next year, well, it started this year, but with one of my collaborators in Berlin, Rodrigo Garcia Alves, we did a residency last year we started to he's a choreographer and a performer. Think about the concept of hospice will not the concept, the literal actuality reality of hospice, and how we've dealt with death in our lives, through being caretakers but also as performers, as movers, how thinking about and also experiencing through other people who we've taken care of working with artists who are also hospice care workers. It's been a very long process, we're making a piece about this next year, that is kind of the beginning of an even bigger project. But really kind of like, again, coming back to the project, the like, the moment of the human, not the post human not but, but actually like, the like what happens when we ask these questions about the period of hospice, particularly from a queer perspective, which many could even say like, we are always in a kind of like state of hospice as queer people. And so you know, kind of historically, what that does to our bodies in this moment and how that kind of like moves us. And we started out by doing a residency, we were invited by a dance organisation in Dusseldorf, to actually be placed within like a care facility as artists and residents, it was them who invited us to be taken out of the studio as movers as dancers as performers, to actually like, think about how we can work on a choreography, when, you know, outside of the kind of like typical space of the dance studio. And what we ended up doing initially was this publication of, of all the things you're thinking about what we were reading, we interviewed a lot of workers who were really interested in like the labour of care, the labour of hospice, we interviewed a lot of the people who were working there, and from this publication will come the scores that will make the piece itself. So I'll just stop there. I think that was like a good general overview, maybe? Yeah. Cool. Thank you.

**Laura Burns (50 minutes)**

How do you feel about what we've recently written?

**Liz Rosenfeld**

Sure. I mean, should we just want me

**Laura Burns**

to? So? Well, I would just say like something that yeah, maybe we share a bit of that, and then just open it out. Okay. So

**Liz Rosenfeld**

I met Laura, her studio yesterday. And we basically just did like, an exchange of our practice and our work. And we've mostly just been, you know, like Skyping, and talking on the phone and stuff for the last few months. And I, again, was just really interested in how she came to this, like relationship with the river and these rocks and, and also, with a lot of questions, of course, to about kind of like, as artists who, who are interested in questions of ecology and nature, like, how is that like a colonising act in itself? Again, through this like question of consensual, non-consensual relationships to non-human alive things. And we had like a quite an amazing conversation yesterday. I just had, like, some questions that I can

throw out there that came out of that, which is what I wrote down was, we started talking about actually codependency and this and desire, and, like, Laura's relationship to these rocks and my relationship to the tree and how like, I felt like when I wasn't with the tree, at a certain point, like I was really missing the feeling of the tree, I was missing this, like, sense of being held by this tree. And how does that kind of how do you create a codependent relationship with like, an alive thing that is not necessarily like, you know, human or, and. And then within that, I started to think about like, interdependency versus codependency and interdependency, which is like, you know, relationships between people or relationships have like ecosystems and animals that, that support those relationships to thrive and actually go through cycles of like death and birth and an aliveness and like finding different ways of existence. And then I was some questions that come up for me were like, when does a relationship move from interdependency to codependency particularly in the realm of like, non-human, human relationships? Can we like what is a conceptual interdependent relationship to nature? Like, because actually, like, you know, you get to a point where like, we're both making our own projections about these like natural objects that have we don't know the story of how you know those stones ended up in the river or how the Fuck Tree you know, like, we don't know the stories of how these ecologies like emerged, like specifically, and like really like about this concept of projection and colonisation is something that I'm really, really interested in and kind of like, this intense desire of like humanity to not just like own nature, but like, feel emotional about it, you know, like feel emotion from it. And like, are we really truly listening to these ecosystems and to these, not to this nature? Or are we just kind of like, again, projecting our own desire onto it? As we do on to each other?

### **Laura Burns**

Yeah, I mean, the thing that the thing that comes up for me in relation to that is feeling as though there's always this really fine line between questioning that projection that desire, where it comes from, where it goes to what it produces. But then also, and I think this is very specific to the river because of the very specific history of that place. Also being aware of what it hasn't been possible to say, because of those specific histories. So, there's kind of this double edged sword of, because, for me, the colonisation happens in both places, actually, do you know what I mean? Like the, the potential projection is the kind of colonisation but also the, the precarity of when that leaks over into a kind of undermining of something like intuition or another kind of way of knowing. And I think that, like, we're existing in a very odd moment, moments, somehow, like, in in the coming together of all of these different desires. And maybe I'm speaking very specifically from being within a particular academic context where I'm often finding myself to do the work of standing up for that intuition. So then that's also I'm aware that I kind of bring that with me to the, to the table.

### **Liz Rosenfeld**

The intuition of what specifically?

### **Laura Burns**

The intuition of what I was sort of speaking to earlier of, like, how do I track what I understand to be an accountability towards the nonhuman? Like what, you know? Yeah, there's many, like ways into that, but especially when the work is done a lot. Alone? Not with not with other humans? There's kind of yeah, it's like, how do I come to decide that it's okay to be here with the stones? Or how do I come to decide that now's the moment? You know, and I would say also, this question with the stones of working with them and bringing them from the river is like has been both okay. And not okay. Like it's it's both of those things. So yeah, this codependency was interesting to me, because I become aware recently that there's this slight kind of addiction that I feel in myself towards over identifying with the people that were persecuted in that place in that history of witch hunts. And we were talking about this yesterday, I was sort of I was understanding myself to have a slightly like codependent relationship with that. Yeah, codependency in terms of identifying with like, what does it do? What like, why, why do I continue to identify with this group of people who I have experienced some, something of that history? And yeah, as you say, what the Fuck Tree is like, and also there's just, it's like, we don't know, all of what that is, might be. And then I also felt as though a and I felt a lot coming up around this issue of codependency that felt like I was projecting my judgments about that world from a kind of human sense. And I was then as I was doing this thinking around what that meant with the river with the stones, that then I was kind of projecting that judgement that I have about it as a human codependency onto this relationship that of course, like has its own codependency but I just don't understand like, I don't understand what that is. And I wondered if that judgement around codependency is also very specific to being in a kind of economic set of relations where you are kind of supposed to be an individual with a practice like what that requirement also somehow, yeah. Interested in like, opening that up slightly. I'm just going to read to small things. Sticky facilitating damage, facilitating habits, making habitats to live in with our mutual bad habits, skin too close to another body of skin, like wipe it off of me before I get fossilised and it's sticky goo skin covering me head to toe. A particular kind of silence, itchy and tepid at the same time. Not so sticky this time, but await an obligation, not quite burden, some more nagging peripheral, I can turn my head and ignore you from time to time. Frequently from time to time, I can turn the volume down, almost ignore you, and

follow some trajectory one way or the other. A weighty, nagging, repetitive interruption, sometimes spinning out and speeding up.

### **Liz Rosenfeld**

So we thought we take like the next 10 or 15 minutes to open up to questions or comments, or I mean, for us, this is really like a research, I would say, I mean, this is part of your research, actually, which is, I think, an important thing for you all to know that

### **Laura Burns**

it's ongoing, with the hope that it's never finished. And also feel free to Yeah, ask the stones, things. Also.

### **Audience**

Questions. I'm thinking about that identification aspect, and I wonder if it's a way of getting to know, something like, is a very kind of fundamental, it's kind like I am that. You kind of begin to understand something bigger about that, because when you talked about when you have a relationship to something like a stone to the river or the tree, then this kind of opens up this distinction, and maybe a different way of understanding. And then the possibility of making words that opened up a different way of understanding and starting to create these in between just thinking about different kinds of ways of getting to know, if that's the right word, ways to maybe understand or relate.

### **Liz Rosenfeld**

I mean, for me, I treat everything, like a relationship, somehow, you know, and I think I mean, in terms of like, identifying with the thing, I think it's less about identifying with the actual thing, but feeling like in a relationship with it, somehow that then reflects back on to like, my history, or the history that I'm invested in, or the community or the way I want to, actually, like live, you know, and, really, like, at the root of, for me, of all my work is desire, actually, and what my relationship to desire is, whether it's through sex, or, you know, I mean, sex is big. But yeah, politics, like how, you know, we are constantly in this situation of our own bodies. And I think the most important thing is that, I really try to be explicit that this is like, this is my narrative, and it's not a narrative that I expect anybody else to identify with. Because I think that when you start to sort of, like, umbrella politics, of a certain, you know, like, identification is where you was where also again, this kind of, like, sense of colonisation starts to happen, that is very dangerous. And so I really try to, like, bring people into a narrative of specificity through you know, like, what, yeah, just walking through this world in this body, but then I also am a great believer in artists are premonition makers, you know, and that we are making proposals and, like anyone in any practice, like working our shit out. But also holding space and what the responsibility again, behind holding that space is, I think, is a big question that is not actually thought about enough or asked enough in relationship, particularly to performance and live artistic. Well, I would say all kinds of art practices, but it's kind of like, you know, there are so many different ways of being an artist there's so many different accessibilities of being an artist and like economies of being an artist in this you know, world and I find it less and less. I find that this discussion of like I'm whether I'm like, in a bedroom or in a theatre or in front of two people or in front of 100 people like still this question of like, how am I responsibly using this space in this body to be like, number one, always in that moment? And I think that is political and actually, how time and space is being moved through bodies always. Yeah.

### **Audience**

I have a question about style. So, in terms of the visual style that you're presenting, and the style of your writing, for both of you. So, I come from a training in queer theory in which nature is an actor in a certain sense. It's a claim to authenticity, it's a claim to the real, and it is culturally defined. And it's also a world in which terms are forever ironised out. So, we use a lot of irony in order not to claim authority to claim that our statements or our knowledge is stable, that it might always be undermining itself. And yet, it seems within both of your practices an attempt, a kind of worry about the colonising, but also an attempt not to simply ironise, but also to account for feeling or attachment, and that seems to come through your style, your written style. So how, how would you define that style? So how do you write in order to have those things at once? Is that an answerable question?

### **Laura Burns**

Okay, so I would say partly, what kind of frames my answering of this question is that I am writing a written part of a thesis for the PhD as well as having a creative practice. So I feel as though that's worth saying, because it kind of shapes what I feel to be quite an anxious space, of this kind of continuous. And I don't know the extent to which I imagine this to be a requirement. Right, so that's, maybe we're saying so, but that there's a kind of, I experience the pressure to make a claim. So that like, frames a lot of my position already, because actually, then in the practice, what I feel myself longing to do is to not make any claims and to kind of yeah, also not have a hierarchy of relationship between, for example, like the speculative or the somatic or like feelings and that what have you like? So I've, I'm sort of trying to, yeah, maybe what has started

happening is that this triangle figure has started appearing, who, I mean, it's less maybe in the stuff that I've just read, but I'm realising that that's this strange, slightly, well, maybe it's a hole, actually, that is starting to kind of like, gather all of the things that I don't know how to say to undermine and still have feelings that I stand by. So like, I don't know what, where that's going, but I'm realising that that's like, has a kind of agency within what I understand it to be speaking to? Yeah.

### **Liz Rosenfeld**

Um, for me, I think it's all about again, kind of my like, intense and other love for like, critical theory and philosophy, particularly coming from a queer context, but also my like, hatred of the economy of it. And also, I mean, I'm, you know, I'm like a runaway academic. Basically, I like argued my way through graduate school twice. And a lot of that was about the way in which, like how much I absolutely adored the language of theory and philosophy but hated the way that it was like being co-opted and sort of the way in which I was being forced to learn it because I wanted to live it. I wanted to read these ideas, because for me, theorists are just another form of artists, actually, they're working out all their complicated ideas and feelings through ideas that maybe they, you know, took me a long time to just accept that, like theorists and philosophers maybe just don't want to feel all that shit, they want to just get it out of their brains. But me like, I want to feel it all. I want to feel it everywhere, I want to, like, you know, practice it, I want to fuck it, I want to like move around it, I want to roll around in it. Like, I want to know what the hell it is until it's exhausted. So, I think that that is where kind of the root of my like aesthetic choices come from is the experiential, in both writing, and performance, and filmmaking, and image making is like: How can I share this as a felt a constantly kind of, like ongoing relationship with feelings and desire to an audience that, like, might walk away with that? Or maybe not, you know, maybe it shuts them down? But yeah, I think that, that I will always be in a complicated relationship to theory and philosophy, and in many ways theorists and philosophers, because in a way, I also am transitioning into this, like, beautiful element of it too, because I think like we are all doing, you know, carrying out the things we do, and the ways that we do it, like all of our labour is different. And you know, at first I was kind of like, how can we just sit around and talk about intimacy and desire and like, regurgitate these ideas, when we don't know what they feel like, when we don't actually live them, you know, and some people just can't, and that's okay, too. And then there are the people who can and then how do those relationships come together? And how do those relationships become productive? And multi, you know, like, in this multiplicity, in this poly relational way, so, does that answer your question? okay.

### **Audience**

I think what I can feel in both of you, is a kind of felt authenticity, or a felt relationship and the claim that there is a kind of fixed one, or resentful one and one can advocate and know what it is.

### **Liz Rosenfeld**

Yeah and also for me, like, what it's a really important element of my work is that hypocritical desire is really at the root of everything, particularly for me personally, queerness, and queer identity, identification, and politics. And I'm really in this constant kind of relationship with my own politics with my work where, like, you know, desire and politics are as much as we want them to be, are not synonymous. And that this is like so important to embrace, to accept and to also like work through, you know, in some suit, also, like achieve a productivity to like, move forward to cross thresholds. Any last burning questions?

### **Audience**

I was going to ask Liz, if you could talk a bit about your experience working in a contemporary dance context? Yeah, you alluded to it earlier?

### **Liz Rosenfeld**

Specifically, how?

### **Audience (1hour 15 minutes)**

I mean, you said, you were, you had problems with that experience.

### **Liz Rosenfeld**

Yeah. Um, so, I mean, I don't I, you know. I should rephrase. So, I'm very attracted to the, and, like, inspired by and motivated by the practice of dance, I should say, just like, because it very much emulates my, like, desire and attraction to the movement of bodies and how bodies feel each other, how we move through intuition, how we move through intimacy. And I wanted to understand that through the practice, like any other kind of practice of body practice of dance, because I had the opportunity to actually and what I came to experience initially was that I'm actually working with a group of people with a very specific history of training in their bodies that they're carrying with them that I'm not carrying with me, which is like, really incredible and something to learn from actually, and, of like, great interest to me, particularly are the things that I

don't know and haven't experienced. And a lot of beauty has come out of that and a lot of inspiration has come out of that. Like alternatively and there are so I mean, when I say contemporary dance, you know, I think it's also dangerous to kind of umbrella. That term terminology because there's so many again, like so many ways to be an artist, so many ways to be a dancer. And but what I found in the kind of like genre of, of the moment that I've been in, like a contemporary dance context is that it's very hard for a lot of, particularly like, choreographers that I've worked with to like, if I can't physically do what they want me to do. Now, I was excited to work with people who have this history of training that I don't, and to know how we can actually collaborate through that. And to, you know, like, not necessarily like, I can't learn it, or necessarily do it the way that they do it. But then, like, when we come to that moment, what do we do together? Kind of, like, kind of like cruising, when we come to that moment, what do we do together, you know, and that was exciting to me. And I've definitely experienced a lot of hurdles in. In this like, very specific history of training where encountering, like a body that is not necessarily of that history, and I'm not necessarily talking about only like, you know, skinny white, able-bodied, the kind of typical normative image of dancers, but dancers who like really have, like, studied and trained, and it's, it's been a hard place to kind of navigate as, as these expectations that come with that kind of, that I found that have come with this kind of history. And I'm very curious, like, how like, I mean, I also don't expect people to necessarily, like want to rupture that or, like, want to, like, work with me on that. But I've, like been invited into a lot of contexts. Specifically, with like, quite, you know, like, amazing choreographers who've been doing this, their whole lives, who actually like felt very challenged by me, by my body and like, what like they thought they could do with me versus what they actually in their mind will, you know, in the reality of the studio and the reality of the performance, and I'm like, trying to sort of spin it in a positive way. Because like, there's a part of it, that is body fascism, there is a part of it that is actually like, people who have been carrying around a whole history of like training and pain and expectation that I will never know, a history of like, people wanting to like break those habits. A lot of dancers around me talk about their habits, talk about how they need to make, like a big conversation is that I just am fascinated by and hate and love is this, like, I'm always told by choreographers to, like, make it look effortless, make it look effortless, and I'm like, but I am, I don't consider this body to be effortless, ever. And in my own work, that is like, the last thing that I ever want to do is to make myself look effortless. You know, like, I want people to see the bodies that I collaborate with working and you know, and like creating these histories and pushing and also like, enjoying it and loving it and exploring it and, and all of that. But I will just say I did have this kind of like the kind of Fuck Tree moment of being held by this tree. I alternatively did kind of reach a point performatively very recently, where I started to understand effortlessness in a totally different way, because I actually just like something in me in this moment of performing. And I think it was like the tension the time of night, like all of these elements that were like surrounded by this performance. I experienced like what I would consider to be effortlessness where I was like, crossing like physical and emotional thresholds at the same time that I hadn't experienced before. And that was really exciting. I wouldn't necessarily say I could just be like, like, you know, do it, do it, do it. Because it was about the moment you know, it was about all the elements around the moment it was the scene, it was the atmosphere, all of it. But anyway, yeah, I think that these body politics, I hear a lot of dancers who are coming from a contemporary context, talk about how they want to, like break these habits, but then I don't actually I have can't say I've actually experienced a relationship of breaking habits within that which I'm still very interested to experience and I still want to know what it feels like to be choreographed by somebody. Something else that like, hasn't really truly happened for me yet, because I always get into fights about it. But yeah, I don't. I don't know if that answers your question, but it's also like a process I'm in right now. So you know.

### **Audience**

What I wanted to ask is, I see very clearly, Liz your contextualization within, you know, the queerness of the experience of cruising, and there is something really transient and imposed lack of safety in so many interesting characteristics about having sex in public and interacting with people and the unsafety of being queer. So, there is a very significant binding view between you and the tree, although you might not be an immediate person who benefits from that the cruising experience and it's primarily you know, cis gay men, but I'm trying to understand your connection to the river, and the queer perspective. And I personally experienced a discomfort about the fact that the stones are here. I'm trying to see why this specific river, what is the connection to your histories and the trauma, how does that relate to you as a person? Because I think that, you know, as I, you know, as a white other person myself, there is sometimes a habit of claiming experiences in terms of, I see myself connected to various things. So I'm trying to understand why that particular river for you? What is the part that feels okay in terms of taking the stones and bringing them here? You know, how does that work? What is your process around that?

### **Laura Burns**

Short and long answers to that. I mean, I think there's a, this is the ongoing discomfort, right, of this practice. For me, which is, yeah, which is, which is unworked out still, like, I'm kind of staying with it for all of these reasons. But also, the short answer is, I don't know, like, I don't know, why this kind of dragged back to this place has continued to happen. And I think this is what we were also thinking about when we were talking about codependency yesterday. And I started to think about

this potential, like over identification with histories which I can make, you know, it's like, there's, there's ways that I've understood myself in that, in that, within that, in terms of like, my human personal ancestry, and I don't want to name that right now, but at the same time, there's this kind of, like, complete unknown about it as well, which is, like, problematic and also, I don't want to just turn away from it. Like I understand I don't, I don't keep going back to lots of different places, you know, so there's also this feeling that I think we're both interested in of like, all that came up in conversation between us which is where like, the autonomy of the stone, let's say of the river of the place is kind of always there alongside all of the histories and all of the violence is like within that place as well. And so I don't understand which I don't want to differentiate or understand like, which parts I'm going back for like I don't know that. And with the stones, I think again, it's this like really precarious meeting place of feeling like I have to trust a little bit in why we're still in dialogue. Like I can't answer that question, why we're still in dialogue? But I have to also trust that there's something about that that I need to stay with. And yeah, what I mean about saying like, it's okay, it's not okay, is that I've had long periods of time thinking like "oh fuck, like, what am I doing? I need I need to like, why are these here with me and take them back", and also then periods of time feeling like I have a sense of why we're in dialogue still and yeah, and I'm thinking of myself in relation to like, my in my own life my relationship to like ownership, property, privilege, my relationship to ancestries of mental health like I'm those those are my kind of, those are two of the things that like come up in this relationship we're not really there's no full answer. Sorry. Yeah. Um, but yeah, like I'm maybe we'll stop there but like, thanks for the question.

*(Outro: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021)*

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