



Dance, Intimacy and the Civic #2 with Vanessa Grasse and Nita Little

(automated transcript)

SPEAKERS

Nita Little, Heni Hale and Vanessa Grasse

(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 ID's 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 independentdance.co.uk/library.

(2021 audio file begins)

Heni Hale

Hello everybody and welcome. It's great to see some familiar, and maybe not so familiar faces here. Can everyone hear me okay? Um, I'm Heni and I'm co-director of Independent Dance ID, based here in London and this evening, we're bringing you the first in a new series of public conversations that ID is curating in partnership with Sadler's Wells and Roehampton University, and this series is replacing ID's long running Talk series, talks programme Crossing Borders that we ran since 2008 on Tuesday nights in autumn. We've now shifted this program to running for talks as conversations intermittently throughout the year and this year they're all springing from or relating to the topic of intimacy and the Civic. So this is the first event happening online, and the following talks will happen in between now and March, 2020, and we hope that some will be held in person, always hoping, and that they will be held in the three partner of venues, so our venue is Siobhan Davies Studios and Roehampton University and at Sadler's Wells, and that we also plan, the ones in person to also be hybrid events so we're experimenting with a lot of hybrid at the moment. So this title this year is titled intimacy and the Civic comes as a response to the year that we've had an ID. Within a pandemic. The concept of intimacy has been heightened. In the last year and a half, because of the limitations to touch and seeking new ways to mitigate isolation. Maintain depth of connection. We've got some noise. Yeah, intimacy is something that becomes inherent in movement practices that foreground the relational and specific ways of attending to self and others. And there are a lot of practices that happen in our program in our building. So this year IDs also been busy with the questions about ways that these intimate relational practices that aren't just the artist in these contexts that we run, can also have impacts beyond that community into other areas of civic life. And we ask the question where does intimacy exist in civic life, and how do practices of relational listening and of reciprocity feed into areas of social justice and civic responsibility. So I won't say any more about this because I want you to listen to the fabulous speakers that I'm going to introduce now. So I'm delighted to welcome, Nita little who's all the way in the West Coast of America, and Vanessa Grasse, who I think is in Leeds that correct Vanessa? Yeah. And in a way just to say that this title of Intimacy and the Civic inviting Nita and Vanessa we didn't necessarily ask them to directly answer any questions about intimacy in the Civic, but that this title is kind of a channel that, then their conversation, and you'll hear a little bit about each of their practices and current concerns. It's just a channel for that conversation to sit within. It's going to be about an hour and then there'll be time for questions. We're going to open the floor to questions. If you have thoughts or questions and comments, it's preferable if you don't write them in the chat but write them for yourselves, and then at the, in the half hour for questions, you can then either unmute yourself and speak them to the Zoom room, or write them in the chat and I will field them to Nita and Vanessa so you can do it either way that suits you. Without further ado, I'm going to hand you over to the wonderful Nita and Vanessa. Thanks very much. I'm going to remove myself. There we go.

Nita Little

Thank you Heni, and thank you, ID for having us. This is an opportunity to really delve into some pertinent information of inquiry. An Inquiry into what is it that's happening here and now. In these times, which are such unusual times. And it's also an opportunity for me to investigate my own work within this topic. And I love getting together with Vanessa. Vanessa and I have really, we haven't known each other that long for a few years, and I had the opportunity to work with her company a few years back, which was really great fun, great fun because we share an interest in attention and touch and how it is that touch is a critical relational practice. To introduce myself to you, I come from a modern dance, literally modern dance José Limon, Martha Graham studios, modern dance into postmodern dance having worked with Steve Paxton, and the initiation and development of contact improvisation, right from the moment. Prior to there even being contact improvisation so I got to see that whole body of work and be a part of that body of work emerging. And that has deeply formed who I am, contact improvisation is has been a running call in my life I have been curious, I have listened, my understanding of life questions I have turned to the physical through contact improvisation through those relational practices to answer them, and contact what I find is that contact really doesn't abide by culture. Culture is something that rides on top of it all. And so I defined myself these days, as an activist for relational intelligence, because I find it doesn't exist, that much. As if not certainly not as much as it could. And that means, as I'm sure I'll have cause to bring up, that means relational practices with oneself, and with our worlds. So, yes so early I've been doing contact improvisation since 1972. And in those early days, I realized that, and I mean, almost immediately. That what I paid attention to determined what was possible, and what would happen. So attention was or what I would call it the time, the mind. The mind became a really important investigation for me in terms of what I was doing with my mind when I was moving. Now I was a contact I was a contemporary dancer, my practice was in dance improvisation was through Judith Dunn and black music. So I have a history of improvisation that comes through forms informed by black music. And into that work, I started working with Steve Paxton on something that is a completely different state of mind completely different attentional practice. And that attentional practice is contact and is highly relational deep into the physics of my relationship to the earth in and and felt physics, I mean, I had to know in a deep and intimate way what was happening in order to capture momentum as I'm hurling myself into space to land on somebody's body. And in that landing be informing, not just of my own self but of them about what's possible in that moment, so it was a completely different attentional practice. A great deal of my work throughout until I was probably 45/50 years old. Yeah 50 was figuring out that relationship, how does that work? How is it that I can do both of those kinds of movement and how did they stop being in commensurable how do they live in the same world at the same moment, and that, that inquiry taught me a massive amount about the mind, body, I then had to go and get a PhD because dance had taught me so much. I went got the PhD in not in dance, in performance studies. My dissertation is about articulating presence, because I'm interested in being a physical being, an embodied being. Articulating presence creative actions of attention in contemporary dance, and it's now been not quite 10 years since I got the PhD, eight years, and I've been doing a great deal of work. As I said being a relational activist and really talking, exploring developing defining inquiring of our relations in this world in which we as Western in western world, we have not a great history of relations, our relations, our relational practices are often hierarchical. Our training in attention supports that practice. And there's, so that's why that I'm butting up against culture all the time, and I'm redefining what's possible, all the time it's my work. And so I teach teaching is a joy, that's where a lot of that shows up. Okay, I'm done with Nita, you're on Vanessa.

Vanessa Grasse (15 minutes)

Thanks so much Nina, we pick up on a lot of what you said a thing in our conversation so I'll do a brief intro, as well about my practice. Yes so I'm an independent dance artist from Sicily, Italy based in Leeds UK, and I might work, I would say in the crossover between choreography, walking art installation and environmental art. So I work mostly outdoors in public spaces, and like you need though with improvisation and with participatory element, cross disciplinary practices, and I do also have background in contact improvisation, I think that's how we met in the first place, making practicing choreographic work which is what I've been mostly focusing in recent years is really my way of doing somatic research. So somatic research and interdisciplinary questionings really is what underpins my practice and the performative work is just a branch of a larger inquiry usually. So that, to the topics of today's event, provoked me to really look at my work and ask what is the role of intimacy and civic. In my practice, and so I thought I'd share some of my work with you today through the lenses of today's topic I knew this introduction also is a little provocation and kickstart for the conversation we need. So I realized I don't usually use the word intimacy, I often talk about, I'll talk about experiencing connectivity relationality and empathic connections, which can all be part of an experience of intimacy and I'm sure we'll touch upon this with Nita. And so intimacy can manifest in different ways, and include a variety of experiences and let me go and share my screen. So I had some fun making a short non exhaustive extracts of different species of intimacy in public in the public realm with humans and non humans that unfolded in my work on. So this is Movementscape, it was a participatory, it's a guided sensorial walk through urban spaces and I wrote few things for each work. The city reveals itself through it's matter, a playground for the senses, it's civic intention becomes malleable, a tall building stands behind us, then close to our face, then above us, as we lie down below it and embrace its verticality, new relationships and intimate landmarks emerge as we walk and take time to encounter, befriend and relate to various forms of life. Mesh. Mesh, is a participatory choreography with 10 dancers which

Nita came and worked with us. She did some mentoring for us and invite, we invite people in the streets to play with us. Short, but felt moments of connection, sometimes through tactility and proximity of through a smile or noticing each other at a distance, as we both merge with and subvert the score of the city, the city unleashes its social potential for empathic human connections. And this is something a man who was passing by and then ended up joining us said "I moved to the UK three years ago this is the first time I feel welcome, like being part of something. I'm part of a group." Two works very similar moment to destruction and roots. They were audio walks and installation through the city featuring red chairs and boxes, intimacy with the changing rhythm of a city, intimacy with our memories of home and the places we feel belonging to, intimacy with this chair and anchor amongst the loud urban life, permission to land, to notice, to encounter myself, the city and people. Pathscaping is a practice of drawing and walking simultaneously. I did my MA on this practice and outdoors in urban and also rural places and I offer it mostly as a workshop. The drawing like a seasonal graph channels and inscribes my relational encounters in a walking, drawing dialogue with the environment. The city can invite wandering, wayfaring the reef, and getting lost as you might do in a forest, whilst being utterly immersed in what is present, it says, citing Walter Benjamin, and then Woven Land to finish with is my current work is an audio guided choreography for a group, for parks and woodland and exploring our relationship with trees and woodland life. The mycelium network in the soil that connects all trees can sense our footsteps. Myself and tree and the tree are both branching vascular and breathing beings. Finding intimacy with our ancestry as we imagine holding our grandparents hands, and since layers of rocks, deep inside the hair, becoming land an ecological and social ritual, becoming aware of the intimate relations we hold with the entangled ecology of life. And to finish with, before we start the conversation very quickly today before we started this event I wrote this and I thought I'll share it with you. I feel intimacy when I enter something with my attention and I'm being noticed back in this encounter we can begin to read each other, reading the unspoken reading a substance, we come closer, we merge but it doesn't need physical touch, or proximity. And so these questions they, for us, how can we offer embodied practices that allow the unfolding of a variety of species of intimacy, different ways of becoming familiar of experiencing empathy of relating. And how can our practices offer a way in which the prescribed civic structures, designs and intentions might become more malleable and porous. So how can we offer new but also ancient ways of relating?

Nita Little

Beautiful Vanessa, your work is beautiful, really lovely there and valuable questions. It made me think of how, especially that last part, thinking about the ways we touch the kinds of touch we touch, touch as the sense that we really understand as intimate. And that, that which is touch is not simply located at our flesh, but that touch is a spatial and attentional practice and how important it is for us to understand that as Alvin Noway would say "everything is touching everything" that touch is not something that only happens when what I call your skin sack comes in contact ends in actual contact with something, but that it is already happening right now, if you will open to recognizing that. So for instance the top of your head is touching the ceiling. And if you move, and you allow that extension of selfhood. That is, and now this requires that you really go against culture. To do that practice you really have to say, okay, I'm not going to limit myself to this small little person, this nice, tidy little social being. I'm going to be a much larger being. And when I do that, I extend it's like wings that open, and the top of my head, knows really where the ceiling is if I walked through a door. If I'm embodied, I'm going to feel the the lentil of the door as a tactile experience.

Vanessa Grasse

That's wonderful, I think, yeah, we definitely have that in common in our practice of working with really question and explore what tactility can be really impactful, a lot of the work I do in my practice, very similarly to what you described working with the tactility of the space between, we were saying how in the city things can be bouncing back at you are less porous, very differently from working and being in relation to a treat than being with a building. However, even a building can be porous but you have to allow yourself to you have to have the availability to receive that porosity, you have to work with your porosity, your own porosity, your own availability and tactility before other things like perhaps a more of a first impression could feel less welcoming.

Nita Little

So Vanessa, I want you to go further into porosity. Now, I want to ask you questions about that, I want you to explain what is the methodology, what are the strategies for being porous?

Vanessa Grasse

Well, I'm showing this, out there there's loads, actually today, I was, it was really fun to. I was thinking about different yeah porosity and malleability and membranes. And I did write down in fact actually a few on the practices narrowing down actually some specific practice that I've named as well that I developed, and I employ in my teaching, often in teaching because it's like, you know, in teaching. It's where really we can go deep into investigating states of being investigating our embodied practice and with my making, obviously I try to offer those things, but they come in a different ways obviously is

different from what you teach. And so what's the methodology I mean, for example, I work a lot with what I would call states, relational states and certain states can be like, what is it to be in a state of absorbing and being absorbed? So I will guide people through an exploration of exploring that state or I have a whole practice of exploring what is the extent of our experience of here? So is it just the geography of your skin touching the ground, or how far does the sense of being here can extend? Can you embrace things in the distance? Can you embrace your family in Sicily? So, and shrinking and extending that sense of here seems to also for me, be part of that work of porosity and permeability of say permeable edges I think a lot of my work has been around trying to figure out edges of our being of our attention, edges in the world. And just a perception geographical edges and yeah and the porosity of those edges and obviously in nature we, we know these edges are all porous and malleable. What would you say in your practice? Could you say something about how you go about exploring porosity?

Nita Little (30 minutes)

So, well, yeah, I noticed a few things. I kind of make a distinction. Noticing that there's many ways that we can attend, hugging your family in Italy can be an image level action, an action of my imagining that I am hugging them. Or I can engage it as, as a physical extension of my tactile body, and that takes a great deal of work. I mean, to get to Italy, takes me really having practiced becoming quite large, quite extended tactfully and quite receptive. As an image, I can bring the family here to my room, I can send myself there, so that I don't have to get that large, I mean there's so many ways that Nita can play Nita on an image level that engages the physical senses, so that I have a physical experience, a state, I want to deal with that word state. Yeah, my attentional state changes if I'm in it, I'm working from an image bank in that sense of a literal, in a literal way. If I invite myself to be touched, to feel touched. Right now I'm going to take us into an urban place into that building that you were talking about. Yeah, I'm going to feel that building. And when I receive that building. I need to feel how is it that I know that building within myself, how is it that I am changed by that building and to do that work, I have to have an understanding of presence. In my work, I had to define what presence meant and I defined presence as a disturbance, not a social disturbance not a psychological disturbance, but a disturbance on the level of physics. When a leaf falls into a quiet pond, the pond moves, the pond is changed, there's a disturbance. The leaf is also changed, it's also disturbed by the pond things disturb each other, nothing is as we said, separate from anything. Therefore, when I think of the building. I feel first, the presence of the building, both as a physical, how is it disturbing the space that I am present to. So to do that job, I of course, am in an extended space, an extended tactile Nita, and one of the methods I do, one of my tools is to practice simultaneously, when I practice presence I practice, where there might be visibility, I would practice in visibility, where there is somethingness, I would be practicing nothingness. So where the building is, I practice nothingness and of course there's a building there, there's not nothingness there but there's simultaneously a building and nothingness. And I feel the disturbance that is somethingness and particularly, the somethingness that is building. I do that as a dance practice as well, I move, and in the hand that's moving there's also nothing there so I know. Absolutely, there's something that I am. That, by the way, works really, really great as a practice for understanding rhythm for understanding texture, for understanding how it is the presence is within you. And you know this stuff goes on and on, guys, I am very, I can get into this and you want me to stop now.

Vanessa Grasse

Yeah, I mean, it also reminds me both of us really engaged with the practice of really all the senses being tactile. And in my practice I've been practicing in urban space, any spaces, outdoor space even in a room, during lock down. Well, that's been my anchor somehow to remind myself, that the tactility is not confined within. Yeah, like you said the sack, or the skin, and to really engage with the practice of exploring and questioning what, how I can experience tactility and their own my eyes behave like touch my hearing is tactile, my attention is tactile and yeah I also spent obviously in this period of pandemic, that has been incredibly valuable. Right, because if we can be tactile also without this tactile, it's liberating, it's fulfilling, and like you said, it goes also beyond certain cultural restraints.

Nita Little

Yeah, yeah. So this to stay on topic in this sense of the tactile as a lens into the intimate, a way of understanding intimacy. Seems really significant. About four years, three years ago, I taught a coaching, whether we call it a coaching practice or something like that. It's a week long intensive at Impuls Tanz with Kerstin Kussmaul on, it was called Also dancing: Intimacies with the in Human, and that understanding these intimacies with that which is more than human intimacy with that which we don't necessarily think of as a subject for intimacy spaces, intimacy with a space. I mean right now for instance if you were to all look around your room, and find the least cared for place in that space. The place you least, go to the one that gets forgotten. That little located place. And how would you go about becoming intimate with it, as if you already weren't. I mean that's the joke. The joke is that, of course you're intimate with that space, you had to be intimate with that space to leave it alone. In a sense, it's like, you know, it's like making a sculpture the negative space is so critical to what exists, and bringing spaces, alive, into vitality, even when they are the places you don't go to, even as they are.

Vanessa Grasse

That's beautiful. So there you said something about you that also that moment of, of, allowing that intimacy to emerge, you're also allowing that to become a place of vitality, so something becomes alive, even if it's the third corner of the room. That's, wonderful and

Nita Little

The forgotten corner

Vanessa Grasse

It reminds me, we had this question the other day when with a child. Okay, so why is intimacy important than you know what for was the value. And so in a way already you touch upon that. And also, you mentioned the word care, so you know, as we become intimate with intimacy we have familiarity, we become familiar with something right, and with this familiarity also there is the possibility for care for more care and there is another big aspect for me of the value of working with intimacy, for example the work I'm doing with trees for example it's very much about that, it's how can we care for something we don't even notice we don't even know. We have to get to know it, something we have to become familiar. We have to find a relationship, and perhaps find intimacy and perhaps other people who work with me with a tree will then use that word. Through that experience then we also have care.

Nita Little

Yeah. Well, right now I want to play with that with you. The forgotten tree, right. That forgotten tree that is, I wonder about it I think about how is it that you come into remembering the tree. How is it that you come into noticing, its vitality and engaging in vitality with that tree. How is it that we, really have to start with not noticing and being in a generous space with ourselves. For those corners of the room that we have forgotten for all that we have forgotten. And allow ourselves to see how important those places are for the work that they have been doing, they've been doing incredible work.

Vanessa Grasse

Yeah, the tree or the forgotten corner doesn't always need me, or need me to notice it. But sometimes it does sometimes it does need to be

Nita Little

When you, exactly, when you come into relations with it when you recognise, you've already been in relations with it, you've been forgetting it. Yeah, forgetting is a relational practice.

Vanessa Grasse

Now that's great, that's interesting, actually I hadn't thought about that before when I was especially with trees I was more like beating myself for forgetting about them when I do.

Nita Little

Well the fact of the matter is that they've been present to you. You've been. They have been disturbing you, and you have chosen to forget that disturbance but to do that job you have to do it constantly. I'm really going to pay attention to something else because, you know, so it's kind of fun to think of those things in, you know, mess with how we mess with how we, how we culturally understand things.

Vanessa Grasse (45 minutes)

Yes, yes and I was thinking just before the talk, there was this plant that I just, I know this coming down the stairs a plant that's been forgot to on top of the shelves, and it was dying. And I was so upset and I just gave it some water, and then some things do need my attention and needs my care, however the plant lost my care because it's been put in a pot. It should not be in a pot in the first place on top of a shelf. So I'm not sure where I'm going with that.

Nita Little

Trust me I'm not advocating for not attending but I am I am advocating for starting where you are. Yeah. Yeah, and really watch out for all those shoulds, because the second you do, say the word should you are invoking, provoking and demanding some kind of cultural standard. Yeah, absolutely. And be very careful of doing that, because when we do that, we define limitations, extraordinary limitations, and yes we do that we need culture I mean I'm not, again not advocating for no culture but I should certainly am for disturbing that culture because right now, how culture has defined relational practices is far too limited. We are not a healthy relational culture, Not with our worlds not with our forests, not with our trees, not with

our plants not with our natural environments, the wild, the wild places, not with, and even not with so much with one another and with our civic worlds so let's get into the Civic, because it's so easy for us to go into intimacy with civic civility and the Civic.

Audience

I don't want to be rude, but there's a word missing. Please, please, I can't it's almost irresistible. Because I know a lot about indigenous culture here, but the word is humility. And I feel like we need humility to listen to the world, instead of always thinking we have to act on the world, but thank you I'm just, I just get, it's so exciting. I got up at dawn to do this.

Vanessa Grasse

Thank you. Yes absolutely.

Nita Little

Bravo. Yeah, beautiful Alice. Absolutely right, who are we, who are we, is the question. And and if we are living in hierarchical cultures with hierarchical language. And let me say, as I just did in class today. Watch out for those prepositions because those prepositions, set you up into hierarchical relationships. Prepositions are the part of speech that are defining your relationships to things. And if you walk, and as I did this in class, I'll do it again, because it works so well. It works so well. If you walk through a forest or in a forest, you have defined yourself as not the forest and culture, our cultural language supports that definition ad nauseam. And if you're defining yourself as not the forest, you're probably defining yourself, not just as different. But as different with a twist, better, more free, more capable, more, more something. So going back to listening, imagine going through, going to a forest, and walking, as the forest. Can you walk as the forest, what changes, because all of this defines your embodiment. If you'd walk through a forest, your embodiment establishes separation. And yes, you can touch the trees but you are in a forest, touching a tree, even if it is at a spatial difference when you walk as a forest something's changed your embodiment shifts all together, you soften and that humility that Alice is asking for. Can't help but be present. It's impossible to not have that word it and now humility is not something separate. It's something absolutely indigenous so to speak to the action of forcing, or have worlding.

Vanessa Grasse

Yeah absolutely, I mean I feel walking as a forest is very much the practice I've been engaging with and going back to the city and more urban life scenario, I'm thinking in a way, yeah I feel like I've been doing that for some time with the work, you were part of as well. There was something about really, yeah maybe going back with the idea of humanity really just staying with what is already there, allowing what is already there to, you to be really be part of that, and then allow something else to emerge from that rather than putting something in it on it, or intervene in some sort of way. So the idea of really being with what's there, and then things trickling and merging in a different direction from like you said the leaf falling on the pond, the ripples are created.

Nita Little

Yeah, so there's a broad word that I think is really important here, Karen Barrad feminist science writer writes about the kind of the anthropology of science. And the word, that she uses is response ability as to, you know together response with a capital A, ability, and that remaining in a response able relational practice to your worlds. Seems what you're saying in some ways there, Vanessa. And I think it's a valuable position to take. and not responsible. Yeah, which is a different thing, responsible for, maybe responsible to could be a possibility but response able to seems a position of respect and respect seems a really important positional practice is. And so if we talk about civic spaces, spaces that are by their very nature, culturally, establishing cultural practices. And then you go in and you dance in them totally disturbing the cultural practices. Totally, asking for something else of the people who are present to your dancers, and it's a wonderful thing to see people disturbed in the social sense. Not sure they are destabilized. They don't know how am I supposed to be here now. The definitions aren't obvious anymore,

Vanessa Grasse

You know, they one that are stabilized are mostly the shoppers I mean we've been working mostly in the city centre. Yeah, people who actually have decided to engage with the city in the way it was prescribed for them but the truth is they also the city is lived and inhabited by loads of people like teenagers who are there to mess around like we were. Or homeless people who are actually living in the corner of the street, and, and so the city, actually, is meant, you know, in a way, is defined then, by the people inhabiting it and with that work, the magical thing was there actually we noticed that we noticed all the different ways we were encountering people, and often, for very brief moments we were encountering these shoppers. The moment they could stop and then they had fun, but people would stayed with us longer were the people maybe more at the edges. People like homeless people or like that guy that I gave you the quote with. I think he was just watching us for ages, and he

was just there having a walk in the city, and then decided to engage with us for longer. So yeah, I just also wanted to say. Yeah, there is the prescribed score of the civic life, but then that's already disturbed by many types of different people and how they live their lives. Yeah,

Nita Little

The interesting thing is, you and I were talking about this, we've had a great conversation all the way already guys so Vanessa and I are coming to this from having had really a nice, juicy time together. A few days back, but the score that is the architectural score, the structural score of a city, designed to keep people moving to keep you from sleeping in the corners to keep you from delaying or taking too much time. The traffic moving, inviting you to feel one of many and to be drawn constantly, drawing you to places and sending you, actually it's a drawing and sending score. I could say.

Vanessa Grasse

Yeah, and we said, in a way it's kind of already designed for doesn't afford for an empathy, empathic relationship, it's really not designed for that. So in a way, then, when where we come into place is to shuffle that around and see where the affordance of an empathic relationship can be because actually it can be there, but in a way, you have to weigh that up and you have to notice like noticing the forgotten corner and see what that affords. Um, yeah, I must say I have moved a bit away from the city center life. I had a strong resistance to go in the city center for a year and a half now since the pandemic. So yeah, talking about the city, I haven't been to Leeds city center for a year and a half, but also is thinking about the you know the Civic the word Civic, we both said yesterday, we don't usually use that term. In our practice, so I haven't, I've used public life, public spaces, and the Civic makes you think of some sort of government, and also your civic responsibility as a civilian, and so the Civic is not just the physical place, right, it's also how you position yourself in relationship to political life to yes, civic ideas and constructs.

Nita Little

Exactly and yeah and let me point out just as that corner of the room that you ignore is, or you're very room right here has various places of use and disuse. So to the urban centers the Civic world defines those places that are wild. And so we can talk about the wild lands, but we're still talking about the Civic, and we can talk about the parks and we're still talking about the Civic. What gets allowed to be forgotten? Or left alone, or not touched? What gets left to the spiders?

Vanessa Grasse

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, the work I do, what happens a lot is coming face to face with the reality of who owns a land, who owns the space, you know, in public, there's really almost nothing public, it's all private, and who makes those decisions so how the spaces are used, who cares for who's the guardian, who can be the guardian for a forest, for example, who can yeah, where is the space left for the birds in the city. And yeah, so, and that's all civic thinking. Absolutely, I mean, nothing can, in a way, be removed from our social and civic life you know. Yeah,

Nita Little (1 hour)

So in talking about the pandemic and our civic life during a pandemic. Our civic responsibility to stay at home. For instance, it's been a joy. I have to say, the time taken to explore the environment of an apartment. To really to understand it as intimate space to come into right relations and I use that word right relations with the objects that I have invited within this space, and to be in respectful relations in the right relations is always going to be relations of respect. And how do we take from this experience of our own little mini civic world into a more public places so that we start to bring that capacity for respect that capacity for being touched by being touched back. What has brought me to very powerfully is how critical it is to, to move past the limitations of a, you know, a mind and with a body, a body that has a mind that limitation that hierarchy. And we can think Descartes and others, Plato for this positionality this languaging and really working against that bring the world back into its animate possibilities, animate potential. So, I'm very invested in, in vitality and bringing the world, that my response ability is to bring the world back into life. For me as an everyday experience, understanding, I am not just touching, I am being touched. I am not, I am not just receiving something, I am being received and to take response ability for my presence, the disturbance I am. What can that disturbance do? That's why I probably call my I call my practice generating joy. So my email, anybody wants to get in touch with me nl@generatingjoy, that's me at Gmail. That's how you reach me, because that's what I'm constantly concerned with.

Vanessa Grasse

That's wonderful. I saw Heni popping up on the screen, which means it's time

Heni Hale

Yeah, I popped myself on the screen just because we said we would open to questions and that felt like a good transition.

Nita Little

Can we leave it with Vanessa just one Vanessa it's your, I just want to take the ball to your court, and from you go to questions.

Vanessa Grasse

What do you want me to say? No I mean, I just also resonate a lot with what you said about working at home, a lot, and being in touch with the non human a lot as well and the attention to details, there's so much value in slowing down, and really paying attention to the details. And I think, yeah, that's as a maker, you know it's my job to bring that back into the public and I love kind of creating work, that stimulates all of that, all those questions that we've been mentioning, and, yeah, there's millions of ways of doing that, you know why I think as embodied practitioners, and creatives, we have so many tools to create vehicles, I always like to think of my work, even if it's not a workshop but as a vehicle for a particular experience I'm not placing something I'm not showing something I'm not lecturing about something, it's a window into something. So, yeah, so let's see what comes next. So yeah, I'm happy to go into chatting with everybody who's here, I'd like to see everyone finally.

Heni Hale

Um, well, we can. There are several ways to do this we can go into a gallery view if that feels easier for us to then sort of see people raise hands on I can sort of call names I think it would be easier than everyone talking at once but um, if you know you can use the raise hand button or you can write something in the chat and we'll just try and keep track of that and we'll feed those in. So everyone know that the raise hand buttons is down the bottom and one of your controls. But, I mean, I want to say thank you both really because I've had loads of thoughts it's incredible and I particularly picked up on this. Forgetting as a relational practice that really struck me as something that I hadn't. I really liked to hear it, and I sort of liked to hear more about it, it makes me think about how relationality is always something that is in a process of becoming in relation and so in order to become in relation you have to sort of forget things in order to re recognize so I kind of resonated me on those ways. And I suppose that leads to my, maybe it's a question maybe it's something to just sort of throw in the pot is that I, I felt like you were really beginning to touch. When you're dealing with the civic space you were really being beginning to sort of describe elements of the Civic or particularly current western elements of the Civic that seemed to have a lot to do with control you didn't use the word control but it came up for me as a sort of what it is to sort of be controlled by design or feel controlled and then yeah, something about self control, or intimacy with self and sort of what can be done to change your relationship to control.

Nita Little

So, yes, okay, changing your relationship to control. To me, it means to change the prepositions, you're actually using, which means today in class for instance we worked with the practice of being alongside, rather than being at, rather than facing somebody in a frontal relationship being in an alongside relationship. So, you're walking alongside. It's a positioning, in which you no longer can be hierarchical if you're alongside. And how is it, we can do that with objects or spaces. How is it? And you know I play all the time so let's play right now. How could you be alongside, take a position, alongside that place in your room that you have forgotten. Not doing an add it, fix it, manage it, change it, but being alongside it. Just notice what's happened. You start to embrace, in, in a lateral way, a lateral relationship, what a thought, not a vertical relationship, a lateral relationship. And when you walk alongside, I have a friend who has a dance company, the Equis projects in New York. She dances with horses, horses are socially different than humans, humans are predators. We go at things, at things. Our eyes are in front. We go at it, but we can practice this lateral, communal organisation that horses have, we can. Instead, we can be as the herd, we can be a herd, rather than be an individual moving through a bunch of people. We can choose to, not just join as in holding hands and staying separate but holding hands. It's a far more intimate space to join. I mean not join but to be lateral, go ahead.

Audience

I have a question, having worked with you both. It's so nice to hear you both speak. So, how much do we need otherness? Do we need to encounter otherness? Otherness can be the animate or the inanimate, and I always feel like if I engage in relational practices as we both teach and use them, I feel diversified by encountering otherness, through that relational practice. And I just wonder how that seeps into your practices and how much is that in. Yeah, if that makes any sense. So, I also feel like I'm becoming, as I'm becoming intimate with what I'm encountering and becoming intimate with myself, because through otherness I'm realising okay, who I am in a deeper way, because I have a diverse, I'm developing diverse relationships with the animate or inanimate, depending if I'm working in urban or natural landscapes. And in terms of the homogenizing tendencies of the human world, I wonder what role that plays in encountering otherness.

Vanessa Grasse

Oh yeah that triggers a lot of thinking. Because I think I've been involved with this also with the word otherness, a lot in my practice. And when I was working in MESH for example that you worked with, Manu, the otherness, we were working also with the families, a lot can be a lot of fear of otherness right so you're talking about otherness actually diversifying you and actually embracing the otherness so for a lot of people otherness actually does this movement does fear or rejection, and so in terms of encountering otherness, a lot of my work has also been I would say about. Yes, otherness to see what we hold in common in the otherness and to our knowledge and celebrate the otherness, to find a commonality with people and also with the non human with trees at the moment. For example, I have a workshop that's all about branching life and to become familiar with the common branching life that we have with this other species, not just with trees, but throughout the earth, either through the same ecosystems. So I'm not sure I'm answering your question, but there's something about encountering otherness and becoming familiar with the otherness. And noticing commonality and I guess because then my practice goes back to the empathic connection through that, through that commonality there is the experience of empathy also that emerges and the knife need that you want to add something else.

Nita Little

Boy, I never hear that word other than I don't go to my mother dying. And when my mother died. I was alone with her and as she was going through the stages of leaving her body. At some point she could no longer and she knew absolutely who I was, but she could not name me. She could name my brothers, Eric and Carl, but she could not name me, I became other. And for quite a while I thought about that other that I was. As she was going I said, "Mother, do you mean me, Nita?" And she said, "Oh yes, love". And what I understood was that other was not a separate thing, it wasn't that distancing she wasn't doing me, you, you know we're separate, it wasn't the other the culture, others. It was a recognition of me as other, other self, I was her in another form. I wasn't, it wasn't this. She couldn't name me because she couldn't separate, in a sense, she couldn't distinguish that I wasn't also her, in some phenomenological way. And that other has always interested me. That other that we can do and when I do that, walking as the forest, does it mean I don't recognise trees? Of course I recognise trees. But when I'm as, it's the same as what Mother was doing with me as she was leaving, she was being as me. And so she was able to take multiple positionality's in a really interesting way. She was herself, leaving earthly life, and she was me present to her leaving. And that other is like, oh my God, that's an extraordinary other may I really get that other? Because I do that thing now, with objects, with spaces, with people. I do not have to define them as other in that separating way, I can easily take a position of otherness that is intimate, an intimate other. I don't know if there's my answer. And yes it's glorious because difference is glorious, difference is enlivening and enhancing and joyful and I taste all that difference yes.

Heni Hale (1 hour, 15 minutes)

Amazing. So we have two comments in the chat from Renée Bellamy also : thinking of control reminding me of the term crowd control, and also thinking of the word communal and the questions that that asks. Renée if you want to hear back about that we could talk to that but there's also another comment from Susan: stimulated by forgetting reminds me of our relationship to decay or perhaps how we can embrace it, memory based on chance and imagination as much as evidence and explanation. The forgetting brought on by decay allows for a different form of recollection.

Nita Little

Hmm. Nice.

Heni Hale

Yeah, thank you, Renée, and thank you Susan and you might want to comment or respond

Vanessa Grasse

Any of the people you just read the comment from, do you want to say something more? Do you want to unmute any of you want to say something about that?

Audience

It's so stimulating and one of the things I found in these long months is. I get up in the middle of the night to do these calls on the other side of the planet and the brain works entirely differently and there's a whole different perceptual field going on, but I get so stimulated. I never want to appropriate Indigenous ways of knowing, Australian Aboriginal Indigenous ways of knowing I feel very a lot of humility around even speaking about it, but somewhere in this conversation with, even though I'm sure there's multiple different cultures, looking at the screen. Different ancestors and origins, I still feel like we take this dominant narrative, which is that what we have forgot already, is that there are these ways of knowing, they're very very well, very very well, and it's in the word colonising comes up and of course I am a white person in what was a black country. And there's almost still extraordinary suffering around that. And I think colonising we've colonised the planet, we colonise,

our ideas colonise and what indigenous people say, Aboriginal people say is, I am country, I am country, which I believe Nita, and Vanessa have made reference to in different ways but that word, country is me. There is no separation, and as I move more into my own attention or practice and I think Nita you and I met, maybe about the same age, I'm 70, and I've worked with Steve and Lisa and Nancy and Eva, wonderful Eva is here somewhere. Eva Karczag, and there's this growing towards dying. That becomes a deeply intimate, I feel like I'm beginning an intimate relationship with dying. Quite, quite remarkable experience, actually. Anywhere is does that offer some thoughts.

Nita Little

Wow. Welcome Alice yes I am 70 as well. And I do know what you're saying and mean that intimacy with with dying, actually has been for quite some time, both through others who go before me, and, yes, I am on the I am presently on the lands of the Snohomish that that my peoples the white peoples of the West have colonised. And I also am very aware of colonisation and I try to be very careful in my language, not to invoke and provoke and continue that practice and it's difficult, and I fail, and try again. And that's the only position I can have. I, again, along with that thinking about other I work to really notice what my positioning is and to be flexible constantly, so that I have the possibility of being not just alongside or as, but also being the country. I am the country. I am this place. I am this moment, I am that which I am present to and so my practice of presencing, presencing as a verb is very stimulating and important practice.

Vanessa Grasse

Just remind me, sorry, I'll just jump in with the, thanks so much for mentioning indigenous knowledge, and I'm from Sicily and it's a land that's been colonised so much and this is Sicilian is still considered the indigenous population, and I'm getting back to be more interested in my native language and a lot of the language in the Sicilian language uses the word. We are in a way, there is a lot of, of this, "I am this" or "we are this place" which is really interesting. And the other thing, yeah I'm not sure I would say I think I know that a lot of my work definitely stands out from what my grandparents taught me of being with the land, being the land. Yeah, it's amazing. But a lot of that knowledge even in Sicily it's being forgotten, and I just want to offer people here a few things then people might want to go and look at, amazing writer anthropology says you spoke highly of Aboriginal Australian culture Tyson Yunkaporta, you might want to look at, yeah. I've been familiarising with this work in the past few years, and then also I'm doing currently finishing a course that it's been six months long, called Guardians of the forest it's still on, I think that will be available online, and most of the teachers are indigenous leaders, ie learners and questioning what guardianship might mean in different cultures and. Yeah, so I can write that in the chat if it's useful,

Nita Little

Do that, do that, I think that's a great, great thing to do Vanessa. Yeah, resources. I wanted to address, Susan Sentler's memory based on chance and imagination as much as evidence and explanation. The forgetting brought on by decay, allows for a different form of recollection. And she says that's from Da Silva and how, when we're dealing with indigenous knowledge right now, which is and has been through stages of decay. As a result of being colonised. And how that that coming to it again coming a new bringing a new that, this allowance for forms of recollection that are not simply evidence based, forms of recollection that are not simply explained forms of remembering. Remember, I love the member part of remember we this is embodied work that we do and how important it is to be dancers and participate in this kind of work. The, the great gratitude I have to and for people who practice the embodied arts seems really important to acknowledge all of you, all of you who are here and how deeply that nurtures my heart. How deeply important it is to me that we are together, acting together, it may be my words but I know that the words don't happen without all of us.

Heni Hale

On that note, I'd like to just read from Donna Redlich who says I'm experiencing togetherness in otherness right now thank you. I thought that was to feed that in. And I also should probably say that we are kind of just slightly over time now, if anyone has a final question thought comment that we can, that feels like that, urging to say, I'm not seeing anything right now. We've got some thank yous. Daphne, thank you so much for your insights and articulate expression of these matters. I'm wondering if positionality gets in the way of intimacy. Is there a sense that individuality and togetherness can exist at the same time therefore possibly civil intimacy involves a loss of positionality.

Nita Little (1 hour, 30 minutes)

Maybe a loss of the sense of positionality but I think an embodied position is a positionality. I think positionality is just saying, we can move attention moves, it's not, it doesn't mean holding a position. I'm using the word positionality not from holding a stance, having a stance that I take as a position as an ideological position, not talking about ideology here I'm just talking about from where I'm seeing that my eyes have a place of locatedness that my experience has a place of locatedness, it may be that I am embodied in a certain way and of course we know embodiment is not just one thing, it's a, it's a huge world

of possibilities, it's not one embodiment, there is no such thing. There are there are only, only a myriad embodiments. Oh, my God, that's the territory.

Vanessa Grasse

The question and comments. Yeah definitely, I would think that taken from you. I think maybe it's not they get in the way positionality. It's more for me about making that positional experiencing positionality in a much more movable and malleable way. And yeah, like you said before Nita. We need a certain positionality to relate to be in intimacy, whether a we are in front, or we are laterally really changes that relationship. And so, whether it's about making our understanding of positionality because it's also an academic on the strands and field of research, where there is a cultural positionality ratio and are embodied, all of those can merge and be malleable and shift and play with that change positionality and see what happens. And see how the relating and relationship shifts, I think.

Heni Hale

Great, Thank you for that. I'll just read up two big yes comments because I love the word yes, comes from earlier in the day as well. So 'yes, this comes from a curatorial perspective it needs more to recognise embodied forms', and that's from Susan and from Lizzie 'Yes, the embodied arts slipping beneath the tectonic plates of culture as we know it.' Thank you both, and there's a message from Alice again 'to be born is wonderful addresses and addresses this conversation is from Luce Irigaray and a lovely message from Eva Eva Karczag 'thank you, Vanessa, Nita your mother story made me think of the mother-child connection in the womb, return to the beginning at the end, I am you, you are me is something we all know intimately'. That's a beautiful way of trying to round, trying to wrap this up, we could talk forever, I think about this because, I mean both of you are fascinating and I'm just completely delighted and provoked and stimulated by this, and it's been amazing, hearing from those of you at home in different parts of the world that have joined us tonight. I hope you've all come away with something that you that you were hoping for, or maybe even not something even more. I'm not gonna say much more I want to say a massive thank you to Nita little and Vanessa Grasse for moving us, getting us thinking. There are more thank yous coming in the chat. It's nice if we can all maybe get onto gallery view and just see who's here, maybe have a little wave, everyone. Thank you all for coming in. Thanks so much, Heni and Independent Dance for inviting us.

(Outro: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021)

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