



Against Value with Sam Ladkin

(automated transcript)

SPEAKERS

Sam Ladkin

(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 2019 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.

This is a field recording of variable quality with a live audience at Siobhan Davies Studios.

(2015 audio or video file begins)

Sam Ladkin

This is a work called against value. The first publication is an edited collection coming out in February of next year. And that's the Table of Contents has all sorts of things. There. The other thing is the poem by the great American poet Frank O'Hara, and I'm going to tell you nothing about that. That is that is a gift, nothing. Okay, so this is this is it. My expectation is that all of you have to deal with straightforward and much more insidious uses of value all the time, an example. In an attempt to be up to date, a brief close reading of the title of the latest green paper, by which academics are going to be valued in the next few years. This paper is expected to do the following, to reshape the higher education landscape to have students at its heart. And I'm not quite sure how a landscape can have a heart. But there we go. And I offer this not because it speaks to only those working within within education, but because it's language and the implications of its language are everywhere around us. And there are two ways in which value is used in this document. And indeed, I think in general, firstly, the term value is used repeatedly. That is the word value peppers documents, and it's most frequently used because it's understood to be in some sense, unanswerable you can't question value, the value of something you might be able to question, but the value of valuing something is irrefutable, or taken to be irrefutable. And I'll go on in this paper to explain, explain some of the reasons why. Secondly, value silently implicates itself and the discourse throughout the text, so that when we read another term, we automatically associated with value, we assume it is something valuable. It's salts, everything, and eventually everything tastes of salt. And here we have fulfilling our potential teaching excellence, social mobility, and student choice. So here's an example of the second the way in which implicates itself into other terms, each of the terms is going to be implicitly valued by their placement in the document all about getting institutions to justify their existence to justify their value. And of course, the document is really there as a form of control. The universities have been opened up by the way it is at the market, the government wouldn't want them to become autonomous within that market, and start doing or saying stuff that was unhelpful. So to keep everyone in line, you come up with measures by which institutions can be placed in a hierarchy, by which judgments of success and failure can be used as threats, or as punishment and very occasionally, as rewards. So what do we think of these words potential? We like the idea of potential it sits in a good tradition, going back to the ancient Greeks of flourishing, the good spirit, it's the ultimate aspiration. The task for all other practical philosophies, according to Aristotle, potential here is neatly vacated. What are the values hidden by this concept of potential? In reality, the title tells us that we have already failed. What are we being judged against our pre existent failure to have lived up to the myth of potential, were a child being dressed down by the headmaster, you fail to live up to your potential and potential is such a useful term, controlling term because it's chimerical there would be need to be natural or essential limitations which people could reach that there are no such potentials when we're living in society, potential itself is socially constituted. For theory, nuts, if there are any here, this is this is a do Rhydian thing. This is the supplement. The supplement which fills up something that's lacking and exceeds something which already exists, and it's being used to

punish us here. The word 'our' the distant echo of solidarity. Though not purely the case the state structuring of universities made as collegiate. So, olden times when we weren't privatise, essentially, we were, in some sense, a collegiate education system. Denigration of another university was of no advantage to each institution, sharing knowledge involved no financial loss, no financial loss to the value of that knowledge, we could live more or less according to a mutually supportive system before knowledge exchange itself had to become a metric of evaluation. And the word our here obfuscates that real change, which is the move from knowledge as a collegiate shared experience, to one in which the fundamental principle is competition. Competition is the value hidden away behind the word our it's right there. In the Browne report, Lord Browne's report on higher education, competition raises quality competition raises quality. That Browne's report has a brilliant title, written by an oil executive who worked for decades in the most environmentally destructive industry, which was securing a sustainable future for higher education. Yeah, this, this one comes up with the beautiful expression. Sorry, sustainable here is one of the terms of environmental discourse, and pretty dubious, I think, too. But if we're going to have securing a sustainable future for higher education, we might have to think about the apocalypse. Unless we hit the apocalypse and all human life comes to an end, which I don't think is entirely impossible, I suspect the future will sustain itself with or without our help. So we might notice to here that the title we're dealing with, with is framed by an institution, the department for Business Innovation and Skills. And that, of course, betrays the switch of higher education, from within the remit of the Department for Education, into the new manual, the department for Business, Innovation and Skills, implicitly, therefore, the values of our potential align with the values of business rather than, for example, the values of people, I can, and do indeed go on about this at length elsewhere, but just to pick up on another moment of this the idea of social mobility, we're very trained to be very fond of social mobility. But of course, it suggests a stable and hierarchical class structure, in which some people are valued incredibly, highly at the top, and some are barely valued at all or are considered consumers of other people's value at the bottom. And social mobility suggests only that the health of society will be judged on whether a few from the bottom might be able to weasel their way up to the top. Student choice, of course, is a consumerist idea too. So the terms of the report, productivity, transparency, driving up standards, and of course, excellence, the report is necessarily vague on excellence. Excellence is not something achieved easily or without focus, time challenge and change. Excellence is not something achieved without change. That I think is the essential threat to the document. Part of the thinking behind my project here is to work out the ways in which this kind of thing is damaging. I have some sympathy for the use of the word excellence. It's a vague term, but it's been landed on for a particular reason, the vagueness of acuity of the term is helpful to those seeking to control the control the discourse, essentially. And in this case, it's Boris Johnson's younger brother, Joe Johnson, who is such a painful human being that he's just signed state documents with just Joe. First person Joe, there the blood boils, rather, but okay, a colleague then ran what's called a corpus linguistics, kind of analysis of this green paper.

Sam Ladkin (15 minutes)

So looked at the document and the number of times the word value is used in this quite brief document. It's used 47 times in the main body of the discussion, and it's almost exclusively a noun. So it's an entity which can be subject to medical evaluation, and only twice as it's something we do, right. And it's most frequently defined in monetary terms value for money. And something which is the object of commodifying processes involving relations between students and consumers, consumers and universities as providers. So it uses terms deliver, ensure demand, expect drive champion, it is also itself evaluated as something which is lasting minimal and poor, variously. So just a sort of way of introducing when I talk about value, here, I'm talking about several connected processes. I'm talking about the use to which the word value is put, and I'm going to describe some of that value works by sounding like something that's intrinsic, we talked about intrinsic value, you can't put a price on it because it has an intrinsic value. And I don't particularly believe in intrinsic value, actually, I think value is always relational. But what value does rhetorically is that it stands in for this idea of intrinsic value, even when it's describing some other property that can only be understood in terms of exchange value. Value is used as an entity which can be subject to metrical evaluation. We have to deliver value. But it doesn't give any information about itself unless it's attached to something else. It's always glomming itself on to some other term value as it's used is largely meaningless or rather fungible, exchangeable usable because it's so empty means it can be used by the person who has the power and authority to do the asking. So essentially, what I think it's useful, it's available to the person who can ask the questions. So if you're being asked to justify the value of something in applications for funding or whatever it might be. To explain how you deliver value you're being placed in a hierarchical situation of power, in which value is mystical enough and fungible enough that you can either be found to be a success or a failure on the whim of the person doing the asking. So they have the power to decide. We have to therefore understand the ideology of the person doing the asking, or ask what are the real values? What are the social values that are being hidden behind these terms, in this case, that of competition, we always have to ask value for whom and to what purposes. And I'm always interested in how value slips between these two categories of use, one where it's asking for more or less an economic argument to be made, and the other one is hiding social or ethical values that we might not be convinced or happy with. Okay, so the spectacle of value the way that value is sort of trumpeted and used to planning the value auditing the value announcing value. Often I argue overwhelms rather than supports the complex ecology of the making and experience of the arts, people who talk a lot about value are often doing it harm, I suspect, the

thesis of against value does not propose some cleansing of values, values are implicit in all forms of behaviour and active communication. It seeks rather to critique value and values as established, manipulated, and audited. Even the most seemingly virtuous values tends to obscure an act of predation than act of harm, or counter intuitively damages that which has been fated. So if you try and audit, for example, if you're a nurse working in a hospital, and you try and audit the movements of that person, then you're damaging relationship with trust, essentially, so you try and audit for trust, and actually, you harm the very process of trust. So my argument is that value is used to extend social control and social control includes the control of artists, by promoting moral values. So I think there's a way in which we, we take on a kind of censoriousness of spirit, by putting upfront in all of our ideas about our work, kind of moral values that might close us down to other kinds of more problematic conversations about who we are and what our real desires are and what we do in the world. And this, the genesis of that this project is partly going back to Friedrich Nietzsche, a project is called the genealogy of morality, where he talks about the way in which good is used good. He understands as being a way for to build up resentment, essentially good was something that the poor could own, they weren't allowed stuff or money but they were allowed virtues, essentially, in piety in particular, and then they'd inherit heaven, of course, which was the ultimate reward. So the genealogy of morality is a kind of model for this thinking. Okay, and it's a process that we should Michel Foucault is invested in to, this is from his great work, discipline and punish. And this is about the process of being asked what you're doing, why you're doing it, and justify what you're doing to give the value of what you're doing. I think you can be asked that once and twice and five times. And I think the process by which you're asked it 100 times, changes your subjectivity, it changes the person you are by having to do this over and over again. And this is his statement about this process of confession. He who is subjected to a field of visibility. Visibility here is thinking about literal visibility within prisons, but he's also thinking about discursive visibility, the idea you're being had to justify your actions and your thoughts. The person who is subjected to this field of visibility and knows it assumes responsibility for the correct constraints of power you take on the constraints, he makes them play spontaneously upon himself, inscribed in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles, he becomes the principal of his own subjection, you know, we do it to ourselves and academics are terrible for this we torture ourselves continuously through these processes. By this very fact the external power may throw off its physical weight, you may become discouraged, it may become language, it tends to be, it tends to the non-corporal and the more it approaches the limit, the more constant profound and permanent are its effects to perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation, which is always decided in advance. The meta values of contemporary value the things that we're told are important transparency, openness, accountability. These all announced themselves as obvious goods they're hard to push against, but cannot so easily be separated off from their counterintuitive effects. We their roles in the spread of censoriousness of spirit, social control, surveillance. These are the non-corporal discursive constraints that begin to constitute us that build us up as subjects. Thomas Dougherty writes about this, the intimacies that help us to shape ourselves as constituent parties to the public sphere and no longer intimate, so to speak, and we lose our right to a private life. There are far reaching consequences for us as subjects and as citizens in the establishment of a transparent society. The question of surveillance is the sinister counterpart to transparency becomes all the more pressing when it's further internalised when we all start to look within, and to focus the grounds of our social and cultural being upon our own sense of our interiority or selfhood, and identity. So I wanted to try and trace to some of the implications of value and its variety of mutable guises. And as it tears across the terrain of arts education, through our work lives and private lives, and outwards onto the grounds of continued existence on a finite planet. And I'm critical of value when it's utilised by those with elitist or at least non egalitarian ideological programmes in mind. So it's quite this is the easiest stage, it's quite easy to be to find people it'll ideologically you disagree with, and to understand why they're motivated and the ways they're motivated. That seems sort of unproblematic Well, in some ways, and I then try and be critical of those wishing broadly to pursue an amiable impulse to defend the humanising effect of the arts and humanities. So I try and be critical of those statements that are, in some sense in the Nietzschean way, pious statements. I forget if I've given this. So this is one Sarah Churchwell writes a defence of the arts and humanities and it was these kinds of defences that just made me even more furious than I normally am, which is pretty furious. She wants the humanities of the study of what makes us human, of what it means to be human. They are the stories and ideas through which we express our humanity. Visual dramas teach us sympathy, empathy, pity, encouraging us to break out of our solipsistic shells. And there's a reading of this, which is all very positive, which says art and culture is good at increasing our empathy and our critical thinking and our understanding. And you think, how, what vision of history do you have whereby cultures with whereby societies that love and adore culture somehow become virtuous? It seems crazy when they're the Imperial War Museum that's walking past them just thinking about, you know, this, this implies that the Nazis didn't have culture. They love going to the theatre was a tremendous night out. So the arts that fund these aren't, in that sense, you know, a panacea to social ills they're part of they're part of our barbarism, I think. Yeah. Particularly Andrew Lloyd Webber, I think. So these kinds of statements, I think, are hugely unhelpful, where we just say, actually, we are all wonderful people. If we all go, go to the theatre, I think it's rubbish. I'm certainly not. So instead, I try and argue about what this means in terms of audit cultures, which I'll go on to explain. So this collection, which there's the handout there that gives the kind of table of contents describes how arts and education can be motivated by or incorporate a critique of value or values, and how previous defences of the arts too often depend on uncritical notions of value. And the

hypothesis presented to the contributors, suggested that it was often the staunchest defenders of art and of Education who do them the most harm by suppressing or modifying their dissenting voice by neutralising the painful truth that the arts reveal and by instrumentalizing, the ambivalence that they produce ambivalence, that simultaneous conflicting set of reactions, I sort of have an idea of writing a green paper for this nurturing our ambivalence. That's kind of what we should be hopeful for, ambivalence is fertile ground for economic and political harvest. It's usable by people. And secondly, when we ramp up ambivalence, and make what it describes into a value when we try and replace value by saying explaining it, and saying that there are good things here, we tend to simplify away its complexities. Just as an example, think about the way in which we describe family, and we've described family as they weren't particularly ambivalent. It's the site of home of intimacy of support, but also statistically, of course, it's the scene of violence, of repression, and of damage. And in general, I think there's a way in which ambivalence is denied by these kinds of processes. So the result is that rather than expanding then expanding the autonomy of our thought and feeling about the artist of the thought and feeling of the artist and the audience of the student and of the teacher, defenders make art and education self satisfied or otherwise an echo chamber for limited self description of people's lives, lived in an audit culture, a culture, pervaded by the direct and indirect excrescence of practices of accountability. I'll go on to say more about this. So there are two there are two major threads of this work. Firstly, a critique of the use of the discourse of value, particularly in its economic guise, and responding insistent that the arts and education should be or could be critical of iterations of value, the arts should be critical value, whatever the value might be, and that includes ostensibly virtuous values. So that includes the critical of the good, and the beautiful, and so the arts and education, fundamentally against value. And, you know, that's a hugely ambivalent expression to and I'm finding that the auditing of values pervades our work lives, our education, our everyday experience, we're frequently asked to justify our value in every sense, including the value of our labour in the past and as a prediction of its future, where will the institution? Where were you? Where will your career be in the future? And we asked to translate our own ambiguous lives into the metrics of the dominating system, the values of our times, and beneath it all works, the conditioning effect of such repetition, to be asked to justify one's value, even when one's value can be justified is to be conditioned into a place of abjection of no value, we're devalued and then have to justify ourselves. We're saved during the brief years between childhood and adolescence, when our labour might be more or less profitable, if we're lucky enough to be in good health. And it's that logic of confession, the repetition of our own evaluation that I think is so damaging. We're asked to read, to listen, to teach to think and feel in ways that do not threaten with dissonance or just descend to the regulatory powers of the social. We're asked only to make art or educate in ways which affirm and do not agitate against the ostensible values of our times, even as those values shield the realities of capital employment of debt, the values which do not care for the lives on which they remain parasitical. The rhetoric of value is used to disguise and justify the continued privatisation of wealth as a measurable kinds that's held in common. So, at the very least when choosing whether or not how to defend the arts and education, rather than rushing to proclaim the value of the arts and education, I think we need to think through a series of related questions to the arts and education constitute a critique of value rather than an expression of value rather than constituting or generating exchange value should the arts and education struggle against the unthinking this value, value is the unthought region that we take for granted. And we have to ask ourselves what harm we may carry out on those who make art or those who educate by insisting on a metric of value? Does the insistence on value stifle darker, more violent, less affirming ghosts of the unconscious imagination or demand us demand of us that we repress our discontent, ultimately, should we defend the arts and education at all? Civilization is the name of one of such iteration of value, a phenomenon of a historical period, under the shadow of which unimaginable horrors have been and continued to be perpetrated? As Walter Benjamin famously said, there is no document of civilization, which is not at the same time a document of barbarism and assessment which might give pause for thought. When returning to the former UK Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and his otherwise banal claim that the arts are a civilising influence, who, exactly according to the minister, is in need of being civilised. What does the redemption offered by the arts matter? When set against civilization's unceasing barbarism, if arts value redeems the catastrophe of history?

Sam Ladkin (30 minutes)

So I'll go into just say a little bit more about audit cultures. And my kind of expectation here is that you'll recognise this, more or less. So auditing is a social practice in which individuals, institutions or social categories are asked to describe themselves to provide information about themselves, or to make predictions about the future. The term stems from accounting and transgress through management studies and into education and arts administration. The value is not simply a term description. But a challenge or an implicit implicit threat can be seen across a number of features that affect workplaces, in both private and state sectors. Audit often provides methodological cover for the manipulation of crisis. And you just have to think about austerity, and how austerity is used as a crisis to demand that people justify their value. Audit provides the rhetoric of reason. And I think a strategic delay necessary to offset the charge of political vandalism. So it's a helpful delaying practice to say, we're going to do this, but we're going to justify it by kind of process by a report. By the end of which people don't care as much. Media doesn't care as much to tell us to care. From its basis as an ideal of economic transparency, that practice and audit is burgeon through management, and exploded into a culture of transparency operative

across all sectors being asked to justify their existence. One major theorist of audit is the social anthropologist Marilyn Strathern. They're largely responding to the incursion of auditing from economics, into higher education Strathern's analysis grew out of reflections on the methods and difficulties of ethnography, the methodologies of anthropology. So ethnography, it defines a field it defines a certain place or a set of people, and tries to borrow the perspective of those people in order to be able to reflect on their culture or cultures. And as a practice, it requires, it requires you to suspend what you think, you know, essentially, right? So you have to, you have to suspend what you imagine, you know, based on your own culture, in order to be able to listen to the culture that you're trying to get to understand. Otherwise, you'll miss understand it and imagine it an expression of as an expression of your own kind of constitution. And I think basically, one of my pushes here is to say, audit seems to be a very bad way of doing this, and ethnography seems to be a more interesting, valuable, Yeah, promotion of ethnography, I think, is possible. So this is a kind of summary of four key claims the auditing is bad ethnography, the auditing of values might be thought of as virtuous can work against those values. That example audit damages trust, that an obsession with transparency echoes a Euro-American cultural preference to self-reflexive knowledge, right? So we're very keen on in our particular bit of the culture, about being able to describe to ourselves what we know. And that process isn't an innocent one. And finally, that there can be tyranny in transparency. I'll go on to pick out a few of these things. So you'll probably recognise aspects of this. This is in funding applications. This is on census forms, all sorts of things. You fill in the form and somehow the boxes don't seem to reflect the complexities of your life, particularly your idea of your life, or the questions the form asks expect you to know yourself to such a degree that you can give complete, and non-idiosyncratic responses to what are complex questions. The overlapping of moral and financial forms of valuation in these rituals of accountability is a distinct cultural artefact of our times its return rights. Although audit is almost impossible to criticise, in principle, because it advances ostensibly positive virtues of responsibility, openness, widening access, its effects often run counter to those virtues, when instrumentalized. Whilst policy and audit sound on the face of it like the opposite ends of a process. So policy sets forward and the audit reflects backwards. The distance between those two poles of policy and the audit is illusory, since the one is also inside the other policymakers build auditing practices into their schema and auditing, replayed to policy the grounds of its own effectiveness. There's always this is this was just my example. This is what I have to fill out by teaching you course, Sheffield, which is I have to give the aims for my course what they're going to learn and then I give the outcomes which they will have learned in this course. And surprisingly, they're the same things just get different grammar involved. So that's the process of policy and audit in a kind of loop. And there's a gap in this where we have to do things like we have to we have to force our students to tell us what the outcomes were. But that process of description is always it's always at a certain point in time. It's always very close to the course for example, so there's no chance for the student to realise that in 40 years down the line that I was the best teacher they ever had. For example, or involves complex questions about what they learned which they might not be able to articulate fully, or I might treat them badly, all sorts of things, or you can have a bad grade and then saying, How did you find the course? Terrible? Right back 'atcha. Okay, so the feedback loop policy audit is a political mechanism. And it comes in with the rise of neoliberalism from the 1970s market competition enterprise family is ideological choices made to diminish the role of the welfare state. Audit culture is therefore a wing of enterprise culture in which auditors and oddities create their own reality, not as some byproduct but stemming from a political doctrine reinforcement. As I say, audit, replicates the tendency of Euro Americans to present knowledge themselves as though we're conditioned with its own reflexivity. One knows things because one can reflect on why and how one knows them. The art of description is therefore takes precedence over latent forms of knowledge without due comprehension of the denote distortions enacted by descriptions. Against the bureaucratic procedure with its internalised system of aims and objectives Strathern. Contrast the ideals of ethnography, these can keep open a place for the unpredictable or contingent, they remain ambiguous where ambiguity signals the way in which claims elicit counterclaims open themselves up to explanation by third parties and so on and so forth. The ethics in advance of anticipated negotiations of audit ultimately belittles the creative power of social relations, you reduce social relations by audit. It's replaced by respect in ethnography for exploratory, exploratory, indeterminate, unpredictable social relations. ethnography, is the opposite of self description and means nothing. Unless one knows the conditions of its compilation or its theoretical underpinnings, it cannot be made abstract, and the way the audit assumes it can be abstract. Okay, what follows now is a short roll call of what I think value does. And I'll try and give some examples of these things as I go to lighten the mood, a little. Value tends to take critical thinking as its first hostage complexity, nuance, counterintuitive logic, long term planning, all go out the window. The call to justify value tends only to be answerable by shifting from one domain of knowledge to another, right. So value normally asks you to move one set of knowledge into another discipline, predominantly, of course, that's into an economic discipline. But also it happens more generally, its measurement requires a kind of seeking of security in somebody else's terrain and somebody else's discipline. So if you're, for example, if you're a choreographer, and you're applying for funding, you're going to need to rely on language as the arbiter of that value. Can your descriptions of dance be used in place of dance literature, we often have to transfer our knowledge. So you think everything would stop at literature is, you know, the people who do the explaining to ourselves, you know, this is least we should be good at this. But actually, we have to transfer our knowledge into history or into philosophy into other fields to each discipline, I think, imagines this security elsewhere, somewhere around the system that other other disciplines have it

easier. And language is, of course, not reliable in this way. The next valley tends to require an artificial break in the fabric of influence, right, for example, by cutting at the point of a copyright document or scientific breakthrough. So we tend to think about, you know, the person who made that particular science scientific breakthrough, they had a certain kind of success, but their knowledge was based on a whole kind of miasma of work going on. And there's just a moment where you can you can cut it and say, that was a kind of shift. And but that might be an economic question about patterns rather than a question of knowledge. And I think the same is true for, for example with public engagement, I think all sorts of long term research or arts practice will be made for some moment, visual or audible. So the public engagement is the moment where this all of this work bubbles up into visibility, but who gets to claim that visibility? Who is hidden by that kind of gesture of coming to light and what work is preceded that's unclaimed in some sense? I think value tends to find itself upon problematic notions of the public or culture don't really believe in either of those terms. And hopefully, the arts and education speak But if they speak at all, they speak to the most intimately held emotional, psychological, aesthetic experiences and the public might legislate, you know, using the rhetoric of the term of the public legislature against the freedom and perversity of the private, some more perverse than others obviously, but might not, I think culture homogenises experience too much value tends to stands in for that which has been sublimated that is, which has been repressed.

Sam Ladkin (45 minutes)

This goes back to kind of more Freudian ideas about for Freud, there's all sorts of sexual libidinal desires going on. And that's essentially repressed to the point where you have to get it out in some other ways you make art, it's a process of sublimation. So it's a wonderful model of library where you can just wander around the gallery you're just looking at various kinds of transforms sexual desires, Rembrandt self-portraits so thinking about that process of sublimation, we actually revalue things by processes of repression to and you have to think, what else is going on in that process? The discourse of value tends to be I think, patronising and authoritarian those who power demand its elaboration, and produce a craven attitude and those without power, apologetic before these, the people who get to ask the questions apologetic for Joe Johnson, just don't. Value is a good method of social control, provide permission for surveillance, and can be used to undermine the integrity of a professional another group. It's no wonder that particularly problematic professions are attacks using the auditing of value. And education is a good one for that. The domain of value is such a frustrating territory because it's so easily instrumentalized by those with malicious intent. And because it wraps up the counterintuitive damages of audit culture. From those who are wishing to act conscientiously, there's a lot of good intentions that term harmful, I think, the territory of values of battlefield of ad hominem attacks, conflict between people solely in terms of the different values they are taken to espouse display displaces the analysis of the principles that give rise to those values. So the way in which the values of Christianity has been used to promote all sorts of conflict in the world is, is obviously the largest scale example of this use of value. Value tends to be used to address if not dressed the wounds caused elsewhere in the social, economic and political system. Right. So it tends to be used as a kind of band-aid on more deep line problematic problems in the social world. The discourse of value tends to deaden the artists hand, the choreographer, Jonathan Burrows gives this allegory before you write this description of what you're going to do in a funding proposal, you most likely don't know what you're going to do, only that you need to do it. Once you've written the description, however, you're in a different position. Now you still don't know what you're going to do. But you have a piece of paper saying that you do. Question is, how do you stop yourself from being tempted into believing what you wrote? I think value tends to encourage the arts and education to mirror the values that dominated society. And an interesting case is the rise of participatory art forms that goes particularly with them, the rise of new Labour participative forms come hand in hand, the intensification of damage for the social contract between the individual and the state, and the continuation of the transfer of the public good into private capital, follows this kind of pattern. And interestingly, participatory art seems to mirror the aesthetic properties of neoconservatism networks, mobility, project work, effective labour, they all seem to be in both neoliberalism and in them. Participatory are worth full value is often undefined or worse, its incremental use depends upon its fundamental vacuousness. One of the tasks of value as a token is to stand in for something that's impossible to describe something that can't be exchanged or something which is ambivalent. When it happens, it does not speak finally to anything intrinsic but instead works to maximise exchangeability, fungibility, the ability of meaning to be manipulated towards the real and implicit purpose of those have the power to demand explanations and justify who's asking you to justify yourself. Okay, so I think this project tries to work in few ways. So I think art can work against value, I think it can be critical in that same sense. I think secondly, it can critique, ostensibly virtuous values. So we can think about the values that we might ostensibly want goodness, happiness, so on and critique them. And I think works can be expressions of values that we wouldn't ordinarily imagine that we wanted. So, thinking about the great French poets, Charles Baudelaire, his poems about spleen and poems about evil, and not things I would want to lose from the cultural canon. But I don't know how you apply for funding. It's a really great project about evil and how evil I want to prove I'm evil, a million pounds. Yeah, so I can give some expression of these. So examples of art moving against value, John Cage from 1953 has this kind of negation or roll call and some of you will, no doubt know, Yvonne Rainer's sort of Against Value work to produce new kinds of new kinds of dance audience. On the second, we can rethink the ways in which terms such as happiness, seriousness, participation is ostensibly positive values contain their contradictions. So the value of

participation, even though participatory artists tend to be left leaning, they tend to stand against neoliberal capitalism. The values tend to be formally involved in the same kinds of products as neoliberalism, networks and mobility, effectively. Happiness we think, you know, it seems fair and cool to say happiness or idea of Greek flourishing might be good things and interesting book by Sara Ahmed about happiness. The affirmative turn creates a distinction between good and bad feelings that presumes bad things are backward and conservative and good feelings of forward and progressive bad feelings are seen as oriented toward the past, to kind of stubbornness that stops the subject from embracing the future. This assumption that good feelings are open and bad feelings are closed allows historical forms of injustice to disappear. So happiness and goodness tends to be used as ways of shutting down questions of historical responsibility for things or for making your feelings of abjection and badness. You punish yourself for those feelings, right? You make yourself feel like an even worse person for having the important statistics knows that if you do want to believe in an audit of happiness, you should become a hairdresser, because they always come out top of the happiness rankings. Yeah, yeah. It's a kind of social work, and they tend to be sociable people. And that's fine. I find it the most debilitating, experience ever trying to have a conversation whilst trying to have a haircut, I guess that's my own neuroses. We might think about so we might revalue those things that we just suspected of being virtuous. And then we have to rethink things that supposed to be not virtuous. So here's Sarah Jane Bales is brilliant book about failure, failure challenges, the cultural dominance and instrumental rationality, the fictions of continuity that bind the way we imagined and manufacture the world. We can think about this in scientific terms to all the experiments that don't work. There's no way of there's no way of having knowledge, progress through success just doesn't, you know, a funding proposal says, I'm going to succeed in this project, well, maybe 1000 people need to fail. That's what we need to think about. I like to run my career as a kind of high level failure on behalf of other people to be hugely successful. You're learning too much about me here, probably. Okay, that that's, that's the project in general, I just want to if you can stay with me for a little while longer. I'll just say a few things about dance. This is where I insult your intelligences. But so I speak as someone who has, who occasionally does teach, I teach avant-garde courses. So I teach bits of dance, and I'm interested in conversations between dance and other art forms. And I've sort of tried to, I tried to kind of get my dirty mits into academic work around dance and things like that. But to say I'm an amateur is even that is too complimentary about this, but we'll see how this goes. I think there are some ways in which we can think about dance with this, this work. And I think there are two key problems for for dance in particular. The first is that value tends to work by transgress, there's transgression of territories, transgression of disciplines. And I think the main one here is that it tends to demand justification in terms of language. And I think that's, it's not to say that there's these exclusive realms that they, you know, language has nothing to do with dance and vice versa. On the contrary, but I think, you know, be an interesting funding application where you had to turn up at the offices and dance instead of having a piece of paper. So that's one so transgression into other territories. Secondly, I think there's a gift of the problem is the gift of ephemerality, right, the problem of the disappearance of the object itself. And we can, we can think through all sorts of ways in which that's been talked about performance art studies and various places. And I wanted to sort of push this and give some sort of very, very amateurish ideas of the kinds of things that people might be asked to do in dance education, thinking about dance, education and training and the record of toil and rigour. And a body's being constituted by the implicit or explicit set of aesthetic and ideological ideas about how a body can and should move you know, that idea of because of confession that you confess so many times that eventually you constitute your subjectivity as the sinful one who confesses, I think there's a way in which the body undertakes these processes to and obviously, it's interesting cases around Laban for example, about its historical place and what it thinks the body is does, and how often it excludes the idea that there's a politics to it, which is obviously the dangerous moment where politics rushes back in. Perhaps we need to distinguish between education and training. And imagine there's unnecessary promotion of stupefaction, in training, bluntly, are becoming dumb, right? This is the insulting stuff. There's a not thinking critically about what you're doing, because how can you think critically about it if you have to do it 1000 times. So we might imagine a preference for Dance Education rather than training, in which the task of dance education would be to think critically and aesthetically, the autonomy of the dancer finds an alternative valuation. And at such a moment, there's perhaps sight of the kind of work value might undertake in dance. It's easy to imagine the promotion of the latter, the autonomous dancer, it's justifiable. It's a model of the maker that's more ethically astute, and I have in a very amateurish way, taught examples of the kind of choreography that makes that judgement. So Yvonne Rainer seems to be an example of that, investigating domesticity and autonomy against Balanchine and his the kind of rigour with which he imposed this ideas. But my hesitation is that I wonder what we lose when we understand education as a valuable thing. So here we go promoting education than doing what is it also damage, the dancer educated as a critically minded autonomous creature is going to gain a huge amount, but also always be involved in kinds of analysis that might find their authority elsewhere, in the dancers, current understanding of philosophical tradition, within their reading, or whether they've really understood the intricacies of a door knows aesthetic theory. Don't get me wrong, all of those things, reading all of those things, I think is a great idea and productive and should be encouraged. More, what might you learn from being dumb that you never learned from being clever? Where can you end up by practising a range of motion without the censorship of critical faculties? I'll try and I'll try and explain this. It does sound terrible. Just hang on a moment. I've been watching some of the recordings of Merce Cunningham teaching his dancers and he always talks about how by limiting questions of motivation, he feels, the

dancer becomes, in some sense more of themselves. So what intelligence can you discover in and from and through your body that's not available to the kind of consciousness which monitors your behaviour, the temptation I succumb to is an want to challenge is to recuperate my initial use of dumb and transform it into a valuable an alternative kind of intelligence, right? So immediately you start to say, Okay, I'm going to say there's something stupefying about this, and then I'm going to reclaim that as a just different alternative form of intelligence. And all I want to do is say we need to spend longer in that period where we haven't revalued it. Actually, if I wasn't in such delightfully polite company, I wrote that in hoping that you'd be quiet so that's good. I'd like to suspend the easy decorum of that revaluation that quickness with which we revalue things, can we not tarry? a while longer thinking through what dumbness might be? Do we have to rescue it? By doing so we're making a value judgement that intelligence is at every stage better than stupidity. But what are the consequences of such a judgement? What are the ethics of such a judgement, what kinds of intelligence do we acknowledge as the intelligence and if we imagine the neutrality, neither dumbness nor intelligence, then we might be able to experiment and explore with the results of training or fully. We might think of two movements then one by which the material potential of the body is constituted by repetitive actions. And there's a world of socio political critique to engage in that process, about how outside of the dance world we become docile bodies or regimented according to norms of sexuality, and norms of labour and so on. And the other movement might rescue something from that process of repetition of practice. Can we resist the two quick rescue? One of the theories of one of the virtues of theory of kind of philosophical tradition of theory, is it through it, though, is filtered out into the world in all sorts of ways in how we understand gender and sexuality. For example, it also offers a space of experimentation, of thinking divorced from the immediate pressure to be efficacious to do something. And I wonder if paradoxically, there's an element of a similar experimental space within the rigour of practice. And I would be interested to hear from people about this. Does the body have a theoretical space that is only opened up not by not working, but by stupefying labour. And so just as an example, the discourse around yoga would immediately revalue those experiences, and claim those experiences as a meditative space and have all sorts of value judgments associated. Is there? Is there a neutrality that doesn't need to be redeemed that might get us to some other experience? And I'm reminded in this a description of a now defunct, Chicago based theatre group called Goat Island, a wonderful group, I think, and much of their work derives from questions about damage and repair. At the start of a show of theirs called the sea and poison, they perform what they dubbed the impossible dance. With the aid of a computer algorithm, they developed a score a set of timings for a dance, and the series of movements that was deliberately exhausting, which they could never successfully performed. So one of the instructions was they had to be on the floor in one moment and upright the next, but there was no time in which to get between the two. Steven Bottoms describes this as a strategic humiliation. But as it continues, he describes it goes on and on and on until they're exhausted. He describes how the performance necessarily become more autonomous in their strategies for coping in improvising unprescribed physical adjustments in order to catch up, if they fall behind. I think there's something in this task that's not only about their figuration of labour, what labour does to the body, but a kind of homage in this to practice. Even whilst it seems to come from a very different register, it takes the fundamental impossibility of practice reaching perfection, and magnifies that gap, that perpetual failure, the rupture in practice, is the site of an alternative. On the one hand, then, I think, I think of thinking against value is the promotion of critical thinking across all moments of engagement with culture and education. Necessarily, I submit critical thinking to that analysis to I just distrust critical thinking sufficiently, not looked to want the world to become an expression of my critical thinking, and ask for another kind of modesty, a minor thinking. And I'm reminded of a line of the American poet, Frank O'Hara, he love dance and loved dancers, and particularly even more than they love dance. Yeah, there's a wonderful acrostic poem for a dancer called Vincent Warren with whom he was in love. And the title of the acrostic is suddenly gone in my head, you'll come back - You're gorgeous, and I'm coming. Anyway, this is from his personalism and we are close to refreshments. Don't panic. I'm not saying that I don't have practically the most lofty ideas of anyone writing today. But what difference does it make them just ideas. The good thing about it is that when I get lofty enough, I've stopped thinking and that's when refreshment arrives. To linger on one of the terms that are practice. Firstly, a gesture toward a couple of intriguing contradictions in its definition, the definition of practice, practice means both carrying something out, right. It's a form of doing as well as deferring the action that is being carried out. So you carry something out that's practice, but also you defer what you're doing by practising the action. The definition of practice, is this the actual application or use of an idea or belief or method as opposed to the theory or the principles of it? Activity or action considers being the realisation of or in contrast to theory, that is not just the realisation of a theory, contrasted to it, unlike theory, idea principles. One of the things I think the theoretical space of doing in dance is that dance seems to be something that's a doing space inside of this discourse of performing practice. One of the things methodology of value does is install itself as the validation of the unimpeded movement from theory to practice. And the effect of such a faith is firstly that the description takes precedence over the primacy of practice, but also that the artist is less conscious of the radical unlikeness of practice. I believe we don't want artworks to be expressions of our descriptions of artworks, our practice to be the expression of our theories, or our students to become expressions of our teaching. That's why criticism never wrote a novel. The third thing to say about practice that is that it's an art of failure. Failure is perpetuated in practice, the affirmation that will culture of value seeks always to denigrate that fundamental negativity of practice, we can think of it in terms of feedback. And I'm very, very close to at least one possible end here. Think about it in terms of

feedback. The feedback not simply as a teacher to a student as dancer, dance instructor to the dancer. That's one instance, feedback assumes an inherent instability in the in the system, it introduces noise into communication think about guitar music, feedback being amplified, but also it seems that there's no communication without noise, there's no simple hygienic mode of transmission, we can think about feedback loops of various kinds, we might think about feedback as one of the ways in which the body learns, we think about feedback in terms of confession to the active expression of one's sins is constituted of the self feedback occurs as a physical necessity to and you will know much more about this than I will but as a totally integrated system with many direct and indirect feedback circuits, information is constantly being gathered on the status of the body parts of the present and the future. frequently compared to past movements, activity seems stored posture and movement pattern is already available. Okay? My point about this is one of complexity and misrecognition.

Sam Ladkin (1 hour)

The cycle of feedback is incredibly vulnerable to corruption. If within this loop, we transform one kind of information for another. If you feed into the system, an alternative system of values, you introduce the hierarchy of sin, into confession, you introduce an economic argument into questions and aesthetics, you introduce a pathogen into the body, where you miss recognise an ecology of process for a single cause and effect. The system has a tendency to extrapolate and magnify that corruption. Allow me then to return to this moment from Nietzsche. What I'll do is I'll pause after that, I have some ideas of practical things of what's to be done with these questions of audit. And we can go through those if you have time and inclination, or I can circulate them or we can say we did not bother, whatever you want to do. The prime evil delusions still lives on that one knows and knows quite precisely, in every case, how human action is brought about. I know what I want, what I've done and free and responsible for it. I hold others responsible, they can call by its name every moral possibility and every inner motion which precedes action, you may act as you will, in this matter, I understand myself and understand you all. That is how almost everyone still thinks that actions are never what they appear to us to be. We have expended so much labour on learning that external things are not as they appear to us to be very well. The case is the same with the inner world. Moral elections are in reality something other than that, more we cannot say and all actions are essentially unknown. Okay, thank you very much.

(Outro: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021)

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