

Thinking Alongside Performance with Laura Cull and David Harradine (2017)

(automated transcript from otter.ai)

SPEAKERS

Laura Cull, David Harradine, Audience

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.

(2017 audio file begins)

David Harradine 00:42

We thought we'd start by just narrating the story of how we came to be sitting here tonight and sort of developing collaboration in relationship. joint investigation, that's something that we're trying to work out. So I'm co-artistic director of a company called Fevered Sleep. And earlier on this year, we were commissioned by Wellcome Collection to make a project as part of an exhibition they had in their gallery, the exhibition was called Making nature. And it was an exploration of human non human animal relationships, and specifically how our understanding of animals or nature is constructed by humans, often rather than being to do with what animals or nature actually are, or might actually be. So we were working on this project as part of that exhibition, a live event as part of that gallery exhibition. This time last year, which was much before this project, Laura and I were both invited to take part in a conversation a bit like this at Central School of Speech and Drama for which the focus was care, performance and care and how performance takes care or cares for or is cared for. And we that was the first time that we met. And it just transpired over the course of that conversation, because at one point in the conversation became about empathy. And I was working on this project, which was about interspecies empathy and the potential for humans to develop empathetic relationships with non human animals. And

Laura Cull 02:30

At which point I got very excited indeed, as you do.

David Harradine 02:36

Your research Yeah,

Laura Cull 02:37

because I was also thinking about the same things but hadn't come across other people who were doing that.

David Harradine 02:44

So then fast forward in about a few months, and the project we made for welcome was called sheep pig goat, and we're going to share some documentation from it and a little bit. And it was a creative research studio, which used a series of improvised encounters between dancers, musicians, and singers, and some sheep, an pigs and goats, to explore the potential for interspecies communication and interspecies exchange interspecies empathy. So there were a series of improvised encounters, which became catalysts for conversations with members of the public who came to this space. It was a research project, but it was entirely open to the public from start to finish, which was pretty terrifying. Because we were pretty terrified about having conversations about something which was literally at the very, very, very start of a research process. And we thought we would shield ourselves slightly by inviting a series of people that we called guest respondents to come and be part of these conversations. And if we, as artists, lost our track and felt like we couldn't talk or think about the work that was developing, these guests might help us to articulate something. And so initially, we invited Laura as one of the guests among the respondents on the back of our meeting previously, and but then it just became really clear that your potential contribution to the project and your interest in the project was much greater than we'd expected. And I think that was the point where we have set off together on this process of trying to work out what it means for a philosopher and an artist or some artists in the context of an arts producing company to be side by side and to to think and talk and look and explore a set of questions or creative possibilities through different perspectives,

Laura Cull 04:47

which all sounds very positive and nice. Feels really positive covers over the fact that for me sheep, pig goat was also this kind of like crisis point of what is the point of people like me, you know. So I have been somewhat dependent on David and I hope I'm not doing it again today in terms of, you know, looking to practitioners to justify my existence. I mean, I come from a practice background myself, I trained as a visual artist and just sort of ended up in cycled academia somewhat by accident. But sheep pig goat seemed to me to be doing such a profoundly good job of thinking for itself, by itself, contextualising itself, asking questions of itself, that there was a crisis for me around what, therefore, then people who ostensibly claim to theorise study, do scholarship around practices that are clearly thinking for themselves in all kinds of ways. I mean, not saying, obviously, this is nothing new. But there was just a very profound embodied impression of that sort of redundancy.

06:03

And, you know, you were very generous in reassuring me that, you know, not completely redundant, but trying to understand why not, or in what ways and this is where this expression or this idea that we're trying to get to, of what thinking alongside performance might mean comes from, for me, anyway, is about trying to rethink the mode of relationship that so called theory has to so called practice or how those how various forms of thought interrelate and intersect with each with each other. So the starting point for me, and apologies if this goes off into abstraction, as theory does, the phrase and I'll title thinking alongside performance comes for me from her is borrowed from the contemporary French thinker who I've been reading François Laruelle, who in a book called intellectuals and power talks about what he calls non-philosophy as a thinking alongside the real, or thinking according to the real So rather than thinking about what philosophy is doing as a kind of privileged mode of representing reality in some way and attempt to capture reality, what what does it mean to practice it as a thinking alongside the real So the title is, from my side anyway, as a kind of borrowing of that phrase, and attempt to sort of think about it in terms of sheep, pig goats, and Fevered Sleep, and then other modes of thinking that take place in the context of performance. The other way that Laruelle talks about what non-philosophy is for him is a style of thought that doesn't know what it is to think. So that attempts to proceed with thinking without knowing what it is. And so that terror of not knowing that you're describing in relation to sheep, pig goat, I think is also one that somewhat implied by non philosophy. So the thing that interests me about Laruelle's project is that it seems to be about thinking about thought and power, the inequalities between different forms of thought, different ways of thinking, and how we might address those inequalities, including in relation to forms of thought we call philosophy and the arts. So there's a kind of a politics there that interests me. And perhaps it's part of extending our considerations of what pluralism means, what inclusion means what a gala terian ism means we're maybe we're good at thinking about equality and diversity in terms of a range of dimensions of theatre and performance practice. But I wonder how much we think about it in terms of modes of thought themselves, the inequalities between different ways and forms of thinking. So Laruelle's project is a critique of philosophy, not as the discipline so not as a kind of the academic discipline of philosophy and the people who do it, what he calls philosophy is a gesture or a position in thought, and I think we can take that quite literally, spatially that happens anytime, where a thought presumes to occupy a position of authority in relation to different forms of thought, other forms of thought, and that sort of literal, physical material notion of position also really interests me. So philosophy for Laruelle, the thought that he wants to critique is one that's characterised by withdrawal by distancing by that kind of transcendent thinking of from a position you know, an assumed position above. So that you know, we've we've been talking a bit about space, and spatial relationships of thinking. So the power that's implied and That self positioning of philosophy is what's kind of under critique, if you like in Laruelle And so to be clear, the non philosophical project is not anti philosophy as in let's stop reading any philosophy, because we can do it as well. So we can be equally as artists, we can be equally guilty of that withdrawal, distancing attempt to monopolise thought,

as if from a superior or authoritative position. So in contrast to that, in contrast to that, that withdrawal, that position thinking alongside real thinking alongside performance seems to be about a material practice of levelling. So what what does it take to equalise or level or flatten out modes of thought such that no one thought when that's philosophy theory, or whatever is occupying that position can presume to represent claim to know and define or otherwise exert power over others. So there's no any time and discourse kind of claims to know what thought is or what counts as proper thought. And for me, that kind of context for all of this, I think there's there's lots of ways that we can think of, you know, how very different ways of thinking are hierarchized are organised unequally in our kind of contemporary moment, and there's lots of them that I'm not qualified, particularly to speak on, for instance, in terms of the geopolitical kind of hierarchies of knowledge. But the ones that I guess I've been thinking about most recently, are, there's been this kind of boom, if you like, of new philosophies of theatre and performance, and that's more my area, as you probably know, rather than dance, although there's been a growth of philosophy of dance, too. So including Anglo American philosophies of theatre performance, but also more in the continental line, European philosophies of theatre, let's say people like Badiou, in particular, producing that work. And it seems to me that while we might, you know, welcome that interdisciplinary engagement, there's all kinds of problematic gestures of authority within that discourse, where philosophers and both philosophy to fight, you know, assumes for itself, the capacity to define the kind of thinking that performance does, and the relationship between that thinking and the kind of thinking that philosophy does to assign to itself, the capacity for a kind of special view into the fundamental nature of performance, you know, people still talking about the essence of performance, the essential conditions of performance, as if philosophy was sort of specially equipped to see what that is. And we might think, okay, yeah, well, that's what you'd expect. You know, philosophers do that kind of thing. But then even in people like Badiou, you who, you know, claim, you know, explicitly state that theatre, for instance, thinks, and I won't even go into all the horrific things he says about dance, I'm sure you're aware of them.

13:14

But even in that gesture, even in the, you know, in seeming to bestow on the arts, a kind of a new equality with other forms of thoughts. He's still presuming for himself and for philosophy, this kind of oversight overseeing role that, you know, tells art, the arts, how they think, and how they think in relation to philosophy and also mathematics. So I think Laruelle gives us some tools to be suspicious of those kinds of discourses. But in another sense, I and these are questions I have for David, because he knows this world better than I do. I wonder if there are also questions to ask around practices research, where we're at with practices research in the academy, and the relative status assigned to different ways of knowing even within the practices research paradigm. So for instance, the demand for written commentary, let's say, and the role that written forms of research or conventional outputs, play in relation to practices research. So to what extent has the academy really let how performance things under its skin? You know, have we got there with that yet? And then one of the other contexts, I guess, I'm interested in is the distinction between the value assigned to the so called core academic subjects and the creative subjects in terms of secondary education. So the idea that real thinking proper thinking is this so called Critical Thinking that core academic subjects do and even if a type of thinking might be assigned to creativity, it's certainly devalued in relation to other subjects. So that's some of the context for me. I'll maybe say a little bit about prepositions and to stop me when I've said too much, so I'm thinking about what relationships academics might have two performance practices, what position or stance in an embodied sense does theory take in relation to practice? Is it still a position of authority and distance, a movement of withdrawal in order to arrive at a standing apart from performance that is also a positioning of itself as above that which it seeks to describe, define explain grass and door can it also embody a different posture, not only by taking up a different position that we might describe as a thinking alongside performance, but also in the sense of inhabiting a different stance or attitude, wherein its historic presumption of authority is deflated in order to make way for its own mutation? So I tried, I've tried to sum up what I think perhaps the value of engaging with Laruelle might be for artists, and saying to David, before we started, I think it's always seems very obvious to me what the value should be for philosophers, that there is a demand there a call there to philosophers to open their understanding of what counts as philosophy and thought to include the arts. And that seems to me to be a creative possibility for philosophy to renew itself, but I wonder why artists should care. So I think perhaps it might be about challenging our own use of philosophy as a legitimising authority. Is that still ultimately what I'm doing with Laruelle? Hopefully not insofar as Laruelle resists providing any definition, or assigning any further properties to the real, he's not presuming to tell us how performance thinks. But to give us a vocabulary to assert it as equally thought in relation to others, and to identify and critique those explicit and surreptitious gestures of authority that we still find in the philosophy of art. So I think there were tools with which to call out philosophical authoritarianism. And I think there are invitations to see performance practice, as contributing to a range of ways of thinking in a more egalitarian fashion alongside other modes of thought, and the interspecies performance of sheep, pig goats, which we'll see seems to me to be an attempt to think alongside sheep, pigs and goats, through specific approaches to improvisations, somatic awareness and attention and light stop there. So we started the film,

17:38

we'll have a little interlude. And see what Sheep Pig Goat might have looked like

Renée Bellamy 17:48

a video is played during this time.

17:54

We can absolutely talk if it's useful to talk more about this and the sorts of thought and thinking things and dirty philosophies that happened in that space. But I guess before we do that, I don't want to talk about that. I just had a few thoughts, I wanted to share just to put some more stuff in this space, which we could then alongside what Laura has put in the space and what this has put in space and what I might put in space, we can have a conversation together, together, and together in December we get to. So I was really interested, I guess, well in everything. But this notion of thinking alongside is a special proposition to think alongside each other. And I suppose because this is an independent dance event and we're at Siobhan Davies Studios a dance research studio, I wanted you to think spatially about thinking and how thought might organise itself spatially, and this is totally speculative, and isn't informed by any sort of philosophical thought, just totally mind blowing my thought as a maker, as an artist. So thinking on sounds hierarchical, or at least heavy for the thinking to be on top. The sounds like perhaps a conventional sort of thinking on performance. Here's a performance during and here is some thought on it, pinning it down. It sounds like a kind of fight. And performance is presumed to be the weakest partner in this fight when it comes to the strength of thought. I don't think I don't think that you deserve proposition by thinking on thinking it over and over and over and over the repetitive nature of performance. things thought and rethought. Let me rethink that can seem weak in some contexts, especially recently in government, the more powerful the context. And the more problematic rethinking seems to be. But in performance, I think the possibility of rethinking and rethinking and rethinking, the thinking over and over again and again, is a strength. And it's a kind of thinking, which is fluid, as a kind of thinking that grows and keeps growing, and shifting and mutating, which is a word that you've just used, and evolving. thinking it through, through thinking which is distributed through a whole structure of that performance process or a performance event. Thinking which is distributed through different collaborators, through different spaces, and through different elements of the work through different points in time or through time. Thinking which is not linear thinking, which is multi directional, and multi dimensional, thinking that takes place through doing not separate from it. Thinking about, like around about, suggest something that moves, or perhaps something that's a landscape for moving through a landscape of thought, not thoughts, arrow. [unintelligible] like thinking on, let me think on it, I want to think it through feels much more like like something we can explore, thought that around and about not fixed. It's not unfocused thought, but it's focused differently. And his focus is a little bit out focus, a little bit diffused and focused in different directions, or with multiple focuses at the same time. Different sorts of thinking and different sorts of thought scattered through a performance process in different people at different times. Again, not linear, not one thought after another, but clustered thought, or simultaneous thought or multiple thought. And I don't think I've been trying to do this. And we can experiment together or separately, I don't think it's possible to actually think about two things simultaneously. I think the mind flicks incredibly quickly.

David Harradine 22:52

To properly think and to keep thinking about something, I certainly found that difficult, perhaps it's insufficiency in my head. But performance can absolutely think about multiple things simultaneously, it's really easy to fundamental characteristic, because performance is multiple and multiple things happening simultaneously, including thought performance can think about and can think around things in a way that other sorts of thoughts come to perhaps thinking about thinking in this roundabout sort of way, and perhaps makes a space for thinking between thinking between you and me, or between me and Laura thought that isn't a solitary internal affair, but thought which is open and collaborative. Not the thoughts are the kinds of thought that takes place in silence in a study or a library. And, but the sort of thought that takes place in a studio or in a process, which can be noisy thought, or messy thought or lively thought. Thinking between you and me, negotiated thought, or thinking between me and movement, or between movement and us. Or between light and us, between sound and us, or between sound and light, or thinking between space and sound. And all their configurations of all the possible relationships between all the elements of all the processes, there is thought that seems like an incredible image for what thought might be like and I wish I could think by myself like that I need to get into performance and performing and performance and performance processes to come into contact. I feel with that kind of thought, which I find incredibly exciting. And I guess it's why I do what I do, which is a collaborative practice. So this is a kind of thinking with you thinking what I'm thinking and And answering that question, are you thinking that I'm thinking, I think is how we find the dramaturgy is for our work? Are you seeing what I'm seeing? Are you thinking what I'm thinking? Which is a kind of thinking alongside, which was the proposition which Nora brought, and invited me to come in and sit alongside you and help you think about that. And so for us to think about that together. Thank you for that invitation. And thinking alongside feels really companionable I kind of friendship, which is a different sort of way of thinking about philosophy and performance compatible friendship is not the sort of relationship that you described as a philosopher in certain contexts. I wouldn't presume to make a judgement on that, but

Laura has already so it feels a lot like walking and talking, like being literally being side by side not facing each other. And you know, that thing that happens when you're walking and talking and the intensity of eye contact, relaxes different sorts of possible relationships open up because of that. So thinking alongside performance keeps performance company. I guess it allows performance to keep company with philosophy, I think, is a different different sorts. But without turning it into an object, just to keep a company to be a friend. Thinking alongside performance, if we think about it, walking is a kind of thinking that goes with the flow. Thinking alongside performance is a kind of thought dance. It really feels choreographic. It pays attention to moment and moment and to movement. And thinking alongside performance moves on every sense of that word. That's my bit. So we decided that what we wouldn't do is now ask each of the questions and keep you all kind of shut out. I know I've got some for you to go and come back. Because we really wanted we move out while we were halfway through.

Laura Cull 27:26

I just was thinking, you know, he's you're talking about the thinking what I'm thinking when it's a pig. And you're the one of the other profound, the profundities of that experience was just the huge labour of reorientation that the performers had to go through. Or at least that is how it appeared. To have that, are you thinking what I'm thinking to attempt to think alongside the pig, those pigs that were so just relentlessly didn't do what you expected them to do? Every time and the requirement to rethink all of your resources, for collaboration, for engaging another in a shared thought process? We're just, you know, profoundly thrown off.

David Harradine 28:45

I think what, right at the heart of the project in what we were trying to do, was to destabilise the absolute authority, which is given to human thought and human perspectives on all other experience or all experience. And it's really complicated because how, how do a bunch of people a bunch of humans in the context of a, you know, art project Commission, in a warehouse in Peckham, to which these animals were brought compelled to come? How is that a starting point for a project which claims to destabilise human primacy but it was an it was the premise of the project, despite all the ethical complications of the form through which we chose to explore it. And one possibility that open door was a recognition that if you if we if we properly try to think with another, whether it's within a discipline or another person, even think with other people and but certainly to try to think, with not four, but with a member of another species, it was massively destabilising and bewildering because ultimately, it's impossible, it was impossible to know. But it was really possible to notice how careless most thought is how we presume to know, we presume to think that we know what the experience of a pig might be like, as it sent through a machine for slaughter, or as it's put into a van and brought to Peckham, or, or. And that that is a kind of example of the real deep challenges of thinking alongside something which is totally.

Audience 31:02

I mean, I thought that the musicians felt the most fixed in this situation, but it seemed the way it was that they had their position on the chair, they had their piece of music, they were playing a score, or like a set piece of music now, improvising

31:16

it was improvised

Audience 31:21

And so yeah, my impression was that they were less concerned with connecting. But then conversely, the animals seem more curious about the sound than the dancers.

David Harradine 31:40

Partly practical, because there's something about the object of an instrument that became quite interesting to the goats a lot in the other animals. Also, we kind of got in the way of what the investigation was,

Laura Cull 31:59

I did sometimes didn't know if they were actually interested in the sound or the smell, or,

32:03

or the material or the feel the feeling the lips, or why did that interest get in the way? Well, that's a good question. It didn't, it didn't get in the way. That was a bad choice of phrasing. Because the realisation that the kind of physical presence of objects is of interest. I don't know what I mean by interest, but, you know, lead to an interaction, especially with a goat was something which we learned about the goat's experience of being in the world and the kind of physic physical experience of being in the wild. But I guess we wanted to go beyond that and see also what the aural experience was, or also, what was

interesting, but you have to be can tell from the film that the pigs were interested in the smell of breath coming out of the bottom of declaring that because pigs, principally animals, which function through smell have got awful eyesight. So the pigs were not interested in keeping petrol dancing, particularly, in fact, in fact, accepted me didn't like it got in between got

33:19

very specifics, spatial moments. I remember when kept the male dancer got in between the two pigs. And the it was an older female pig and a younger female pig. And there was a sort of hierarchy. A Well, well, sense of responsibility, the older female pick for the younger one, and having him spatially interrupt them caused a real, it was a big reaction to that. But it was just something very, I don't know, I'm interested in how we talk about the practice of not knowing, inhabiting a place of not knowing that's not about some kind of blank slate, clearly a blank slate situation. But how the dancers how people like Kip, on in defined their habits, their tricks, their training, even though those were modes of training, in openness, responsiveness, you know, so he's from a sort of contact improv type background or you know, to, even if those that was the tricks of the training, even that needed to be in, in defined or, you know, opened out unlearned to find another way of relating to those animals in that space. And there's something about that process of how you embody a state a stance and attitude of unknowing. That is not some naive, what yeah, whatever blank slate notion that seems to be or it's very resonant for me with what I understand. Non philosophy is also trying to get toward that a genuine pluralism of thought necessarily has to involve that kind of stuff, stance, or attitude. And what what is that? What techniques have we got to get ourselves there to allow peak thinking to get under your skin? What does that and to allow it to mutate your own thinking in some way. And it's what makes me think that you're your own what you said, when you were saying it's not something you can do by yourself? I don't know, I'm not sure about that. I wonder if your multiple model of performance can also be sort of transferred back to some extent to how we think about the individual thinker. So when we talk about all I can only think about one thing at a time. That's maybe you know, that's, that's only one model of thought that's going on. And we're doing some other multiple modes and different forms of thinking. Simultaneously, were just that we're used to thinking of this one conscious, intentional mode as the dominant one. And so much of the work that the performers were doing, were relying on other kinds of in embodied thinking, somatic thinking, durational, thinking, all those other sorts of things. Don't make any sense.

37:03

We're kind of putting aside or coming to any insight. Do you view the word they get the investigation, which I would definitely aligned with, with researching questions, which is a certain kind of thinking. And I think the other thing I'd say is that thinking for me is something that I do align with movement as a dancer. And it's something that doesn't stop. It's ongoing, but it's kind of especially it's kind of like this, whereas insight might still be thinking, but there's a change something happens. A few ideas. And I'm just wondering, did you have the expectation that you would come away? Having learned something?

37:41

I think we felt that the sorts of questions that we wanted to explore would yield something interesting, which is different from they will be answered. And that was definitely the case. It was also definitely the case that over the course of that week, as an increasingly we've talked about this before, because I think you I think that we're not talking about an abyss. You're not sure about this word of an investment for me and Sam, kind of direct to lead the project. It felt it was like there wasn't a base of absolute unknowability, which, which opened up, which is not, which is not the same as an empty, like, that's not a blank, empty space to me at all, it felt incredibly full of something, which was beyond our capacity to think it was big beyond our capacity to experience because it felt like we really came into contact with pig thought, pig emotion, goat thought go into motion shaping motion, cheap thought, and all of the complex, nuanced things which existed for those animals in that space at that time. Which no matter how much we persisted with our questions, like what, what aspects of technical training can a dancer bring to an interaction with a member of another species that might open up some kind of understanding? They know that's an example question. No, the refined listening skills of a musician, what might that do to help us understand and think about the communication shape? We felt like there were things which are happening, but all they could ever ultimately happened was that we interpreted those things on our terms as humans and it wasn't possible for beings who were the as the absolute heart of the project to help us know whether or not our inquiry was going in the right or the wrong direction. And so the best that we felt me left looking into, which for me was like that This is a representation of the kind of the horrible separation of humans from all other sorts of life, because of what we have done to ourselves and to all other sorts of life, which I'm not sure it's ever recoverable, to come into contact with that on a daily basis, felt pretty devastatingly profound. Not only is the outcome of a research project unfathomable, knowing bewilderment. But also, just as a person just didn't live with that, to create that sense of wow, we have really thought ourselves into an awful place from which we might never escape. We thought ourselves so separate from them by having this word, then these other species called pigs or sheep or goats, language, just as it immediately you said word and we lost it, and how do you work with that, as an inquiry, it was really,

41:12

really anti, I'm not against the word of best, it's more that I get worried about the idea of calling animal experience somehow ineffable. You know, a collect completely, kind of beyond engagement or, or even when that happens to other forms of others, as it were, that ineffability Seems like a kind of another way of not dealing with something, and I can see how it can be. There's an ethics to that to not not claiming knowledge of the animal. But there seemed to be multiple ways of knowing the animal that came out. And were sitting alongside each other in the project. So what was interesting, and in it, yeah, sort of tussling with each other sometimes, because the handlers the animal handlers were also there. And so sometimes, you know, Kevin would come in and say, you know, put his knowledge in there of, oh, she's she's doing that now. This is, you know, that's, she's, she's telling you to back off, that pig is telling you to back off, get you know, so, you know, he and he, you know, was coming with his is somebody who's lived with these particular pigs for years and years. And so there was this interesting, but placing of these knowledges alongside each other, but without any one of them, being allowed to be the authorising one being allowed to be the ultimate authority on what this pig is thinking and experiencing in that moment. But Kip's developing knowledge as a dancer involved in the project over the week sits alongside the handler sits alongside the biologist who comes in and gives a talk on behaviour based on scientific methodologies. There's something about that jutting up of ways of knowing alongside each other that that seems very important to that no one of these captures no one of these knows the pig, and that they expose each other's own limits as

David Harradine 43:19

your introduction, you use the word terror and crisis to talk about yourself, finding these space images off putting an ineffable? Yeah, yeah. And when you were talking about a moment of crisis, as a performance philosopher, your job title, that is a reduction of you to a job title, but that crisis, I can't think in what context you use the word terror. On the one hand, that just immediately made me think of the state of being that artists approach quite readily of crisis and fear and profound self doubt and questioning, which motivates us to keep going with the things that we're investigating. And to hear you talk in what felt like a totally familiar language about yourself, whilst also building a picture of sort of the relationships and tensions between performance and philosophy for you to use those words, but other than that picture, seems like a brilliant bridge also between these these two things, performance and philosophy. And also, I wonder if that your crisis and my abyss are somehow related. I don't know if they are.

Laura Cull 44:47

I just a thought I just somehow feel like the practice. And maybe I'm putting too much store in the host of practices research moment, but it's somehow feels to me that there should have been a more fundamental shake up of the academy in that, in the event of artistic research being supposedly treated as equal to other forms, I'm just not convinced that that is what has happened in any fundamental material way. But I wonder how much still our experience is that this is a sort of pluralism by name, were actually the authority to determine what counts as practices research, as opposed to what you know, other kinds of practices that supposedly aren't?

Audience 45:51

Well, in a subtle way, actually different species, we are different species, those academic thinkers, and those artists working in the studio, I think that it's a different even the same person does maybe those two jobs, but it's a different way. It's a different brain, it's a different part of the brain, or a different way of thinking, that does those two different things, sort of looking at and knowing or trying to know something in a, in a linear academic way. And the other kinds of knowledge that aren't making and experiencing.

Laura Cull 46:40

That seems that it is pretty, if that's the case, that seems like a disaster for the academies

Audience 46:47

not just told me each other. And I also think, you know, we need to be able to be in a room with pigs and not need to know that we know what they're thinking. Because we need that to be okay, even with other humans, that we can be with them and never understand their experience. For sure, for sure. I would just take an opposite approach to say that I feel really excited by what our practices research can bring to academia and vice versa. And this comes from the perspective of our way through a PhD, and perhaps the PhD at the moment. And I feel very invigorated by the rigour and the rich soup of ideas that I'm encountering in philosophy, that are then informing my way of dealing with practice. And likewise, I feel that practice is has been, and I've been aware of practices research for quite a while before I ever started this PhD. And what I see is that practice has also been pushing academia and challenging its ways of seeing and challenging its ways of understanding. So hearing you to speak. For me this feels very hopeful, not like you never have never Yeah, why do you think that's an opposition to us? Because you said that they will, that can't remember how you said it. But I felt that you were saying that these two things will never understand each other? Or that there's no ways and why is that a problem? I think my point is to,

to, to feel value, or to live with me work with and be with, we don't have to have a total understanding. But I think there's shades of grey in between those two positions. It's not that we work beside each other. And we we simply cannot even go there at all. I think that's not true. I think there are practitioners who are very Faasil in the world of theory and vice versa, that that those worlds are not so mutually exclusive

Laura Cull 49:04

anymore. Me being being open to being changed by something is not the same as knowing it.

Audience 49:12

And when I was talking, I may not have been very articulate. But what I also said was that one person, a single human can do both of those, those jobs, but I still think it requires a thinking in a different way to shimmer between those Yes, Shimmer. Third Way or many third ways? No, I wouldn't. I wouldn't say third way I would say as much. Yeah. Okay. But there's

David Harradine 49:40

another case and I'm picking up on something that or is there another you want to come in? I think picking up I'm thinking correctly picking up on something that you've been talking about? Is it not the case that within the context of the academy? Yes. Practice Research and different ways and in thinking through ways of knowing different modes for generating knowledge are accepted, but also expected, at some point it start to conform to some established structures such as writing about practice, the practice is not quite enough just by itself. And I don't think and this is what Laura was saying, and I absolutely agree with you, if I understood you correctly, I don't think that those established structures have taken it upon themselves to do the same thing in the other direction to allow themselves to be messed up, and pluralize and complicated and to become more general. And that's that's a definite imbalance. I don't I don't think it's, if that's exactly what I was, I don't think it's the case that we can say they're different, but equal, I do different

Audience 50:55

disciplines. And I know, in terms of the RAF, which is the way that universities are ranked according for research strength, that to, to submit practice research to be continuing to be added to the list of strong research presented by a university, you only have to write 300 words, admittedly, you'd have to write something. But that's a big change from years ago when you would need to write more than so. So I'm not saying that it's a perfect situation yet. And I actually welcome the possibility that practice starts to push those other those kind of more traditional academic worlds into a different way of being, you know, a different way of understanding crisis. And I think, partly also, because I come from theatre, dance performance, visual arts sort of background, but I've been presenting at conferences that are not that's not performance at all, and daring to a well experimenting, because it's what I feel comfortable with, with performance lecturing. So doing things that are both performance and text based, and challenging audiences who don't usually experience those kinds of things. And it's really interesting to see how they respond to that alien kind of way of communicating. And then

52:16

I think, Well, I'm not sure how my studio brain is necessarily different than my library brain. But I think the question that I find, especially with what you've just said, and I kind of want to throw it back to that. So how do you then think alongside an audience as opposed to for or in front of an audience? Because it seems like a lot of the discussion that you talked about was the dancers are the musicians, and a few people observe that. And I kind of wonder how you how we might think about challenging the VA, kind of if, which also kind of goes back to academia and practice research, because at the end of the day, you put something forward or you put something in front of an audience, whether it's someone who will read it for the rest, or an examiner or whatever, how do you invite such thinking to happen alongside

Laura Cull 53:13

but that was the other cool thing about how they structured it. That seems to me a great model for sharing thinking regardless of how you categorise it was that the, you know, the audience audience, what they're observing, as David and Sam, were interacting with the performers, directing, you know, it wasn't a show. And so kind of having inviting an audience to be part of the process, part of the conversation about the process from the get go, seemed to me like a model. Already. That was about thinking with the audience to who were feeding back into the, the way the project was framed, or at least

David Harradine 54:08

it's not apparent from this film, the structure. This open studio, though, they were advertised times when people occurred could visit, they amounted to all of the time, one after another after another after another, just kind of slot 90 minute slots, in which people came, we had a conversation with this group of people, an audience, a group of visitors, bunch of people, and we had a conversation, we talked about our investigation, the sorts of questions we were exploring, and we said that in

return for our decision to open up the very first day, the very first week of our research on a brand new project in return for that invitation, they had to contribute to our research by taking part in it conversation with us. We kind of laid out some elements of the contract into the space. And then these encounters just became a catalyst for the subsequent conversation with the visitors. And the purpose of the encounters was to catalyse that conversation. Of course, the encounters were part of the research, and they were a research method, and they yielded great insights and not. But the focus was, was to make things better to make space in which a group of up to 40 people could not 4030 people could articulate thought and response and reaction collectively to something. I don't know if that sort of thing is anything sort of like what you're thinking for? What do you not? Well,

56:01

I didn't have a kind of it was an unknown trajectory. But I think there might be a key because there might be something in that sort of thinking about practice research, that kind of might challenge that. Because if we break that expectation of someone in the artist in the no complaints to an unknown to an audience that doesn't, then you kind of you can assume different relationship. And then research can be can find a different configuration. Yeah, what is the research good find it?

Laura Cull 56:40

I'm not. And that's the terror, isn't it? That's the temperate part, or the frightening part is, that is breaking the delivery of that expectation of knowledge provision, you know, like before this session, Oh, I haven't prepared enough content to get it and having the dealing with the the terror of not providing what you think is expected in this kind of economy of the for you and for the audience, you know, meant you were frightened, but people were coming expecting you to know something and to show you that you knew something and to put on a show, even in the loose sense of that word. And in the same way it's feels comparable to the kind of fear I have around you know, how to think together with people as you meet them, rather than hiding behind the kind of preparation of knowledge that you feel is somehow expected of you, and how how we can do that, at all the stages of research in whatever form it takes, seems to me to be a, you know, a really important challenge to make to ourselves, like,

58:02

what what's been really interesting about this project for Fevered sSleep as a company, and for me and Sam Butler, the other artistic director as in as artists, on the back of our other project men and girls dance, which feels like it's approached a similar sort of tactic. When thinking about a future project, it was really clear having gone through this, and that it called into question the whole process of artistic production. And like the notion that artists produce artworks, which are for people to encounter, like that we have abandoned, I think we've been in a process of abandoning that for quite a while. And this project brought the absolute clarity that just I mean, I'm only speaking for myself, and for us as a company advocating this is better or worse than anything else. But we had abandoned making artworks which we are presented to people, precisely because we only want to produce art processes or potentials, which become part of thinking and talking and become part of discourse and argument and debate. So the artist becomes a catalyst, which is the start of something rather than the endpoint of something which is presented and that I'm making you kind of generalisations and simplifying your point, I think. But that was a real I mean, that was a realisation through this sort of project was really incredible, like five famously points to stop making stuff and start facilitating stuff through the process of kind of making stuff but leaving it really wide open for other people to enter into.

Laura Cull 59:54

That so maybe, yeah, so you know, an athlete goes through a similar process. Maybe I don't want to write Another book also,

David Harradine 1:00:01

you know, coming into our company ending up side by side idea has been part of that process, like, what does it mean for us to think? What does it mean for me as an artist and as artistic director of a company to think about my practice and our work and what we do, through you, through you, through all of you, or whoever the you are? Who are? Yeah, that's that, of course, that's always happened to an extent, to the extent until we get to the point of going, Well, fuck it, I don't care what they think, okay, I don't care about that review, or don't care what Laura thinks she's a philosopher, I'm an artist, I really profoundly care what you think. Because it's a different kind of relationship. You both wanted to say something, you're gonna say something about pigs?

1:00:58

Yeah, I was gonna say, a few different points. But now I don't know if the moment has passed. And I'm also aware that as I start talking that I into that same, like, producing something in relation thing, which is whatever, but I yeah, I was thinking

about when you spoke earlier about this skill, or the resourcing from dance and about, you mentioned contact, and I was thinking a bit about kind of the ego performing performance. And I was thinking about the animals and what they're performing, or go, how they're performing, or how we are asking them to perform in some way, which is not very playful. But I was thinking then about how, actually to kind of what everyone said, how the animals you know, weigh become this quite like unknowable mirror to reflect back something about the process with the dancing the process of the musicians, because in my experience, also as dancer, as a dancer, I have, of course, like, a range of skills, which are available to me in relating to like a person, or an animal, which I very much like to do, but I'm not going to dance for the cat, they can relate in that way. And I was thinking what, what needs to get lost, or what needs to get softened around the codification of those skills. Like when I think about contact, particularly, of course, it's all about like sensing and seeing and finding and all these things that we know. But it's also about performing those things without necessarily being very good at doing them. It can be. And I guess, like I was just curious about what's happening, because we can't know as we've discovered, in many ways, really what the experience is for the animals, but we can know what the experience is for Petra and for Kip at some level, and also for the musicians, we can we can think about ways of trying to capture or record what's happening for them as they're playing in relation to the animals and how that's changing their practices and the codes that they bring to those practices. And that, for me is like the thing that is potentially really fascinating here, because we are also have animals, of course that we have so much in common with, they have so much in common. So it's that like, that I would find so interesting to know more about maybe at some point,

1:03:38

Kip in particular talked about ego didn't he,

1:03:42

I think there was some sort of equivalent to the kind of experience for Fevered sleep that I just described the letting go of what we thought we knew about what we did and how to do it well, which I think Kip had a very similar experience, an extraordinary dancer, who was put in a situation of improvising without any preparation, because the first bit of r&d in front of 30 people, of course, is instinct, and in his language was to, you know, flip all these tricks, like get all the Kip tricks out of caps, but you know, Kip's, particularly remarkable body, and he can do all this amazing stuff. So the older humans can go ah Kip's a great dancer. But it's got nothing to do with the investigation of the project, which we told him and which he knew himself, which I thought about after the first kind of set of improvisation. So over the course of the week, he was doing less and less and less and less. And so as Petra doing less and less and less and less and it's enough just to see if it's possible to breathe and what impact that has a profound impact on on a sheep. And that that's really good what that does to a performance ego, as you say, and we're improvising, I'm just improvising and making it up as I go along. No, you're not you're carrying years of training years of experience, years of tricks, you can flip out in a moment of crisis, because you know, it's good.

Laura Cull 1:05:17

But the kind of the deflation of ego or the decentering of ego that happened by putting the emphasis on paying attention to what the pigs were doing, how they were performing, acting, behaving, was a kind of relief, in a sense, wasn't it or an opening to a different type of movement or way of being for them. But if, if part of what they were doing was simple, was paying attention to the animal performers, not paying attention to their own performance, so much that seemed to be kind of

David Harradine 1:05:52

became like a kind of permission, you were given permission to explore different ways of being a professional dancer in the context of a public improvisation. And

1:06:07

that's yeah, that's kind of what I mean, like something is about learning by being alongside the animals. It's not about learning necessarily about the experience.

David Harradine 1:06:17

No, no, absolutely, absolutely. And it's really interesting, because just just just that as a simple proposition that a human might be granted permission by a pig, to adopt a different way of being that, to me feels like a beautiful thought to arrive, that the potential for the pig or the shape of the goats to do that much to a human, when in most contexts, they are only done to by us. And for that doing to a human to be really profound for the human to rich to him, it was done.

Laura Cull 1:06:50

And it might be a doing less, or not doing. So there's a kind of when we're talking about thinking alongside spatially, there's also something about effort or a kind of passivity, that are thinking alongside is also a bout beings thought, or letting oneself be thought that may not require, you know, the the effort of action in the way that we're thinking about it. But there's a kind of, yeah, an important mode of passivity in that performance to,

Audience 1:07:26

to allow a bit of listening to them instead of just constantly questioning the moment to listen to what the moment is. Which is, I think, part of what.

Laura Cull 1:07:46

Yeah, which isn't, yeah, as you say, which isn't about claiming to know something about those animals, but is producing something still in that?

1:08:00

And still kind of was using those animals in the seller's

Laura Cull 1:08:03

understanding for sure. For sure. For sure. And,

Audience 1:08:07

yeah, and you're not in a field

David Harradine 1:08:10

field, and then not an abattoir?

1:08:16

Can I ask quickly, if you felt that you need any time afterwards to make sense of what happened? Sometimes I'll make something and loads of ideas, I just want to ask. But I always come to a point in places where I've actually got no idea where I've sort of lived and lose my latch on it somehow runs away and I feel like I need to sit sit down at the end and kind of forced some partway through the process. Maybe as a process, maybe a rationalisation, you don't want to engage at that level. I wanted to solve it, but everything you needed to do with it was there. To have that moment afterwards.

David Harradine 1:08:57

Definitely wasn't all bad. And what I wanted to happen afterwards, I realised afterwards, but I realised it too late. So it didn't happen. And then that moment was lost, which I'm really sad about. I realised after that it wasn't possible to come out of this project and to start to think about it by myself, that I could only think about it by talking about it with other with other people. And what I wanted to do was to invite a series of people just have a series of conversations, which we could record and then and then it's possible to listen to those conversations by myself and reflect on them. But I literally physically and emotionally and mentally felt like I can't think about that. Like I can't, I can't understand it. I can't hold it in myself. I can only hold it in between myself and somebody else. I mean, the way this this feels, this feels like one of those encounters that I had wanted make happen like this possibility that there's also this. And that's interesting in the context of your notion of thinking alongside performance. I guess my notion which accompanies that is that performance always wants to be accompanied. It doesn't want to be by itself or certainly in my experience, so that feels like a really mutually rich and beneficial place to this kind of companionable, companionable friendly, mutual thinking, and talking or not talking, you know, thinking and feeling and touching and crisis.

Laura Cull 1:10:40

Like, this is how you deal with the excess, isn't it the excess of an event like that, like, I didn't even go to the entirety, like it was on for a week. And even the amount that isolating I saw what three days maybe, and just the sheer excess of experience was impossible to hold for any length of time. And I probably gave some completely incoherent class to my students, which was just a sort of a babble of trying to share, but that that, that is the experience of trying to process isn't it of kind of wanting to maintain some kind of authenticity to that excess as characteristic of the experience that you can't see, you can't even hold your attention to the sheer multiplicity and thickness of stuff that's going on in front of you, like it was just exhausting to watch, to try and attend that closely to what that big nose is doing with that bar, you know, just trying to hold that. And to try it and then to hold the memory. And, and so that that work is really important for me too, in terms of writing or what happens with writing alongside and in relation to performance of how I re revision and remember, the sensory impacted being in there. And that experience of access such a bit, you know, drain that life out of it, when it when you're trying to

organise or categorise or extract some clarity out of the experience for other purposes to not lose it, you know, there was so much shit in that space constant pooling all the time. And that was a really characteristic part of the experience, there was a lot of poo. And I don't want that not to be in how I remember it and write about it. And it's, I put poo in Lawwell together. You just bring

Audience 1:12:48

some in, when you give any kind of talk about what you think is laying around four corners,

1:12:56

but it did something the pa - the place, smelled. And even us humans who are crap at smelling could smell it. And we went into a different state of understanding something about that space, unconscious through smell. And just that little glimmer of insight into what the world might smell like to have one of those pigs, that this vast, complex world of smell, which we are excluded from, we cannot be part of it. It's not possible. The shirt is a reminder of the existence of that parallel universe that pig lives in which were excluded from beautiful mean. Like really important, really, really good.

Audience 1:13:38

But also the shed in that context is completely separated from the ecosystem that would degrade it and make it its soil. And sure. So So becomes isolated as this thing that sticks and probably hangs around longer than it would have been who is very city oriented, like I grew up in a farm. So like that what I'm imagining is like I've seen I grew up playing a piece or so yeah. So it's like a very specific view through which that experience happens.

Laura Cull 1:14:08

But it's I suppose it depends on how you were staring at them.

Audience 1:14:12

So just because they were like my companion.

Laura Cull 1:14:14

But but but it's maybe a different type of looking.

Audience 1:14:17

Yeah, yeah. But I was wondering whether it's like these experiments is particularly strong in your lessons, because it's also not, you know, the context, which is presented as London and its people just travelled through like the cube which is very humanised.

Laura Cull 1:14:32

We went through a series of butcher shops actually walk down an alley through a load of butcher shops and pack them in order to get to the space.

Audience 1:14:42

Everything help reception from humans might be very different.

David Harradine 1:14:47

As much as we know nobody objected to the butcher shop, but lots of people objected to the project because then the problem of art.

Audience 1:14:56

So will you continue to work with this? Yeah.

David Harradine 1:14:59

Just trying to create some different contexts in which it might continue some outside on the phones, some inside in

Laura Cull 1:15:10

exploring a collaboration with the vet school where I work that sorry, where there were animals to think about empathy, partly. So when empathy is an issue for vets and how that's performed and communicate with animals to vets are trained to think we're wondering about what vets and performers might teach each other about communicating with families. Thank you.

Outro: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021

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