Dance as the practice of negative knowledge with Steve Valk

(*automated transcript from otter.ai*)

SPEAKERS
Steve Valk, Frank Bock, 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.

*(**2014** audio file begins)*

Frank Bock 00:42
Welcome everybody to this first Crossing Borders…things are going to go in a slightly different order tonight. And I'm very excited about having Steve Valk here to open the series. And the series is about kind of understanding and imagining where the art form of dance can go, and how it's going, how it's really going in all kinds of directions. Steve wants me to say only a little, about his biography, because I think a lot of it's going to emerge through the presentation this evening. So I'm really excited to see so many of you and hope that many of you will be back seamlessly, as we've already done.

Steve Valk 01:36
So I just wanted to say the rather, you know, what's the word? You know, sort of atmospheric theatrical beginning is really just a kind of performative hat tipping or Thank you, or recognition of where my work started, which was very much almost with Robert Wilson. And you just saw a segment from Einstein on the Beach. Which, it was really nice to actually think about this stuff. I've never lectured on it. I've never shown that clip I've never talked about, actually, I've never even really talked about working with Robert Wilson. But Frank said that I should talk about how I came to where I am. So not so much about what I'm doing and sort of thing. Philosophy, I'm

really interested in all those things in theory and always has been kind of to say, Okay, who are you? What did you you know, you came here tonight? Where do you come from? And so I put that up that Einstein on the Beach there because that's kind of the earliest roots of my work in theatre. Like I said, there are a few things I want to say about Einstein on the Beach. You could see it as still clapping. You could see it as a kind of a blossom of flowering of all the downtown New York artwork. That happens, you know, who knows when you want to go back, but the whole happenings the whole art scene, John Cage, and Merce Cunningham, the Judson church, the experimental music, all of it is kind of like the spirit of it. And this is all kind of collected in a way, in this Robert Wilson work, we send a child to the choreography, and it made it to the Metropolitan Opera House. So one of the things I want to talk about tonight is doing something, moving things, taking ideas that are very personal, deeply personal, and taking them into society and bringing them forward and presenting them and having them be seen. So just to say, it's quite amazing that there's an opera at the Metropolitan Opera called Einstein on the Beach, which is pretty interesting. Title. And the text that was being spoken, you heard sort of the sort of two people speaking at the same time and repetitions and no real coherence meaning. And one thing you should know and again, it's also a theme of tonight is that that text was written by Christopher Knowles, who was an 11 year old autistic boy in an institution who Robert Wilson met, befriended, and then almost cooperated with a life tie. I'm long or certainly on many different projects, and produced some major works together. So what you're seeing on the opera stage of the, of the Metropolitan Opera, is the speaking is the language of an autistic boy, his poetry. And the poetry is very interesting, because it sounds just sort of weird and repetitive and whatever. But if you actually write it down, it's absolutely mathematical. So here we're connecting to maybe to Einstein. And to, again, another theme of tonight's talk, I guess they're going to be that 25 themes, but in sort of the deeper kinds of languages that we have the hidden languages, the languages that are to be uncovered, or to be excavated. So it's pretty amazing that on the opposite of the Metropolitan, all of these things are coming together. So I guess that's really all I have to say about that. So speaking of this excavating, and of doing something and of, of work coming and thinking and acting from a deep place, which I'm hoping, obviously, I think we hopefully have a connection, to dance and to embodiment to all these things, that's where I'm coming from. So the purpose or the reason for this and speaking about this is, because I feel that in our times, now, we're deeply in need of a kind of redirection, or re appraisal, a reconfiguration of our values. And so it's interesting because the text that the bus driver was talking about when he was sitting there talking was about nighttime and going to sleep and telling a story before you go to sleep. So in connection with that is this phrase which will come up magically, for the invention of radically new values to occur this first absolutely necessary to achieve the void of values. So again, connecting a theme for tonight, something about starting from zero from from from from letting go of everything, of finding some kind of No, no place. And perhaps, and we'll go to the next slide, the title of the of this evening is negative knowledge. And the question for this evening is we have a kind of psychic psychic, sort of, what's the word? Para psychological sort of connection tonight? But anyways, the question is, is dance the art form of the 21st century. And I'm connecting it to negative knowledge in a sense that the knowledge of letting go of knowledge, the knowledge of having to, to give up knowledge, that is one of the definitions of what negative knowledge is. So I'm saying that and again, it says, well, you'll see later in the next slide, but this is not I'm not claiming to speak for

dance, like I'm talking about dance, I'm speaking I will say, I'm speaking of a vision of dance. So it's a vision of what dance is, could be. And so I'm kind of asking the question, does the dance form the art form? Have something centrally important to do in this century? And if it does, my my thesis is that it has to do with some kind of performative emptying or kind of a dissolving of the No. Okay. That's my, one of my favourite pictures of myself. So I'm telling the story. So and I, I kind of liked the flashlight, this is a that guy there is Mark Patrick Hederman and Ireland, he's a, he's a Benedictine Abbot. And another one of the themes we're going to talk about tonight is the CO the CO co creation, and the collaboration and the connecting of dance with other fields of knowledge. And of course, the idea that dance is a field of knowledge. And that's actually how I'm seeing that is to say, it is actually a kind of embodied knowledge. And so in that sense, it can connect up with with anything and here connecting up with, you know, with Mark Patrick Hederman connecting up with religion with liturgy, with prayer with with the whole tradition sort of sacred of the sacred. So this is one of the partnerships. And you know, you'll see the next slide. Having moved beyond the architecture of its stations stationary something historical universe dramaturg, Steve Valk, a vision of dance that no longer understand itself as an art form, but as a constituting principle. So, I'm kind of, I'm kind of putting myself into another place, I'm putting on different glasses, and I'm saying, I'm going to look at dance not as a thing not as an object, but as a kind of principle as a kind of creative force as a kind of a living, mysterious life, vital, vital life, life energy. And, and to give it a kind of scientific spin, a technology of the self. So by exploring this kind of unknown by kind of going into this, this, the ability to experience something new, or to let go of the knowledge we have, we also are developing technologies of the self, I mean, of understanding who we are, what we are, what it means to be a person, what it means to be a human being on this planet in this ecology. So it's a real exploration and a kind of, you know, a reconfiguring of even how we understand who we are. And that's, again, how I'm seeing dance tonight. That's how I'm presenting it in this vision of dance that we're that we're all participating in tonight. So I just seemed to show some pictures because I liked this person. And it's sort of like a mood thing. This is a drawing by Friedrich Kiesler, who's an architect, he's a visionary architect. If you really, if you're, I mean, I can very much recommend looking into him super interesting person, he lived around the 20th century, he died like in the he lives like late I think it was born late 19th century, early 20th century and died like in 1960s or something. But he was a very interesting architect. And this is a drawing of his, and he believed in something called core realism, which was the kind of interpenetration and connection of everything of thoughts of life of buildings of nature, all things kind of connecting. And you kind of see this picture of the notion that we make our reality like, you know, the relationship between ourselves and the world is a is a mutual exchange. Yeah. So this is a this is a theatre of his Ah, yes. And I wanted to read this as well. Here's another little sort of thing to throw in. Speaking of negative knowledge. I also do want to talk about the shadow side of things. So negative, yes, in the sense of aware of the unknown, but also negative in the sense of anxiety, fear, there's there are two sides to everything or more many sides. So this is a quotation. I won't read the whole thing, but it's from Aldous Huxley. And it basically, it's his recounting of taking mescaline of taking a hallucinogenic drug. And he was considered one of the most brilliant people of the 20th century. I mean, he was an extremely interesting, experimental person travelled and really an amazing individual. And what I find interesting is he's talking about going to the limits of his own consciousness. So it says here, and suddenly I had an inkling of what it must feel like to be

mad. Confronted by a chair, which looked like the last judgement, I found myself all at once, on the brink of panic. This I suddenly felt was going too far. The fear as I analyse it, in retrospect, was worth being overwhelmed, of just of disintegrating under a pressure of reality, greater than a mind accustomed in this my favourite phrase to living most of the time, in a cosy world of symbols could possibly bear so for a mind that was living mostly in the cosy world of symbols this experience of, of the world under Mexico. When was overwhelming, and he says that the schizophrenic is like a man permanently under the influence of mescaline, and therefore unable to shut off the experience of reality, which he is not wholly wholly enough to live with, which he cannot contain, or he cannot explain away. And which scares him into interpreting its unremitting strangeness. So he's basically saying that the fear that underlies this experience is a fear of being overwhelmed of not being able to contain things. And that that creates incredible panic and fear and anxiety. Now, the reason I put that at the front of this talk, is because one of the most profound issues I think we're facing in our situation in western civilization, is the very, very bizarre and, you know, dysfunctional relationship between the arts and the rest of society. And, again, I can't go into this in great detail, because we don't have a lot of time. And there's lots of things I want to talk about. But I believe that the issue, the unspoken issue, that's that's that's happening in society, in relation to the arts, is the anxiety that Huxley is talking about that, in fact, generally, we are afraid to, to take in so much reality. And there are people who, you know, there's there's people say, it's called an Autistic Spectrum Disorder, it's a spectrum. So there are all sorts of people who can live with and sort of not live with diverse, diverse, diverse awareness of what's around them, and diverse abilities to cope with it and function. And so I think I'm going to just since this might happen all that long. So like I said, I really don't want to skim over that. But I think that I think that we all know, we all know how weird it feels. And we all know that we are in this in this strange communicational. You know, dysfunctional place. And I And it's, and I've spent a lot of time thinking about what is that and what's going on. And I think that that what underlies that is a kind of anxiety for the unknown, and that a lot of people who call themselves artists, and those are people who kind of constructively work with this, being very aware and open and sort of connected to everything and having this feeling of really, of really being, you know, almost nearly overwhelmed by all the things that are happening, that those are artists, but then there are many, many other people. And for example, I worked and I'll show a little bit about this, I worked for seven years in the Social Services, also doing dramaturgy and the arts and stuff like that. And many of those people, I just feel like there are people who are artists, but who didn't have don't have the tools or the skills or not in the social structures to be able to do something with their sensibility. So the thing is that they they suffer, and they are they are their their their human who have their personhood is in a certain way, violated or or hindered or controlled, and they give up sovereignty or they have to give up sovereignty. So I think this issue is absolutely huge. And you could say one of the most important interesting things that are happening out there is the neurodiversity movement. So I feel like we had in the country I'm from we had a civil rights movement, we had a women's movement, we had a gay and lesbian movement, and the movement, the liberation movement of the future, and again, I'm sort of whatever is a neurodiversity movement, it's about understanding that there is a highly rich, diverse ecosystem of consciousness and awareness and we need to create a much more differentiated structures for healthy living to propagate you know, anyways, blah, blah, blah, going on a lot. This is his building. This is the theatre he designed a house called the endless

house. A gallery space. Did your thing he didn't want the paintings hanging on the walls and he talked about hanging Add in constellations. And again, maybe there's some some of what I was talking about poor realism, a world where things are not fixed, they're not finished. They're not objectified. They're still in relation, they're still in there becoming Yeah. So negative ability capability is actually a word that's been around a long time, describes the capacity of human beings to transcend, and revise their contexts. The term has been used by poets and philosophers to describe the ability of the individual to perceive, think and operate beyond any presupposition of a predetermined capacity of the human being. So what I'm talking about is going beyond what the known and what we sort of think we know about people and ourselves in our world, and really going beyond everything we know. And again, the thesis for tonight is dance is or could be the art form of the 21st century, because it might be able to lead us in this direction. In further, in further, oh, it further captures the rejection of the constraints of any context. So the idea of saying, this lovely, I don't know what's going on here, I don't have any clue. And I'm just gonna see what happens. So it's literally can be anywhere, it's going somewhere and going I'm this might be called a supermarket. But I have no idea what this is, for me, it's all new. I'm watching and seeing what's happening. And I'm amazed, that would be sort of something of the kind of perception that this is referring to. So the rejection of constraints of any context and the ability to experience phenomenon free from epistemological bounds, free from the kind of common sense understanding we have, as well as to assert one's own will and individuality upon their activity. The term was first used by a level that does matter. So anyways, what's really interesting is going back to Einstein on the Beach, someone like Robert Wilson, being deeply affected and connected and interested in an autistic boy, and producing work for the opera, in full collaboration in conjunction with him. And so and, you know, we all know what it's like to do any work to put up any work to to get any show up. So you can imagine what it's like to get up or work. You know, like that for the for the Metropolitan Opera, what that entails. So here again, maybe Robert Wilson is an example of this negative ability, this ability to go way beyond anything that convention says is this or that way, to find something, and to bring it out and to show it and to potentially transform the way we see. Yeah. By the way, if anybody has some absolutely pressing question or something they don't understand. Please give a nod, give a wink. And be glad to answer so that's Friedrich Keisler brain that acts rather than thinks this is one of the fantastic dancers it Dr. Dance Company where I worked with Michael clean forever from Michael clean. For seven years, we discovered that there was a or discovered we went over to our neighbours and the neighbours were it was a workshop. What was it called a work? Garvey work is an occupational workplace. That's right. Yeah, an occupational workspace. And we went over there and visited them. And they were super nice. And we started to invite them over to visit us and we did things with them drawing and stuff. But weirdly enough, it takes an entire year to invite them to come and dance. And what happened is that we created a sort of very special situation. And we kind of all went out on the dance floor, like super aware and concentrated. And suddenly these people were dancing, and we were just absolutely floored at their ability. And so basically, in the course of a couple of years, we had top dancers who could dance anywhere in the world, and they did. So they went to Dublin, they went to London, they went to Frankfurt, they danced with the, you know, top dancers of the world in festivals, and these are, you know, we had 12 people and four of them to do that. So, so that's again, one of the major, major major AHA effects of the of all of this work and this referred to social

choreography. is the discovery of what is out there, if you just engaged with it, yeah, and what is out there for dance for the arts, that just blows your mind. But we don't have the structures in place, we have these rigid sort of weird frames that we have that lead us to behave in certain ways and think in certain ways. But if we're able to let go of that, we discover these incredible things. And if you see these pictures, I don't need to say anything. So anyways, summing it up, dance does not create or use space, but disclose it, this discloses it as a meaningful situation, does not diligently conduct a building project of the world, but rather stops mechanical building, and begins a poetic living, a hearing and sharing the common being in the world with the creatures of the world. So here, we were at Robert Wilson, I think it's really great to see pictures like this, this is, you know, his apartment, and he did his workshops, and, you know, in his, in his in his loft apartment in New York City. And that's where these things start, they start here, you know, they start somewhere in the world. So they wind up in the Metropolitan opera stage, but they start there. What I also just, well, just, it's just interesting, because if you look at this picture here, there's a weird walrus over there, there's some old guy, there's like a kind of a cage with some lady, there's, I don't know what is on the stage, there's someone lying there in the, in the, in the straw. And this is a piece called The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud. So, again, you could see this as a kind of negative search. It's like, how I want to understand or I'm interested in Sigmund Freud, but I'm gonna knock out my rational structures, I'm going to make something and it's going to it's going to tell me something that I don't even know what it's going to tell me. But that's the way I'm exploring Sigmund Freud. And I think it's a really good way to explore Sigmund Freud. And here's the Einstein on the Beach picture. And this is a I just threw this in a bit random, but it's a quotation from Andrew Hewitt, who wrote a book called Social choreography, which I'm going to get to that term. But we might think of choreography in terms of a rehearsal that is as the working out and working through of utopian nevertheless, real social relations. That's Buckminster Fuller, visionary or another visionary architect a little bit later. His architecture was very much built on the study of nature. So his stability and his ended the sustainability of his buildings was one that he found in nature. And so he's studied how he's one of the first people studying how natural structures are strong and sustainable and efficient and ecological. And again, I like this picture as a social choreographic picture. So, I also wanted to show you things you might not have seen before, this is a work of William Forsythe, in Groningen in Holland. And he planted trees, and they were they had a string tied to them. So they were bent from from the very beginning. And basically, this is a 50 year choreography, of something growing and bending like that. And I just wanted to, again, expand the understanding of choreography, and also practically show what artists working in dance and choreography are doing that we might not think about. And so again, the whole purpose of tonight is to kind of just open up the field of dance are thinking about dance and choreography. So I'm referring to lean foresight, because that is the second sort of major influence. I wouldn't say I don't know influence but because foresight was more of an enabler, but basically, I worked for about 12 years, a little bit on and off, but pretty much for 12 years as head dramaturg, an artistic collaborator with Ballet Frankfurt and he, I don't know probably you're all fairly familiar with Forsythe's work What William Forsythe did was to go at ballet, sort of in the way I've been talking about in the sort of in the sense of negative knowledge, of kind of not accepting what ballet was sort of saying it is, and the rules that it was proposing and the ideology, like the kind of belief system now, like, I mean, you all know that ballet sees the body, as symmetrical and

sees this point here is the centre of everything, everything radiates from this point. But what foresight did was say, Well, what if it radiated from potentially any point? So what if it What if my elbow became the centre of all of everything? And what if my and then my painting, so he began to deconstruct art ballet, while respecting it and while being fascinated by it, but basically, going at it with this sort of this negative knowledge, this sort of that is almost in a way destructive that is deconstructive, that is looking for a kind of deep, deep vitality, that maybe ballet itself has kind of lost or looking for a potential radical social, possibly even revolutionary potential somewhere in ballet. But but but needing to spend years and years and years and years, you know, going down that tunnel going down that, you know, that that rabbit hole, yeah. So I included this drawing just, again, to sort of connect up with the architect. And, you know, this notion of all these disciplines are connected the body and space, you know, so this is a, I think you might know this, it's a video, a demonstration video he did, where he's outline his his choreographic techniques. So, we're gonna read that thing. Again, I wanted to show you just a little bit of something, if you have some foresight, and also, you know, just to kind of, so you can imagine a little bit what it must be like to sit in the theatre, and watch it smell and like, so it's similar pieces an hour in going an hour, an hour and 20 minutes. So I mean, you are just, you know, what's going on what's happening. And the thing is that I think something is happening, lots happening. But it's happening at this other level of awareness. And I don't I mean, I'm sure you're realising I'm not. But I don't want to trivialise that at all. It's not about something else. It's about a level of like, fundamental consciousness and awareness. It's the it's the root, it's like our core is being spoken to, at this moment, things are being negotiated, things are being communicated that are, I think, really elemental, and they're very powerful. And the thing is that our contemporary structures of, of, of the way we organise the arts, trivialise this, they package it, they put it into boxes, and they want it to end they want it to have seven shows, and leave and don't come back. Because something else is coming. And it's really important that something else comes so that nobody thinks this is anything more than a candy box of different things coming and cheap, cheap things moving. And we don't work with this. We don't take this apart. We you know, one of the things that really amazes me is whenever anything happens in the world that serious like really really really serious there's never an artist anywhere in sight to be talking or being sitting on a panel or you know, I mean artists are activists I mean, that's clear I mean, artists are activists but this notion of being called to speak I really never see that you know anyways so to go on we're a little bit you know, we got a lot to cover and I don't think we're going to cover it so but I guess now we're getting someplace we are we're doing well right hold on. I just saw the next slide. I'm like okay, so I think we're so on to make the leap right now, but this leap is not actually happening in the world. firsts So speaking of lead, haha. So yeah, so that's, that's in the middle. And so let's just hit save Forsyth, you know, did all this work, we just saw a piece of this work. When I started when I started at Ballet Frankfurt, one of the first things not not the absolute first thing, but over the course of the year, my first year, Forsyth was saying he wanted to bring the audience up on stage like he was, he was just, you know, he wanted to do a piece where the audience was on the stage and wanted to break that boundary. And about whatever, six years later, who did it, in a sense that he moved the ballet out of this fantastic situation in the opera house with the biggest stage in Europe, where it was at that time with a really beautiful penthouse studio. And everything he wanted, he left and he moved the company into a streetcar depo which had, which was on the ground floor, which had giant windows like

those windows, they're even bigger and all glass. And basically, you could see the passers by people going to the boss, some people can't whatever they were right there. And you had this big giant space. And he did a piece which I if I had a picture I would have shown it and talked about he did. He's based on Friedrich Keisler that architect that called endless house. And it was a piece that, in fact, had a gigantic dance floor in this street CarDekho. And people could take their shoes off and be on the dance floor. And there were walls moving and the whole thing was like ports. So you could walk around, get a drink. And the whole piece just kind of happened in flux and flow and was very influenced by also by Balinese dance and theatre. So you have this shift that happens, and I call it a paradigm shift, because I think it introduces a new relationship between the art and the audience, between the artists in the audience, between the the roles of the artist and the audience, and something happens. And so the work that she that clearly marks that is a work called White bouncy castle, which is a choreographic installation. And what I find really interesting is, you know, theatre is futile. I mean, it comes from patrons and kings building, you know, castles and having stages and commissioning work. And so it has that tradition. And I think it's deeply symbolic that in this other kind of a building, you have this white glowing fortress, which is traditionally meant to keep people out to be a kind of mil-, you know, a militaristic kind of a, you know, a, what's the word, a rampart, to protect. And this rampart is actually an invitation. And it's actually a toy, it's a child's that it's an object or it's something that an architecture that children have. And it becomes a place for auto poetic, self created movement, and being and it's framed in a State Theatre, it's that it is a it is a theatre, and it is the is the calling of the audience out of the seats. And it's the artist creating the space for participation for creativity, for vitality, for self regulation, in the sense of people are with each other and have to figure things out. Yeah, so that, that was a tremendous shift. And basically, if we were talking and we were going up a hill, we've now reached the top of the hill of the talk. And now we're going to start to plunge into what I call this new paradigm shift and into social choreography, which I which I founded an institute year ago called the Institute of Social choreography, and I believe that it is a emerging cultural practice. So it's not just describing things that are happening, but I believe that it's potentially could be a kind of form of cultural practice. That is, that is a drama. So that's the dramaturgy of this new situation. I made a place for people to go and to sit at a table. There are cushions there, see them right there. And I made a giant three giant children books like with big thick pages, huge with images and, and really fun for children parents to go and look at. But they were also deeply philosophical. So basically, my philosopher friends could look at it and like it, and kids and their moms could go and look at it. And if you see the white little thing on the back there, that is a wheel on the roof on the roof of this sort of Emporium there, and on the roof are castles that we commissioned from a local arts after school Arts Project. And one of those castles is on the table, and you see the TVs there, there's one there and there's one there. And basically, that wheel rotates every minute. And there's a camera and the castles that the kids made show up on the TVs in that in that space. And the kids were I did a dramaturgical presentation of the project to the after school project, we invited them for the blowing up of the castle. Of course, they got tickets to come, they were there for the opening. And so this and this is a kind of participatory dramaturgy, you can say and also one that is hopefully accessible to, you know, like a Mobius band, it doesn't disconnect from anybody, but it's kind of connected. Yeah. I'm not even going to read that. This is the invitation card for a project called Smile club. Now it's not searching, searching, searching. From on just a

second F. So you see, there's a little chat, it's really interesting. This was just done by a design student at the design school, he came up with this idea. But it's very interesting that it's seven year old child, and the white bouncy castle and the transition to this project. Anyways, small club was a five year long, full year of collaboration with the College of Art and Design. And what happened there was if you could imagine, the Royal Shakespeare Company, or the Royal Ballet was about their ballet here in town is the Royal Ballet. So imagine them saying, okay, doors open art students in and go. That's what happened. So for five years, the ballet, Frankfurt simply opened its doors like you would to refugees or to, you know, people who have you know, were affected by a flood to come into your house, and live. That's what happened. And so these are the every card, you'll see them. Oh, and then and also, very much the notion of the idea was, as designers, as students, as artists, to see the social as a playground as a possibility for creative creativity. So saying, If I were like in a helicopter looking down at my city and going, I think we should take that and put that there and take that, that there. We bring those things here. And that's kind of how these students worked. So it opened with a party for 1400 people in white bouncy castle. And the first event and I'm you know, again, there are 17. I don't want to go through all of them. But the first one basically turned the depot into like an airport, or a train station. And so the audience came, and there were computers and everything was organised. And basically people signed up to travel. And every half hour a bus came and 50 people got on the bus and left the party. And what happened is that they went to an abandoned airport, which had been totally curated. So like when they went out there it was there were big, big, big fire was it called garbage cans, these big you know, things with firing them, there was a band playing, there was food, there was weird stuff going on. And so everyone at this event, at some point in the evening was taking the trip and leaving. So you had this weird situation of like being at a party where everyone's leaving to go yet you're on a really behind a clock. How was it? I'm not going to tell you, you know, but it's really cool. And things like you know, everything was curated. So the people on the bus that are you know, in uniform, they speak Swedish, they don't speak English, and they have little things to hand out. You get stuff and it's every detail was was designed choreographed. And I'm just going to fly through these things because oh, this is one of my favourites as well. This is this is really important. And we did about seven of these events and everyone love them and you can imagine, you know, audience coming in. And it's the thing where without the audience, there's nothing if the audience doesn't participate, it's not an event. So, so anyways, so after seven of these events, we decided, Okay, we're gonna get tricky, we're starting to get bored making just really fantastic things for people. So what we decided is we would have two of these events in one evening. And the first one would be at 730. And the second one would be a 10, or 1030, I don't remember. And we would sell 50 tickets to the first event and 200 tickets to the second. And what happened was that the 50, people came to the first show, and they were treated like kings and queens, and they got t shirts, and they were just like, there were 30 people taking care of 50 people. And they were led somewhere, they were told to sit down, and then famous actors and dancers came and talk to them. And before they knew it, they were all divided up into groups, and they were doing something. And within about an hour's time of this doing, they realised they were at the event at 1030. And in fact, what it was was an elaborate, perfectly organised piece that had been divided up in, you know, efficiently so that 50 people could learn it and do it. And it was fine. It wasn't you know, of course, they weren't, you know, it's really simple. It was it was a bit of a stealing of Jerome Bell

idea. It was like really stealing an idea of his and using doing it. And one of the funny things I thought was that was when a journalist I met she was she's mysterious. She said, I'm here to cover both events, I was just gonna go with the first one and go the second one, she had a call her colleague and say, Look, you're gonna have to come to the second I'm in the second. So So again, here you see a radical, you know, a radical something happening inversion happening in theatre, which is that the artists remove themselves from the whole equation. And in fact, the audience becomes the performance for the audience. And it's one of the it was one of the top, you know, seven or eight or six this evenings I've ever experienced in my life. Because what was amazing was, that's that the other people came thinking something wild is going to happen, it's going to be whatever. They didn't know what was going to happen. But instead, there was just someone handing out a programme, they walked into the space, it was just like a theatre, there were some drinks and then and then the end, the programme had, of course, all the names, everything had been printed up in two and a half hours. And so they went in and they sat down in the dark lights go off. And the first piece the first little thing was She's a model by Kraftwerk. And there was a spotlight in the middle and all 50 people one at a time, came in to the spotlight, did something and walked away, walked out, and the people started to watch it. And I swear, I could feel it like just coming through my body that the entire audience got it. They just got it. And they started to like cheer they put up there they put up lighters, it was so bizarre, but it was like they got it. It was so it was like that's us, that's us, you know. So anyways, again, like I could talk 17 events, we did all stuff like this, and I call it the ballet Frankfurt opening its body it's home, it's you know, it's social body, and letting others come in to choreograph the social. And this happened over five or six years. And I'm just gonna, these are these are parts of this show. This was a an overnight sleep over 400 by 250 people. I'm leading a Midnight's walk, where we're going without anybody knowing it to the Museum of Natural History, and all the lights are off and we only have flashlights. And the director of the Natural History Museum gives a tour for half an hour in groups, you know, six groups or seven groups went all night long in the middle of the night to the Museum of Natural History led by the director of museum with a flashlight to the museum. So just saying that's one of the things that happened. mattresses were organised over months, you know, gathering 250 mattresses and blankets were bought at flea markets and washed and so anyways, I mean again, lots of details. There's a kitchen everybody was woken up by a jazz singer in the morning going around and there was you know, rolls were brought and coffee made and you know there was a big giant sink that were like 12 people would brush their teeth at the same time. Everybody got pillows and a little house shoes and some toothbrush and toothpaste and And I slept the evening on a giant round blanket that was sewn by the opera, where like 20 people could actually lie in there and sleep. And then in the middle was a hole and an actor from the theatre read stories at nights from, you know, to the people sleeping. And anyways, like I said, so lots of beautiful stuff, basically allowing people, citizens, artists to play with the social structures to be to just experiment, you know. And, you know, the question is, you know, where can we do this? And isn't this quite a good thing to be doing? You know, here's breakfasts. I'm just going to go through these pictures, because there's just too much stuff. things. You know, this was a giant, this was a, this was like a treasure hunt. In a way, it's a stupid word, right, just to describe it quickly, all through the whole neighbourhood with 40 different stations, and people going every half hour groups of 10. And they all wind up at the, at the telecom Central Headquarters. And there's a huge lobby, and we have a giant party.

And people go, that's the largest video screen in Europe and the Telekom, hosted this party at the end. But you know, it's amazing in the name of art, also. And, of course, it's having valet Frankfurt, William Forsythe, you know, on the hydrometer, I go to the telecom, we want to do this crazy project. But the thing is that they all wanted to do it, they loved it. So what we discovered was that there's this huge creative and even kind of a narcotic playful, you know, desire out there, in the society, to just to just do stuff to do things to do crazy things. Yeah. So it culminated in the creation in of a choreographed or a two year, four month long in each year living room, which became a place for arts and for arts public, but also for mothers and children and families. And so this is what it looked like almost every day, because it was winter. And it was the greatest indoor playground in the town. It was free. And of course, all my colleagues were shocked and horrified that all these babies and mothers were in there. Because it used to be students reading books, and drinking coffee. But it was fantastic. And it was also again, social experimentation. And we had like, famous pedagogues coming in and saying this was the most successful adult child situation they'd ever seen, you know, bright balls and plastic, and, you know, nothing like that. So the parents felt like they had valet Frankfurt, and the kids are having a great time. Yeah. And, you know, you have utopian studies, conferences, happenings, and you have that happening in the same building. And then you have, this was a TV show, with a bear and the kids follow the bear all around, and they're going backstage, and the bears in the middle of the South African Dance Company, that's guessing, sort of bears in there. So the thing is that, you know, look, what we can do with our own structures, look, what we can do with, you know, with, with what we do every day, how we can shift it, how we can open it up for, for different experiences, and for socially affirming and creatively affirming experiences. Yeah. This is a big sister day. So it's art students from the heart did did curated a day for little girls to you know, to do stuff, and they're getting facials here. And, of course, the dance, you know, university was they're doing stuff as well. So that all ended as going back to the sort of shadow side of things. I mean, I always thought the day that the Avant Garde Arts become totally accessible to the society is the day the politicians like, jump for joy. And just, you know, it's like, the history is the end of history. It's a new dawn. Yeah, it was exactly the opposite. There was that people, there wasn't a real awareness of what was happening. And because it wasn't representational, in a sense that it wasn't William Forsythe doing big works and just sort of pumping out the stuff that gets needs to get done. Because it was ambiguous and different. There was just no reception for it. And in fact, probably 100 heard about it, when foresights contract was ended. And the whole bail I frankly, can't. So I'm gonna skip, what are we doing on time? How are we frankly? Yes, okay. All right. Well, so after that period, I started to use the networks and I am I this is a project I did with one of the great contemporary ensembles, music ensembles, we did a project in a prison with young prisoners, which is really fantastic. I won't go into the details. And then during the period of ballet Frankfurt, I met the choreographer, Michel clean. And we became colleagues, partners, artistic partners, and very, very, very good friends. And basically, he's the person I work with almost exclusively as an artistic partner. And Michael was sort of in limbo he was choreographing for Valley Frankfort but didn't want No. And he wanted to have a company wanted to take over an institution. And so he had two job offers one was in Czechoslovakia or something or I'm not exactly sure. And the other was in Ireland. And he said, Well, the one in Ireland is connected with the university, it's part of the university, and they have this church that they want to, you know, they're going to give the company a church,

and I said, is no brainer, you've got to take the Irish thing. So basically, after Valley, Frankfurt closed, my I had a contracted belly, Dr. Dance, give me with Michael. And basically what we did is you can imagine that you saw the pictures, there was like this ocean of experience, we had just had this kind of revolutionary time. And it's over in your life, what the hell happened and what is going on. And what was that all about. So basically, Doctor was this beautiful, smaller infrastructure, but beautiful infrastructure, with total freedom, because the Irish don't have such a strong contemporary dance tradition. So really, they were like, great that you're here, and, you know, do the dance company. And so we basically took it off for full steam. And I think what we did was we designed, we became to design specific prototypes and specific things, we started a mentoring programme, so that choreographers coming out of college programmes for people who have been out into the world for a few years, but we're looking for kind of, you know, communication and critical exchange about their work. They came to Dr. Some of them are here tonight. Mark is here, and other people are in the building and whatever. So anyways, and then we, you know, we worked with the Garvey centre, Michael did his own choreographies, we had an event called an ambush tonight, I'm just, I'm just gonna go. So this is the this is the space. And the thing that we did. That's really important. We started with a month long Think Tank. And we invited the public in. And we invited experts from different fields, people that we had read were interested in. But what was really curious is that none of them were from dance and choreography. And probably that was on purpose, but not really, but it sort of turned out that way. And again, we start, we also then wrote books, and we're really interested in sort of in theoretical, like, what happened at Valley Frankfurt, what are we doing? What is the social photography? What is the relationship between choreography and dance and other disciplines. So that's all was started in Dhaka. And by the way, that's free to Keesler. It's another piece of Friedrich killers keys, there's architecture up there on the slide. And we're just this is why I'm just gonna go flip through this just. And the other thing that was really important was that we decided from the moment from day one not to have any ticket price, no tickets. Because we figured out that in Limerick, which is not you know, which is a smaller town and doesn't have a real dance scene and whatever, that we figured ticket prices, were going to just keep so many people away. And the money that we would earn would be so marginal, really, that we just decided, forget it. And so what happened is that we actually had auctions all the time, we created a community around the whole work. And the other thing that I think is really important, and again, it's a huge luxury, which is that this whole thing of like, well, they're paying so we should actually, you know, do something and basically, it didn't exist. So there was a sense of we're doing what we think is right, and people are coming in because they want to come in. And again, if you don't think about this, really you just do it. But now after seven years of doing it and returning to the normal world, you're like laying, wow, how do you build deep cultural roots? If you get this weird ticket thing going on, and figuring out in detail, have you really done the right you know, how do you trust How are you able to how do you empower people who've spent their lives perfecting or getting good at something? How do you How do you empower them to radically follow what they think the next step should be the right next step. And of course, that's what creative people have to do. Because they have to create these new structures and these challenging structures for the society, they have to challenge the whole perceptual machinery mechanism of the society. So obviously, they need the laboratory to produce the stuff and they need to be like racehorses go. So coming back again to the world, after having, you know, been invalid Frankfurt. And

these things, it's like, wow, you know, of course, that's what you do. I'm gonna leave that open. So there was also fantastic dancer. You know, Michael was, I said to everybody, Michaels choreographic work, and the dance was like, the, the nuclear reactor of this place. So it's like, this was the this is the, this is the vital elixir of this whole project is the dance that's happening. And in fact, what we did is we had, the church was an open studio. And so there was dance happening all the time, but the doors were open. So people would come in, talk quietly, have lunch, you know, have meetings, sometimes if it was too loud, they'd go up into a little loft area, but basically, there was no studio that's shut, and I'm doing my work. It was like, open studio, which again, changes your whole thinking, no mirrors, no, like, I have to be alone to do my work. It's like a kind of tough school, for working. But it also had an incredible quality. And so you had lots of you. So it was it was possible to work like every day, and always be connected and surrounded by dance. So that was an amazing experience. Feeling dance is a living, you know, force in a working day in a in an environment. So I'm gonna I'm going to probably this lot, lots of stuff to show still. But I'm going to end here I think with a with a work that I find to be extremely interesting is called choreography for blackboards. And basically, it's the embodiment of what we've been talking about, which is this invisible, something this, this, you know, can talk about this negative knowledge, this vitality, this kind of, you know, this thing that dance has, and, and also this thing that dance has that everyone has, it's not just dancers, things that happen, but it's the tapping of some kind of elemental, creative energy. So the logical consequence of that, I mean, seems to me is to do something like put blackboards on the dance floor. And to give people chalk, water, a sponge, and a towel. And create a kind of, you know, choreography, choreography, I mean, create purpose, meaning it's not just going out there and doing something, there are five sections, and there are certain commands and certain focus and certain rules in each of the sections. So it's a choreography takes three days to learn. But basically, it's a way of demonstrating of showing a very practical way of saying, you know, look at this, this is what it is. And it's being manifested by non dancers. So the choreography for Black was we go into a city we find six or seven, eight, people who we just think are really interesting. Some of them might be dancers, some might be performers, but they're physicists and political activists, and filmmakers, and Wall Street bankers and whatever. And they, they they enter into this piece, and they perform it and there's a we have a beautiful, we always curate a tea station. We have weird little sort of signs around. So we create a kind of rich atmosphere. And the audience witnesses this installation is choreographic installation. It's been very successful. It's we've been around the world with it, we really believe in this work. It's just one of the works we do. But I just think it's sort of embodies a little bit oops, you're getting, but it's sort of, you know, shows a kind of like step one of how what I've been talking about starts to enter into the dance or into the, into the dance space. I'm going to close with one last little bit of film, which is the latest work that Michael and I and others put together. In Greece. It's called Jerusalem choreography for Greece. And I believe it's sort of like the blackboards for citizens. But now we've decided to take away the blackboards. So going to show you that And I think then we'll end the evening, just to say something briefly about this. It's an hour long hour and 20 minute long piece. And it basically brings the performers slowly in and it builds. And so reaches a point in part four, which is called Jerusalem. And it's sort of exactly what I talked about with this negative knowledge. It's the part in the piece where everyone who's performing is meant to go beyond everything they know. And, in fact, the choreographic you know, direction in that

section is you must, you should die, you should, you should expand everything you have to expand in that section. And the fifth section is what emerges after that. So, I'm going to actually probably show you, the, what the coming out of the, of the kind of keep trying everything of the kind of giving total giving of oneself, and then I'm going to show you what happens sort of in the last section of the piece. Yeah, so, I want to thank you. Again, just to say that, that that is a choreography for a complete diverse group of people from all of these are non dancers, and the grants homeless person, housewife, historian, architects, dancer, performer, mix students, you know, all mixed is people coming in at four days for four days. And the exploration is can we involve the populace? Can we involve ourselves with each other? In the pursuit of what what we used to call avant garde art or high art or whatever can can we create other places and there are other prototypes for continuing with the work we're doing, but in a way that is absolutely sewn, connected in in the fabric of society that is not disconnected. So that's the proposal the thesis that I wanted to give tonight as a kind of food for thought. Thank you very much. And yeah.

(Outro: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021)

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