



Walk of Life: Non-stylised and Environmental Movement with Helen Poynor (2014)

(automated transcript from otter.ai)

SPEAKERS

Helen Poynor, 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)

Helen Poynor 00:47

Hi, everybody, thanks for coming. I have no idea what to expect them to do and numbers. So it's great. I'm hoping that we can keep this fairly informal. So I'll tell you a bit about the format that I'm planning to use to present. But first of all, I wanted to thank independent dance for inviting me and particularly to Frank for sending me a postcard, because I don't use email. So it was completely wonderful to get a postcard invitation to come up to London and to come to Independent Dance. And yeah, so thank you very much. And I been loosely connected with ID for many, many centuries. And I'm totally grateful for the work that independent dance does for this sector of the dance community. So it's very nice to be invited up. And I hope that I can, in turn, contribute something. And as Frank says, a lot of people come from all over, but also from London to work with me. So I think it's only fair that occasionally, I venture up to the Big Smoke and show my face. So the format that I'm planning to use is that I'm planning to talk for a little to give you some background, because it felt like it might be useful for you to know how I've arrived at what I what I do. Now, it's been a long trajectory, but a fairly consistent one, then to show you some images of some performance for work really across a big span of time. And then to talk some more about some of the principles and ideas that I'm working with. And to show you some more images of practice, man environmental work. And to finish up with some

things that I'm have got questions about in my own practice. And then what I'd like to do is really open the floor. And if possible, for it's been more of a discussion and a question and answer, so that I can hear about people's practices or where they intersect or what the connections might or, or might not be. So I hope that's acceptable to everybody. And I'm up for interruptions. If you feel you can't wait to the moment, but we're going to discuss and you need to jump in. So I was thinking of preparing the session and did what I would normally do in that situation, which is go to the beach, in the Devon fishing village that I live in, to sort of cogitate and I was just aware of the very different geographies of the place where I live and work on the Devon, Dorset borders, and London. And that in the theme of crossing borders that come in here is already crossing the border. And as I was thinking about that memories arose of my very early work in London in which you believe the 1970s So there was some sense of Oh, yeah, that is also where I come from. I've ended up working in Southwark West, I've ended up working environmentally, but I started out working in London. So although I want to focus on the present, I felt that it might be useful to give you a very quick whistlestop tour of you know, how I've come the roads that I've travelled on route to the way that I'm working now. And also, I feel and don't ask me about this, because I can't answer it. But I feel as if I'm on the brink of a new phase of my own work, which is unknown to me. So that's why you can ask me about it. Well, you can but I can't do anything because it just feels unknown. And some of that has to do with practicalities. There's that potential shift there. But it's more than that. It's like I feel like I'm in a new phase of my life. And it's like so what does that mean in relation to how I work and what I do and don't Don't, don't, don't do so, basically after 10 years of non professional ballet, and I stress the non professional but somewhere it is important that I did 10 years of ballet. As a long letting go of that afterwards. I took a theatre degree and that led me back into movement through improvisation. And then I became very happily in embroiled with a group called the natural dance workshop and Theatre in London in the 1970s which was quite it was quite a pivotal moment. So it was around the same time as x six. I don't know if any of this means anything to anybody was happening and people like Jacky Lansley and Fergus early and many others but I know those two are still working. We're experimenting with new approaches today. Dance. The natural dance workshop was was more left afield than what was happening there. And it was set up by somebody hadn't come from dance. Somebody called Jim MacRitchie, who's recently reliably been informed has moved back to the UK, but I'm not sure where he is. But he's around somewhere in may well, material life. He was a social artist who'd worked at St. George's Community Project in Liverpool. And I don't know how it had happened. But he'd gone over at this point and how prints work really wasn't known about in UK, he'd gone over to work with Anna [Halprin], and had stayed there quite a time and worked with her and CO wrote stuff with her and came back very fired up with her ideas and brought them back to London. So although I think there was a connection through Dartington, as far as I know, Jim was really the person who brought brought her work first back to London. And when I went to work with her, I went to the Arts Council to talk about, you know, funding and they said, Anna, who so you know, she really wasn't known about. So the natural arts workshop was was radical for its time, it probably won't sound radical now, but it was radical for its time. And it was very, very 70s. That's all I can say. It's great fun. It was great fun. And it broke down barriers, really, between the dance world and the rest of the general public. And so really, it was making dance very accessible in a very joyous sort of way to people of all age groups, all backgrounds, all shapes and sizes. And I think the staff team, I

think I was the only person that had a dance background. So there was somebody who was a journalist, somebody who was a dentist, somebody who was an engineer, electrical engineer, Jim, you know, so it was a very eclectic group of people, attracting a lot of people. And they ran, we ran a very successful workshop programme, which included large scale participatory dance events. And also, those were both inside and outside and also what we would now call site specific performances around London, but that term didn't exist at that point. So this is predating a lot of them I've covered this around. And, and those sites specific performances were inspired in part by unhealth Prince city dance in San Francisco, which interestingly, has inspired much more recently, a couple of years back city dance in Edinburgh. So the stuff is still out there, it's still happening. So that was my springboard for going to train with Anna Halprin. And her team in San Francisco in California in my late 20s. At what was then the San Francisco dancers workshop, but was on the cusp of becoming the Tamalpa Institute, which is what it still is, it's run by her daughter, Daria. And my main motivation for going was and I think this was because of my dance background, what I saw in the natural dance workshop happening was that people were having a fantastic time, all the workshops were full, you know, people were dancing, who felt that dance wasn't for them, because you had to be particularly personal, a particular type of background. But beyond having a fantastic time, from my perspective, it felt like people were not developing. So they would develop to a certain point, led by their pleasure, really, and then into in terms of their movement potential in terms of my movement potential, it didn't go beyond that. So I really felt that I wanted to move myself and other people beyond beyond that part place of enjoyment, if you like, which was great. It was opening up a lot of doors. So that was the reason for going to to work with that I wanted to discover more of my movement potential, I wanted to be able to work with more of other people's movement potential. And her work basically provided me with an an in depth kinesthetic knowledge. She's really, and I think it's something that people don't really know about her work. I think the there are elements of her work to do with healing to do with ritual to do with participation, that are more known about but Anna herself is really rigorous in in her work with the body with the kinesthetic sense. She trained in the States at the first university dance, the University of Wisconsin dance department in the States. And because there hadn't been one before the person who had set it up, Margaret H'Doubler was not a dancer. And she actually she was an educationalist. And she insisted that all the dance students there, went to the pre med dissection course. I'm really glad I wasn't around at that time. But you know, that's just to give you an example of the fact that she really is very, very knowledgeable about the body. So that was a really good grounding for me. But also what's very clear in her work is the connection between art process and life process that's absolutely fundamental to her approach. She talks about a double spiral spiralling into deepen personal experience in interlocking spiral spiralling out to broaden artistic expression. And she says the two things are inseparable. But also, she really introduced me to a love of working with the natural environment because up to that point I'd been working environmentally, if you like, specifically in London, and living in London. And so it was with her that the the love of working with the natural environment was really opened for me. So it really laid that time in my late 20s laid a foundation for my ongoing practice with non stop eyes and environmental movement and also with site specific and autobiographical performance because of the link between our process and life process. So I came back I set up my own dance and theatre programme in London in 81 also started working in Dartmoor, and then moved the whole programme to Dorset

1983. And it was I was working off the Marylebone Road and I was like, I just couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't send, you know, run an evening class, opening up people's awareness. You know, some people were really open and sensitive and send them out into six lanes of traffic, it just, it didn't make any sense to me. And I know that you all have to do that. And that one has to do it if you live in city, but I felt that I had a choice not to. So also during the 70s and 80s I was performing with a natural Dance Theatre and also with my own movement based improvisation Theatre Company, movement Theatre Company. And then with a company called push dance theatre that in Germany that was set up by G. Hoffman Soto who has been in England a few times recently, but this is way back in the 80s. But he was one of Anna's team, who was one of the people I trained with. And subsequently, I worked with site specific performance and film on the Dorset coast and Dartmoor, and with a company called Theatre of the heart from Hampstead Heath, and also for a while with a Grotowski based theatre company in London. So that you can see already there's quite a lot of different influences coming there. And you can see which part of the world those influences are coming from. And then in the mid 80s, I was introduced by colleagues to the work of Suprpto Suryodarmo from Java. I don't know if any of you know of his name or his work. And there's a very recently published book there. That's about how his work has influenced people, not primarily from Dance backgrounds, but from a lot of different backgrounds. So I trained with him in Java in 1986 in 1988, and I was part of a team that brought him for the first time to the UK. Suffice it to say that the experience of working with him at that particular time unpicked, everything that I thought I knew about dance, everything that basically unpick the whole edifice that I had constructed for myself as a movement artists and movement teacher, it was a very useful and picketing, but it was unbelievably challenging, that for a while, I didn't really know which way was up. But what it did was it gave me a chance to re lay the foundations, I felt like I went right back to the foundations, and then I could relay them and build from there and reclaim earlier work as well. But it was it was quite a challenging time. And that I could talk about that particular experience or indeed experience with Anna all evening. So I'm not going to I'm just going to say there's an essay in that book called body body, which is about my experiences of working with him. So at the moment, when I went worked with him, my life was in a was in a process of complete shift. So I was I was in a period of retreat, I sort of retreated, that's where that's where I ended up and Deb and I moved to Dorset, but I ended up being where I am now. Because I took time out from both teaching and from performing. And during that time I went to Java and it was quite lucky in some ways that I'd already take the time out because I had time to really integrate the work. The programme that I run now was first established in 1991. It's a public workshop programme called the walk of life. And I extended it to that was based in East Devon and I extended it to West Dorset in 2000. And then develop the training programmes that Frank referred to that some people in the room have have honoured with their presence in they were first established in 2007. And they've been evolving since then. But throughout that time I was performing performing in and directing site specific performances also an urban environments as well as natural environments. So most people don't know that I do actually work in cities. When pushed that I have worked in Sydney and Bristol and Coventry and London and I was also creating autobiographical work. So other influences apart from the ones that I've just mentioned include I go to Boston's approach to biodynamic psychology, a mouthful, which is a type of body therapy in which I'm trained. So for those of you who know anything about therapy, it's a near Reichian.

But I hate using that word because people immediately think of stress positions and pushing through it as a very soft approach to neurology and work. Also, Samira meditation, which becomes more and more important to me was a significant influences practice work. And to Feldenkrais, which was part of my training. and to a lesser extent, Tai Chi cat, where all sorts of other things come into the mix. But rather than thinking of the notion of crossing borders, particularly with the debates on immigration, at the moment, I'm not sure that I could really go for that immunity, actually, because there's such a lot of, it's been problematized. So much, I suppose, even the notion of borders. I prefer, I prefer to think about different streams intermingling in various ways. And so for me, that includes the different cultural influences and the different landscapes of California and Java, where I've trained, and England and Australia where I've lived and worked. So while being an extremely reluctant traveller, I seem to have done the four points of the, of the compass, because they will basically go anywhere that I need to go to do what I need to do, and that those are the countries that have been part of my journey. But it's also an interweaving of a dance and movement background with a theatre background. And the dialogue between which is very much ongoing for me between environmental, artistic and therapeutic concerns and how those intersect or, or not. So I don't know if anybody wants to say anything before I steam on because I'm aware I can just or whether you'd like to see some images and pick it from there. So I've only recently started digitising images. So I've got a very limited stock. So I'm going to show you a weird and wonderful selection of performance work starting in 1980. And going to 2006. And as the reason why it stops there at the moment, I have been stopped performing. There mainly solo pieces, there are a few collaborations. And they're both studio and environmental work. So their work that I have created myself or have created in in collaboration. But it's a partial representation, because it doesn't include any of the work that I've directed, or which which tend to be larger, site specific performances. And it doesn't include any film work. And the reason for that is that I really don't like to show clips of films that I've created, I feel like you take a long time in a film to get the whole trajectory to work. And to just sort of grab a bit doesn't feel very respectful to work. That's that's the artistic reasoning. The technological reason was I needed to keep this very simple. So let's, let's go through a few images. And if you've want to say anything while they're up, you don't need to be precious about it. So this is a piece of work that was basically created during Anna Halprin's training. It's a piece that I called adolescence. And it's working in the Redwood Forest on her land. And it grew out of a earliest score, which was based on it was a father score, one of the things that we did in our training was to create scores based on on relationships with our father or mother or significant other. So this was what would be known as a recycling with that score. They're much more successful piece and the enrichment score, didn't look anything like this. So that was 1981. I should have my list here somewhere, the dates. So if you like that was post sample. It was post natural dance workshop, but it was still very early on in my career very early on in the trajectory that led me to what I'm doing now. This was a piece with could push Dance Theatre, which was performed in various cities in Germany and also at Dartington. It was a duet, as you can see, and it was a piece called English girls. It was 1982 and it was about women and food. That's an example of a piece that I didn't think was well, I understood a lot more about what it was about several years down the track than I did when I was making it. Interesting. This was after I'd moved to Dorset it was the first big environmental piece that I did down there is a piece called CMS. It was on the Dorset coast it

was in 1985. It basically involved creating work for three different sites on the Dorset coastline, the wonderful thing about working on the coast in Britain, as opposed to Australia or the states is that and how well people know the coast, but it changes every 10 miles. The geology is completely different. One of the reasons why I base my work in two different places, and they're only half an hour away from each other, because the cosine is completely different. So for this piece, we created performances of three dancers involved all helped and trained in three very different sites in Dorset. This is a site called Wind spit. I mean, these are really just I've just pulled out like one shot from each of these projects so that you, you don't overwhelm. What is that object that's flying? Is that a boot? No, it's interesting. It's actually just a bundle of cloth. Okay, so this, this site had a quarry on it. And what we were working with in terms of the imagery and character for the, for the young women, that was the women that would worked in that area. And we each arrived at there with a sort of grey travelling bundle. And inside the bundles of the other two that were very bright cloths, and inside my bundle was this bundle, which is actually just a piece of cloth that's tied. But interestingly, nobody, nobody knew what it was. Now, for me, there was a very clear narrative about a young woman who'd become pregnant, and, and was discarding a child. But it wasn't important to me that anybody else knew that narrative. But what was very interesting was what people saw. And this was seen from quite a distance. So some people thought the piece was about abortion, some people thought it was about the carry babies who it was a newspaper item at the moment, at that time, there were two young naked babies that were washed up on the coast of caring. My father said to me, is that was that? He said, was that a baby? Or was it all your troubles? You know? So it was a very, and that's one of the things that interests me about making work is to make an image that you might need to feed it with a narrative yourself. But if the image is open enough, which doesn't mean to say that it's nothing, because it's fed by your narrative that it can it can touch everybody else's narrative, so it's not closed down? So, you know, that's an interesting question, because that was relevant. This was one of the other sites which was Kimmeridge, which was, is on the site of, I mean, the army, some of the best country, in the UK, including whole swathes of but also post this site Kimmeridge, which is a site of special scientific interest is just on the edge of the army territory, just at the edge of the site. We're working on big notices, don't go any further shooting in progress, whatever. And you can hear you could hear the guns from so we worked on a piece which was very Armageddon ish, which was inspired a lot, not only by the geological locations, if there's a huge flat grey platforms that go out into the sea, but also by the, by the juxtaposition of the army. And the third Beach, which I don't haven't washed an image of was Chesil Beach, which some of you might know, which is an 80 mile shingle bank. And we took people out for the day and they didn't know where they were going. They just knew that they were, they were going to be on a bus so they were bused around the sites, they were taken out for tea, they were taken out for lunch, we were down the lane, supposedly doing shortcut, but unfortunately, the driver knew the shortcut to changing and but it was a very it was it was an interesting day, because by the end of the day, in Chazal, when people arrived there at the scrape bank, people were saying, Where are our dancers, so there's this real sense that we belong to them. This was a piece in Java after I trained there, it's 1995. It was a piece made with an installation artists who are often collaborate with called Annie thinks we were living in Australia at the time. So we took an exhibition, and an installation, an exhibition that was in a carrier bag and an installation that fitted in a day pack basically. So those are the installed

elements of this the the event was a big international gallery gathering on ritual art and cultural environment. And this piece made quite a lot later than the bundle piece that you've just seen, actually ended up having a connection with it. So people who have seen that early piece of work in Java at that time, saw the connection, it wasn't conscious for me at the beginning of the process of making it it was a piece that was dedicated to any women that had lost a child. That's what it was about. It seems like I think there's another one of that which is just so the the the installation changed in the course of the movement. Quite interesting feedback on that haven't performing it. This is a Japanese pen dopo, which is a building that has a roof and no sides and into practice land just to support it by pillars. There was a discussion afterwards because it was very much an artist sharing. And I got asked by one of the, I don't know spiritual leaders there, whether I prayed before I performed, which is very left field question for me to answer as a Western artist. But it was and he said, it would really help your practice if you prayed before you perform. So I'm just throwing that out, because I'm just remembering that as I see that he's sitting somewhere that this is a piece made in Bristol in 1998. It's a two part piece, it's called repro blues, which was about not having kids or trying to have kids. This was very consciously an autobiographical piece. This is a place it's very washed out. Sorry about that. It is a sandstone environment in Australia. It's a piece called incubation, made in 1999. It was made as part of an international event, which I can't remember the name of but it will come back, which was to do with artists working environment. It was made in a place that I knew very well in the Royal National Park south of Sydney. And it was made as a photographic work. So again, with the same installation artist, and you can just see in the foreground, this is what it was called in incubation, you can see actually a coloured egg. And there's another one just in front of my arm. And there's another one up in the crevices. So we instal 99 eggs in this site. It was a it was a three mile walk into the site and they weren't cooked. That was quite interesting that the eggs were dyed to to reflect colours in the environment. So they were only died in colours that were that actually there in the environment. So we basically spent the day that other people were working all across the world on this, you know, artists and environment event name work, web art garden. And I don't know, I think it might still be going. So we spent the day installing the 99 eggs in the site. For the first half of the day, we still station artists did that. And we're just warmed up. And the second half of the day actually moved in the costume that had been created for the site. And that was recorded photographically. So none of there's a whole series of photographs, none of them, pose. They're all taken in movement. What what was quite interesting, there was a reason that we didn't do a big public event we just got back to Australia from the UK. It's very complicated. What we hadn't, what we'd forgotten about is that the trail actually goes through this site. So in fact, there was quite a lot of very interesting and unexpected public interaction during the course of the work, which was wonderful. It was it was great. And there were also two, this is a very, very high ledge several 100 feet high above the Pacific, or two men fishing on the edge of it. So I'm just trying to give you a taste of a lot of different types of work if I'm going too fast slowing down. This is from a piece made in Dorset called on the brink, which was a film pieces. These are stills from the film, it was made collaboratively with Sandra Reeve, Peter batty and Tim Jones. So a filmmaker, another performer and a musician. It was working with the theme of it was commission was commissioned for that, for that landscape. It was working with the theme of that this landscape is very unstable. The whole of England is very well not not gradually, actually quite rapidly falling

into the sea, which I think is rather wonderful. And so the whole of this coast is very unstable. So we were working with the notion of slippage. We were working with the with the geological national slippage, which is very real in this site. But we were also working with a psychological notion of being on the brink, which was a personal thing for both the dancers at the time. So there's a few images from this. This all this. It's the same area of coasts, but there's, I think three different sites and that is the right way I'm not sure that's the last one. The last one this is another piece of work.

Helen Poynor 29:42

This was made quite near to where I live. It's called Chrome spelt c o r w hyphen n e was made in 2005. It was made as installation because the sites are inaccessible and dangerous. And that's one of the questions I have about how you how you make work in those types of places and how you then the work is communicated with other people. But this wasn't intended as a live piece. Again, it was made with Annie Pfingst it was made for a gallery space. So these images were printed on a very large transparent paper that the light shone through, and that you could see from both sides. And they were hung. I mean, the exhibition still exists, they were hung to swing from the ceiling, and in such a way that that people had to walk through them, so they weren't hung at the sides. So you need to walk through. And what we wanted to do was to try and see whether we could give a kinesthetic experience of the sides in a gallery space, because we couldn't take people what one of the things that happened was that we had booked the ground floor of the scatterer. And it turned out that we could have both the ground floor and the top floor. And they echoed the two parts of the sites that we worked on. So there wasn't a nice synchronicity there. So this is one one movement sequence. And I'll talk a little bit more about how I work on site later. I just didn't want you to have all the talking in one back. So I don't know if you can see the figure that gives you gives you the idea of the scale. This is England, this is not a states or Australia. It's it's interesting to me that scale. Sorry, these aren't quite as clear projectors as I thought they would be. So this piece was an autobiographical piece it was actually, after writing the book, which is here on Anna Halprin with Libby Werth, in 2004, I went and having spent some time with her researching that, I went back just as to join her in the collective of artists in a non taught situation. And she works a lot with the notion of self portraits with creating self portrait dancers. It's a major part of of the way that she works. What was new to me, but I don't think new to her, when I returned for this collective collaborative situation was how she brought that into the environment. So this is effectively an environmental self portrait. A particular moment in time that was 2005. And this is a piece that Omar will recognise this to change. Tack a bit. This is a piece called Men O Pause All Moments. And it was commissioned or invited for an improvisation festival called escapade, which America corrected. In two, when was it I don't have the date. I think it was 2006. My intention is to look a fright I did. I realised I came up the night beforehand, having made that most other people were performing in sort of recognisable dance gear, pastel coloured, loose basses and tops and I seem to quite often find myself in a rather different mode to be environments I find myself in. So that's the end of that batch of photos. So I don't know if anybody wants to give me a break and respond at this stage. Whether you need more information about what you've just seen before,

Helen Poynor 33:32

engaging. So do I take it that I should steam on? Something but I haven't actually given you very much information

Audience 33:55

about landscape construct, how different the things we've seen how different spaces? I'm curious to what extent you meet the landscape with the accumulated knowledge that you've thought about how you approach any landscape and then sort of tuning into the online. Going into to what extent does it always new and to what extent have you built up some?

Helen Poynor 34:35

I think both are true. Because inevitably if you've been working a long time, you've got a body of practice and you can't pretend you haven't. I think I think sometimes people imagine that if they're going to work in environments landscape that they're going in as a blank slate and the landscapes the blank slate and then something happens but actually neither is true. The landscapes absolutely full it's full of content, which is what I've discovered over the years. As well as everything that's obviously there materially. And even if you're very open, your, your full, whether it's of your practice or your life or, or your movement, vocabulary, or whatever. So it's never a blank slate. Sometimes I'm going into an environment. And, yeah, this really varies with a specific theme in mind. So like, when we were making on the brink, we had, you know, we'd applied for the commission, we'd got it, we'd have to, as well, so often does articulate what it wasn't planned to do. So there was specific, a specific theme in mind. But for me, the work always has to come out of an encounter with a landscape. So the thing that stays the same for me is that I want my research on the landscape to be considered. So in other words, that that I devised the work by moving on that site. So whatever, even if I have gone in with a theme, and I might not have, that actually, the material that gets generated comes from a kinesthetic encounter between myself and the site. And you know, it. So that's what I call kinesthetic research, which is moving on site. But it also can include just hanging out there for a really long time and meandering around and looking on the rocks and eating sandwiches and imagining things. And do you know what I mean, I feel that it's, it's very important, if you're making site work, that it that you don't just go, that's a great site, which is shorthand for saying that would make a lovely background for my work. Or that or that you sort of use it and impose yourself on it, it, it has to come out of relationship. If that answers, the

Audience 37:00

back of that, can I ask how you give voice to that material agency, exposing your body and body editor, this is something that I'm confused about moment how to how to be a body in a in place, some space. And that human centric element and will that take over maybe to view as rather than themselves. But still, that's how it's gonna be.

Helen Poynor 37:47

I think that's one of the reasons I work in tidal environment. Because tidal environments, I mean, I work in them because I love them, basically. But you cannot, you cannot believe that you're the most important thing, or that you're in any way in charge or in control of the environment. Because you have to work with the tides, nature sets, terms completely, I mean,

actually always does. But in tidal environments, it's very clear. Now partly living in Britain was very different in Australia, we can kid ourselves that, you know, we're sort of in control of everything. And nature's very benign, and it took me after I'd moved to bear the village I live in, it took me one November real storms to really get it that you know, because because weather in England, and it's getting more extreme, is very mild most of the time. But if you live somewhere like Australia, I mean, the image for me being in Australia is that, that I'm I'm on the back of this huge, old animal, and that at any point, it could just tip slightly, and all the roads and houses would just fall off. You know, you. So I suppose working in tidal environments is one word getting in the UK, in the sense of, you're not the most important thing there that you're not the you know, it's can't be on your terms. It can't be on your terms. So, so that sort of helps with the issue of the human centric, but I think also, in terms of making work in environments, and it's particularly challenging for young dancers, I think you have to let go of your ego. Because, for me, if I'm working in an environment where there's a lot going on, you know, it's the people who've come to witness it, look at the waves or the seagulls or the sky and go, that's a wonderful sky, and not at the dancers, that's fine. And it has to be fine. So I think it requires a level of humility in terms of ego, which if you're fighting really hard for your dance identity is quite hard to get to that you really know that and that maybe you don't have to do that, you know, just to be human forming the environment. That there's a sense of, you're just part of this fished out. You're not yet. I don't know if this is meeting your question at all. I think

Audience 40:00

Yeah, I'm wondering what the if one has says that in itself, if it's received in that way?

Helen Poyner 40:14

Well, a lot depends on how you set it up. If you bring an audience into the site, you know, if you walk them for a mile before they get to it, that helps. You know, I mean, that's happening just because the sites, you know, if if you want the audience to have a real bodily experience and sensory experience at the site that you're working in, you can set it up in such a way that, that that happens, you know, but you have to go against a lot of, you know, I've mentored pieces, and then people have been with loud halos, telling people to move over. And it's like, no, no, no, that's not gonna work. You know, you have to set it up in such a way that didn't fight the audience to experience the whole site. You know, if you set it up in a way that says, look at us, then, you know, and a way that sort of accentuate the traditional theatre, you know, because we've built scaffolding, and we've put in lighting and whatever, then then it's going to be harder for the witnesses to have a different experience. So shall I move on a little? I said, I was going to talk about non stylized movements. So I just wanted to say a little bit about that term, because it's, I find language very tricky. And so I tend to use language as sort of flags to indicate something rather than to be entirely accurate about something. For me, the word non stylized flags that we're not working with steps, we're not working with, wanting to standardise bodies or movements, in theory, any type of movement would be included. That there's not a there's not a preset set vocabulary that's based on an external form. Well, let me know if that's really news to people and then in the alternative dance, but just to just to say why I use it. But the intention is not to replicate something. Could it be considered a contradiction? Well, in insofar as Why would hope that working this way that that Well, I wouldn't hope but what actually happens is

people develop their own style of work. And that is also a style. But hopefully it's not said. So hopefully, that personal style continues to evolve all the time, so that it doesn't get fixed. And I often say to people, the more you move, the more habits you get, and the more difficult to get, as opposed to the more because the more difficult it gets to move away from habits because you've got so many habits that your habit vocabulary is like this big. Whereas if you haven't moved a lot, and it's only this big and small chance that you can come at it from a different angle. So it's just a flag what that word means to me. And I just wanted to also flag some some underlying principles or areas of interest or concern. None of these are absolute truths. Somebody said to me the other day, I said something, and I said, Yes, but and, and she said, Oh, yeah, so you could always say that the opposite is also true. And that's probably right. There are a series of evolving propositions, or ideas. The notion of working in any condition, and people didn't know that, that's, that's how I work. That is whatever conditions whatever your personal or environmental weather is. So the only conditions I don't work in conditions that are not safe. I don't aim to work in some storms with wild seas and driving sleep, but it has been doing to happen. Or heat waves actually, in the last time American we I'm so unused to the idea of might be too hot that we all need it expired, that your personal weather is also part of the environment. So that feeling states of mind experiences past and current, as well as sensations inevitably colour are whether and can't be left behind at the studio door. So I mean, again, some things I'm saying I think probably very obvious to people now but they weren't obvious to dancers in my generation, there was an ethos that you leave your life at studio door with your coat or whatever. And actually, it's not possible. It's really not possible. So by acknowledging these, these, these other layers, it it clarifies the environment this is my experience and my belief and it also releases movement potential. So the word acknowledge is important. It's, it's, it's particular. I'm interested in moving human beings I'm not interested in in beings whether humanity is somehow veiled. It is a movement practice is starting as the starting point is the body and kinesthetic experience. But each moving being is unique, and they become more and more visible as their movement and capacity for expression becomes more vulnerable. So I'm interested in a generosity of presence that is wholehearted. And a full bodied commitment to whatever is emerging in the moment of the movement practice. So a saying yes, even if you don't like it, don't understand it, or are confused by it or whatever. And that also clarifies the space, if you've got a room full of people who are moving, like, with a question mark, that's different from moving with a question, what I call wandering and wandering, the environment gets very unclear. If you have people who are going, yep, this is what I'm doing right now, whatever I think about it, the environment plus the spaces, I can tell you witnessing the space is different, it is very, very different. It's different than people moving in it. But it's also for me, I physically see it differently. I'm interested in the ability to follow a movement as it evolves, allowing it to flow freely freely through the whole body through the skeleton and the joints, and following it moving through space. I'm interested in seeing being integrated as part of moving. And I'm talking about what I call ordinary ordinary Eyes, eyes that are neither fixed nor trancelike. So you see what you see as you move. And at the same time. This allows you to be seen. I don't know how it works. But I know that it does. If people's eyes are ordinary, not not blazed not only in peripheral vision, able to see what's in front of them, they can be seen, which I think is one of the reasons why our stances we often avoid working with the feet as mobile anchors, so that they're in clear, but changing contact with the floor, so that even in moments of

chaos or speed, you're always grounded in that moment. So the same applies to other points of contact with the ground. So you avoid glueing yourself to one spot, through your bottom through your seat whatever, in order to ground yourself. Or indeed, holding or fixing the body without it being in contact with the ground to give the illusion of stability or security. So no fixing. To recognise that in the studio, a group constitutes a constantly changing environment, even if you're all working separately. Even if you're not working communication at all, just the fact that there are X number of bodies moving in the studio creates an environment which is in constant change. One of the basic intentions or premises of the work is to be able to be simultaneously aware of yourself and aware of the environment and to develop a receptive and mutually responsive relationship to the environment. So neither using nor imposing upon it, which I've spoken about before. A recognition that different environments elements and weathers elicit different movement qualities and experiences, which potentially have the ability to disrupt habits and offer new possibilities. One of the reasons to work in all weathers personal and environmental. I've already talked about tidal environments demanding that we stay awake, and that we need to engage on their own terms. So we're not in charge, there can be no illusion of omnipotence and the capacity to move with others in a mutually responsive relationship without losing a sense of self. In other words, without merging, but meeting from a place of individuality. So offering without trying to control or manipulate other people or the environment. So what I'm going to do is I'm time speeding, I'm going to show you some images that have come from the environmental images that have come from workshops and training. And then there's some more questions, but perhaps we can also talk. So these don't need any as the other one. It's got these don't need any explanation. They haven't they're all from the last couple of years since I started getting images on this. So this isn't this is not performance work this is movement well actually first one is that is a steal from film. This is still from the film called on on an incoming tide but the restaurant or practice. So again, this is the this is this is where I live. Basically what exactly that right. All of this is this is immediately these sites are not available at particular, at a lot of times they're only available at particular tides, but these are all just at the edge of the village beach where it's true. I have no idea why that's in black and white, but it seems to have been I know it was used for a brochure that was so these people are from very different backgrounds. I took all these photographs. I'm not a professional photographer, so they're just they're just grabbed This looks like the tide is coming in. These are environments that people here who've worked with me, you know, all these you've worked in all of these. There's the next three are really showing work that that crosses art form. This actually is taken from a piece of work called Time and tide, which was with a group of women known as movers and makers, which Annie Pflugst and I had worked with for quite a long time combining movement and installation in the landscape. It's just one shot from that group. But these other shots are also somehow illustrating the crossing between art forms. So a lot of people who come and work with me, I mean, this, this person comes from dance, but actually as moved into the visual arts and the crossover between the two. But a lot of people who come and work actually come from, from writing or from visual arts, as well as from Dance and Theatre, and environmental concerns and self development and health concerns. This again, this one was also part of movers and makers, as compared to just general work. So this landscape is the landscape nearer charmer, which is just east in Dorset, just east of Lyme Regis, and this is blue liche clay as a cloud, as opposed to chalk. They're very, very different environments to work in. And I do work in nontidal

environments as well. So this is actually a site looks got a 360 degree view above above the the sea, the sea is sort of there. I work in a couple of woodland sites, but I don't have I don't have images from them, because they're very old. This is one, two woodland sites, both of which happened to be Hill forts that I don't have met very many engine images, because it's difficult to shoot in the woods. So these sites change, this is a title site, but it's this site has completely transformed with the big storms last winter. So walk back to it at Easter thinking I might work there again, and actually was no possibility of working there for a while it's been completely thrown around the place. It's completely changed. And I mean, they often change but it just felt like the site has been so disturbed, it needs to be left in peace for a while. And we you know, we're talking about huge trees and rocks that have been moved. And so that is also the crossover between visual arts. And so, yeah, I mean, I have a few more questions that I'm dealing with. But again, I'd like to hear hear from you if there's something you want to ask or something you want to share about. And it's great when you spoke about your own concerns. And your own work, it's really nice to have that exchange, particularly as I'm not here to choose. The criteria is that I love them. Actually. It's, I mean, the Dorset Coast project was interesting, because I've moved to Dorset from London, the project, and I walked the coast path for two years. And then I thought, if I'm going to make a piece, I have to make it now which turned out right, because I ended up moving, which I didn't know, but it felt like those two years of walking the path were really important. So I like to work in spaces that I know very well. And, and that I have a desire to work in. So I found that so it's those two criteria, but I do occasionally work elsewhere for people. And then when I do that, and I'm not talking about Commission's to make work, I'm talking more about going and doing training and workshop. Then I asked, it's generally through people who know my work and have worked with me. So they know, you know, they know, I asked them to take me to sites that they love, or that they've worked on. But I need time. So I can't just arrive somewhere and work somewhere. I mean, it's tricky for me going to new places. And so I have to build that into any contract that I do that I'm actually up there and on site for a few days, but I let them take me to a selection places that they love. Because then I think well, it's sort of the same criteria. But if I'm if I'm making work in cities, it's normally because somebody said so you know that that's it, then it would be an invitation. So I did a lot of work in Western Sydney, for example. And that was that was commissioned work and somebody was wanting work to happen in that environment, but it's different working in the city to a natural environment. I mean, why would I work somewhere that I don't love? Do you know what I mean? There's so many beautiful places around the day. Do I you know, in the city, I might work in site that's, you know, quite problematic for lots of reasons. But if I'm working in natural sites, then it's it seems ridiculous. If I have the choice not to work in places that I have a pull to an interaction. But it's that and the familiarity because I think one has to be very respectful. And not just grab, you know, I like it cycle. I'll work there. It's like, and I've had times, you know, I was working in beer for a long time I went away for a couple of years I was in Sydney. just referring to Marcus, I know, we have an Australia connection every time I mentioned Australia, and well, I look at you. I am Australia. And many other places. And I came back and people I've been working with had continued working there when I was when I came back, as I'm going to start working here again, immediately walked my favourite walk in the land went, No, you're not, you're not gonna walk in. And I'm like, shit. But it was very clear just didn't know. I can't tell you how I got the message. But it was absolutely clear. And it was non

negotiable. And it was years before I could go back. So there has to be some sort of negotiation with the landscape. And it's not just is it safe? Or can I get around here with the tides? It's like, asking permission, you know, and that that is part of just hanging out somewhere. You know, before you try and generate material and whatever is about like, what's it like to be here? What do I notice if I'm just here?

Audience 56:18

This is what I'm most proficient in. But obviously, the environments are very comfortable compared to the studio or something like that. And there's just a lot of requests to actually go there. Like how do you work out, balance and calm? Think

Helen Poynor 56:35

it depends very much on the piece, so that the film piece that I hadn't showed you, but that [unintelligible] is shot, that first shot of this sequence on an incoming tide. The The costumes were based entirely on colours in sight. And it's difficult making I mean, I find it very difficult costuming for film, very, very difficult in the natural environment. Because there's such a screaming clash between most of the fabrics that we and colours that we have and the environment. So though all of those and those costumes were supposed to be sort of daily life costumes and with colours, and we worked a long time to get colours that really blended in the environment. And when I showed it in one particular dance venue, which shall be nameless, they said, It's pity about the costumes. Because they obviously have some image that we should have some great diaphanous floating sort of things. Whereas other people got it and saw. So in terms of the read, I'm trying to think what I've shown you, sometimes you're wanting to work with something that really stands out, can you remember which shot it was? Those are just those are just, those aren't performance. So just practice shots. Now, whatever people wear when they're when they're practising, so they're waterproof soften. So those colours are just, you know, just whatever, they're whatever they're wearing to cope with whatever weather they've got

Audience 58:00

and you are designing the costumes, or .a question your genuine interest.

Helen Poynor 58:04

Not always It depends what the piece is about. So on Chesil beach, we did wear red, because it was you know, you had this 18 mile stretch of, of shingle that went on forever, and that had no definition at all. And it wasn't for me, it was an incredibly difficult site to work on. And actually, we wanted to work with a very stark contrast. So we did work with red, we dyed her hair red, everything was red, all the props were red, it was a little boxing ring that was red, because it was some it needed and it was quite, it was quite a comic piece. So it depends on the piece. It depends on what you're wanting to do what you're wanting to say. And it's different costuming for life performance and costuming for film.

Frank Bock 58:48

I'm interested in in in the relationship between producing work and training, oh, giving, putting dance artists through a process of training of certain kind of unfolding of experience. There might not necessarily be for making work, but just for for their expansion in some way. And when you're when you're Yeah, how do those two things sit together for you to kind of producing artworks and the training programme? In a

Helen Poyner 59:21

minute, I'm going to refer to Katye and Omaris, I'm just flagging you. Because these are two people who have gone through the training process. I'm very clear that the training that I offer as a movement training is not a performance training, although I have offered performance training in might again in the future. And it's not a teacher's training. So it's really about giving people a very thorough grounding in this particular approach to environmental work and to non stop Nice work. So that so there are there are various layers in it. It started as a nine as a nine month training and then people asked or more. So then there was another layer introduced. And there's a third layer, which is a mentorship programme. And it's very definitely a mentorship programme. And the intention is that people who have done enough, which varies with people, but at least those two layers, maybe more than one, then work in a peer mentoring situation with me with a very small group on how they want to apply the work in their practice, whatever that is, whether it's whether it's making performance work, whether it's, it's working in an educational setting, whether it's, but they come to the mentorship programme with, with an intention of I want to look at the application of this work in this context on this unit, people have used it in very, very different ways. And that that feels important to me. And I think I was lucky in terms of the era that I trained with both Anna and perhaps, because they were both really saying often do your own work. And it wasn't it wasn't formalised, so it would feel a sort of, you know, for me on this in 10 years time, if I've changed my mind, but it would feel a travesty to have to the processes that I work with, to want to train people to do my work. To see what else do you see what I'm saying? That isn't really the question you answer you asked, but I think in terms of my own creative work, and my teaching practice, it's I earn most of my living through teaching. So it's very easy for my creative practice to become submerged. Because for me teaching isn't is a creative practices. It's incredibly dynamic creatively. And you know, and it's not just, it is a creative practice. And I think that's one of the reasons why I chose to show some performance work because that I'm less known for that. And it's partly because I earn my living through the other work. It's partly because I'm a slightly reluctant performer. I've never been somebody who produces and produces and producers, I always need a stimulus. And that stimulus might be the invitation to perform s. escapade or to do a piece in Coventry. Or it might be a particular moment in my life like menopause. Like, recently, I've been working with grief, or a particular situation like going to live in Sydney at the time when there were acute bushfires ringing the city. So I find that I don't, that I don't get through my, my shyness or reluctance unless I have a clear like, yeah, now I or I want to work with these people, or I want to work in this place. But I would love more time to do it. I would I would love. It's not that I don't love the teaching work. I do. But I find often I mean, I'm working on a film piece at the moment. And it's, it's taking forever, because it's like having to hold back the waters of everything else in order to carve out the artistic time for myself. So it's, it's not quite right balance. It's the balance of has evolved over the years, but I'm not totally happy with it. Does that answer the question?

Audience 1:03:10

I'm interested in for, for an artist that works in the environment, it's would seem that a lot of a lot of the work is about the experience of being in an environment that also so many works not only just with live pieces, but with film and recorded images. So how do you see the relationship between recordings of your work and your experiences? If you do this documentation to see this visual art? And how to

Helen Poynor 1:03:37

Yeah, I mean, it's I do I don't see them as documentation, those shots, I just shown you a documentation. But I don't see the works, the working cross art form as documentation. There are their artworks in their own right. But I it is one of the things that I've got down on my questions is that it's the recurrent like, it's more clear, actually in the installation work for me than in the film work. Because that's clear. I'm collaborating with an installation artist who has also come from a movement as well as a visual arts background. We understand the processes. She also trained with Anna Halprin, we understand the processes we work with, we're clear of what we're making his installation. So for example, we made an installation called salt mash, which was about the bushfires around Sydney and sneaked in when we weren't supposed to 10 days after the fires that raged through and went back again. And, you know, so then the intention is clear. It's clear that we're making an installation. It's not it's not ever intended as a life work. So that's less problematic to me. But I'm interested in how what experiences get generated in the witnesses you know, I talked about Chrome and walking through the soft Nash installations and a nine foot high slide dissolve with an installation of salt and ash and bark from from the land. So I'm interested in how I was very contemplative piece. I'm interested in how people experience it. But film is like, it's an ongoing dilemma. I haven't answered it to my satisfaction at all. Because I like working in remote places, I like working in places that are not easy to get to not easily accessible. I don't like them because they're dangerous, but they are often a bit dangerous. That's not the attraction. It's just that, you know, if you're working under cliffs, and the cliffs are unstable, and the tides coming in, it's dangerous. You can't you can't get public liability insurance for an audience apart from that most people wouldn't. You know, and I've we've got that movers and makers piece we did at the end of the beach. And it was part of a project that was related to other environmental work. And even the environmentalists, despite the fact that we put a plaque up to say, you need to walk right to the end of the beach, and then some it wasn't that far. Even they gave up. Even they didn't, if they weren't come into, you know, so. So how do you take that work out? And and I mean, I will go on working with film and I will go on. I mean, we I've just directed a piece, which came out of the mentorship programme that's collaboration with a visual artist is also a movement artists called Hillary Neal and filmmaker called the key value. And that was a really, I was happy with that collaboration. I was happy with what emerged from it. But I can't answer your question, because I don't know the answer. I'm just continually, you know, and I think one of the problems for me is, I'm a bit of a technophobe anyway, and how can you work with film and not have the technology takeover? and not and not have people say, Well, you need to hit that mark. And but they just repeat that and, you know, in the best will in the world, and it needs filmmakers and editors who prepared to really question their own, you know, the practices of the profession, actually, and I know they're out there, you

know, I've met them. But you know, it's not, not all editors will co edit, for example. So I've come to the conclusion that the answer is to, to work with people who are prepared to film dancers like they were wildlife, because, you know, I know they do all sorts of things for the wildlife. But actually, you can't make them repeat the same thing. You can't get them to appear at the right time. And you can't say only that mark. But I like the medium of film, I see things very visually. But but it's an ongoing. So any ideas, any thoughts I'm really interested in.

Frank Bock 1:07:30

You said something earlier about about, the more, the more training, or the more dancing you do, the more habits you accumulate. And I'm interested in your approach to training that sounds like it's finding as a kinesthetic training, but not through kind of repetitive structured kind of relationship to the body or the technical relationship to the body. But it's both technical and technical, but in a very different way. So maybe I was wondering if you could say something

Helen Poyner 1:08:02

about the technical bit or about technical in

Frank Bock 1:08:05

a very different way, that kinesthetic rigour?

Helen Poyner 1:08:09

Yeah, and one of the questions that I've got here, you're asking all the questions that I asked myself, so that's great. Is there a place for rigour in in in non stylized work and that was important to me because of how, because of how I entered it, which was from a very non rigorous, celebratory sort of approach. And I think the rigour is in the level of kinesthetic and environmental awareness, both in the intention, attention to detail, and in the awareness of the overall gift out, which is of the body of the environment and of the body in relation to the environment, and an awareness of the changing form of the body from moment to moment. So it's like any improvisation practice, actually, the form is one that changes from second to second, and whether one can really be fully inhabit that, as it as it changes. I think disrupting habits is is a great thing. And I think the environment does that. So, you know, if you take people who are used to working in a studio, on their feet, or not even on their feet to a very three dimensional unpredictable environment with surfaces that are not apparently conducive to movement in bodies, then then you have to find another way of moving. So the environment actually does that it can and same as you know, us working in challenging conditions, weather conditions, it means you have to move differently. So it's not difficult and doing environmental work to disrupt habits. One of my experiences when working in Java was that we trained in a very formal pen doper that was an informal one that you saw, which had I don't know whether it was a marble floor but a very hard floor and very imposing pillars and it's very dark and even though it was open and We spent a month working there and and perhaps at that point spoke very little English, it was very, it was all kinesthetic, you know, he would say please move and bagless, which means good. And walk, crawl, you know that there was very, very little that was all communicated through the body. And so we worked for a month, you really intensely. And he was working at that time with, you know, really on a very what I call robust physicality really

strong clear feet on the ground. This is great. And I thought after a month, I thought, Oh, I've got it, you know, know what we're doing. And then you took us out into these massive sand dunes nothing, you put your foot down, and the whole earth moved, you know. So that's, that's what I mean by also, the opposite is always true. So there's even a danger in having underlying principles, you have to start from somewhere, that those somehow became set in steel, whereas they're just, they're not actually the work. They're just ways in that might that might offer particular experiences. But it's not there yet. So you could come in through a completely different door, or you could spend time developing a whole a whole particular understanding repertoire. And then and then me suggests that we're doing something completely different. I mean, not to be perverse, but just because it's like, Okay, so you've got that. So now, how about this?

Frank Bock 1:11:25

I think earlier on, you talked about the idea of being grounded, and it makes me think about a different, different idea of groundedness, when ground always changes. And, and you're Yeah, it seems that you're referring to a different kind of ground or a different kind of thing that as a, as a dancer, you're you're holding on to or you're dropping into that isn't, isn't ground in the way that as many trainings talk about,

Helen Poynor 1:11:54

I think the feet are crucial. But I think it's crucial that they're not planted. I mean, of course, you can plant them. Of course, there's nothing wrong with planting your feet. But if that becomes like, you know, that's how we get our stability, by grounding in that conventional way, then then the movement can't flow through the whole body, and it can't flow through space. So I guess it's being grounded in the whole body in each moment. And through whatever is touching, whatever it's touching, which in these environments might not be the floor, it might be a clear floor, do you see what I'm saying in that moment? And that those moments of touching can be fleeting, but still still grounded? So it's been grounded in movement being centred in in the movement itself?

Audience 1:12:41

Can you talk a bit more about the practice in relationship to women and in relationship to men? It seems like, it seems that a lot of the work is around women and, and the environment. And you work with a lot of women. And I know that it's really that round of training. I wondered if we could talk more about that. Men can do that as well.

Helen Poynor 1:13:07

Yes, men do come and do that as well. But I think most of you will know. I mean, it's not bad proportion here that in most dance environments, there are less men and women. So yes, men definitely come and work with me too. And that's great. And it pulls something different out of me. And out of the groups. I do do some work, which is women's groups, because it's a different environment. And some women like that. And it's different for me to be working group of women to be working in the next group. But I enjoy the challenge of working with male energy as well. But I think, I suppose I don't know why less men come apart from proportion, either the proportions in the movement world in general. But you should ask, you should ask the men that

work with me or the women that have worked with me and experience. What I don't like is the situation when there's just one man in group because it was horrible for him. But that does happen. And there's much longer answers about my work with women. But I feel like I can't even get my head in gear for that. Did you have a particular reason for asking the question from your own perspective? I mean, you've given me the external one. But did you have a personal reason?

Audience 1:14:22

I suppose I'm interested in emulation. So I don't know how many formulated but the idea of the natural world and women and I don't know.

Helen Poynor 1:14:37

Okay. So, yes, I'm a feminist. And I think that puts some people I think very often women are naturally conflated in a way that hasn't served women. So somebody was saying something about feelings recently in relation to men and women and I just wanted to say men feel absolutely as much as women do is just culturally expressed in different ways or allowed in different ways. So I think human beings have relationships with nature. But I don't think it's gender specific. Having said that, there's lots of fabulous nature writing by women. And there's lots of women artists who've worked in nature, whose work I love and really respect. So I'm not, I'm not pushing that away. But I'm being slightly provocative by saying, I don't think it's special. It's a special relationship. But you know, really, what you need to do is to talk to the men that have worked with me and find out because I don't know what people think. And I don't know what people get from it. But thank you for giving me the context for your question.

Audience 1:15:44

If I could ask you, I'm really sorry. I came in late and maybe I missed No, don't worry, something you may have spoken about. I'm curious how you may have been influenced or how your perspectives on the use of sights and landscape may have changed after a time in Java, and your time with Bob Proctor. Because I love the little work that I've done in Java. I did get the sense that there's this great sense of spirituality, about spaces and the forces that are in spaces, and then I see it in a very different way. And when you mentioned how someone had come to you and asked you if you prayed before performing? I mean, that makes a lot of sense. But how much did it penetrate your practice?

Helen Poynor 1:16:25

What do I pray before I work? Sometimes? It's lots of answers for that, because there are two questions in there. One's about environment, one's about spirituality, and you're making connection between the two which is right. So when I trained with superato, he worked specifically in three sites. One was, um, so you've probably been to some of these one was, and initially he didn't have his land. So initially, we were in Central suricata and then out on his land, and but he took us out to the sites to Paris akitas, which you may have been to which is it's it's the site with the sand dunes, but it's a beach site, but it's dedicated to a goddess of the sea is very powerful. And you can't wait green there because it upsets her. And they're all particular culture traditions that you have to be very careful about. One was a Hindu temple up in the hills

called Changi, Cebu. Okay, which is, which is a very stone environment, it's very, very beautiful. But it's also in the middle of a village. So, you know, we turn up a group of Westerners and start working. And suddenly they're 1330, Javanese children sort of about the temple looking. And it's in the hills. So it's, it's very different types of temperature. And the other was one, a girl, which I don't think it takes people to anymore, which is, is clay hills, while in monsoon very slippery clay hills, where he had a very tiny bamboo temple, and where he later built the foundation for a Buddhist stupa. So it took me a while actually, fairly recently, to really wake up to the fact that, that I think what Prapto is doing, but it's different, because because the film that I saw of him recently would contradict this, but those sites all have spiritual significance. And it's the spiritual significance that he's taking people therefore, rather than the natural environment, I think, but I might be wrong on this. And I can't claim to sleep for him. But I think at the time, it was just environment, if you see what I mean, but for me, that I didn't, that I wasn't I knew the spiritual element was there, but I wasn't particularly connected to it. There were people in the group that had much more connection, you know, as ardent meditators or whatever. But but his spirituality was very, very present in the work. So he would often chant while we were working, or he would invite the Black Monk into chant. It was a very large guy who would have very sonorous voice, and whenever he chanted, I just fell asleep for the length of chanting and then woke up immediately hit finish. But the biggest influence for me in terms of spirituality was the summer meditation. Because at the time when I was training with him, which was very early on, it was the late 80s, he asked us, he suggested to us that we all went to Samira meditation twice a week, which was the only time it was translated into English. And I'm more and more and more understand the connection with that, you know, I was happy to go and I knew that it was connected to the work, but the more I get involved with it now, the more I understand there are all these things that I've been doing all these years that actually from Semara meditation are connected to some annotation and I didn't know that whereas the Buddhist influence is very clear because practice Buddhist and so yes, it's it's in there somewhere in it certainly in their in my practice, but I don't tend to talk about it. But I feel like it's, it's there. And if people want to engage with it, it's, I will talk about it, but I don't tend to move it weary of words with capital letters like spirituality, meditation, relaxation, or whatever, you know, become these big things, I think, you know, we all have our own personal belief systems and we work from those, we can't work from anything else. And then it's, you know, being transparent with that if people want the information, but also making sure it's spacious enough so that people from many different backgrounds and belief systems and people who are allergic to spirituality can come do the work and not not, it's not an issue. I mean, hopefully, because the work is so much about difference in some way, that that people find their own level with it. And also people who have trained with superato Anna Anna, and there are a number of us who've done both, you know, we're all working totally differently. Which is right. I think, I don't know whether that begins to engage with what you're talking about. Do you want to say more about your experience of working job?

Audience 1:20:49

I didn't work an awful lot. But I performed at Prapto's Festival at unintelligible] ? Okay, two years ago, so this is the temple on a hill. And I came through another Indonesian dancer [unintelligible]. Okay. We've been trying to work together for a long time, it's never happened.

But I went to Solo to, to meet him and performed there. And I guess it was particularly that time, like, I was working previously with always a lot of like, found objects. And but it was when I went to perform it chatty. So go ahead, I hadn't planned it that way. Because I didn't really know anything about the site, we didn't have very good information. But I took a piece about reincarnation. And that's a very significant part of that temple site. And friends had warned me that the spiritual presence of that site can be very heavy. So as a bit as beware, But I could definitely feel there was something and I guess, in, in my work and in different spaces, like, for me, I can, I am not religious in any way. Really, and but I can feel like a sort of energy, I don't know where this is spiritual energy or something in many spaces. And for me, it's sort of part of the landscape, but I kind of struggle with how to work with it. Like, ask for blessing before I work, but

Helen Poynor 1:22:17

yeah, I think if you've got good intention, that counts for a lot, but I think sites do hold whatever. I mean, of course, a temple is going to have a spiritual presence. But I've seen it time and time again, I've worked in sites, not not those types of sites, you know, built environments, natural environments, where I haven't learned the history, I deliberately haven't researched the history. I've only worked there through movement. And then I've made a piece that reflects history that I didn't know that it's there. You know, and, you know, that spooked me a bit now, I think, no, it's clear. That's what you get. So it's not it's not coincidental that you took material about reincarnation, not knowing that that was the you know, because that process is started even before you got that.

Frank Bock 1:23:01

We're coming to time. Okay. I know you brought some books and things as well. Are you happy to, to leave it there?

Helen Poynor 1:23:15

Absolutely. Yeah, that's great. It's great that people have come in so much. And that's what I was hoping that I wouldn't just pontificate.

Frank Bock 1:23:22

Well, thank you for your very generous sharing. And yeah, it's been a real privilege to hear.

Helen Poynor 1:23:30

Thank you for asking me and thank you all for coming.

(Outro: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021)

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