



Transcription of recorded conversation

Dance Dialogues: Joel Bray & Dan Koop

22 October 2020

Tom Pritchard - 00:00

Good evening everyone and welcome to this Dance Dialogues conversation between Joel Bray and Dan Koop.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I'm joining today's talk from the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Eastern Kulin Nation, and I want to pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging, and extend this respect to any First Nations people joining us today.

My name is Tom Prichard, and for those of you who don't know me, I'm the Studio Producer here at Lucy Guerin Inc. I'm a white cis man in my mid-30s with short brown hair and a beard, and I'm wearing a blue shirt. I'm sat in a room with white walls with some shelves, a small wooden mirror, and a chest of drawers.

So, on to tonight's talk, we're delighted to welcome Joel and Dan for a conversation exploring what practices now. Before I hand over to them, some brief reintroductions.

Melbourne-based artist Joel Bray is a proud Wiradjuri man. He began dancing at age 20 in traditional Aboriginal and Contemporary dance forms at NAISDA Dance College and went on to graduate from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts in 2005. Joel's fourteen-year career spans Australia, France, Portugal and Israel having performed with CHUNKY MOVE, Niv Sheinfeld & Oren Laor, and Roy Assaf, amongst others.



Joel's work *Biladurang*, an intimate performance in a hotel room, won three Fringe Awards and has toured nationally and internationally. *Dharawungara*, commissioned by CHUNKY MOVE, in conjunction with a Fellowship at the National Library of Australia was a first step in a larger research project into Wiradjuri ritual. *Daddy*, won the GreenRoom Award for Best Contemporary/Experimental Performance and toured to Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney. Joel is Board Member of Melbourne Fringe.

Joel's choreographic practice springs from his Wiradjuri cultural heritage. Rather than recreating an Indigenous 'form', his methodology is rooted in traditional Wiradjuri ways of making work; namely durational, site-specific and cross-artform processes. His works engender intimate encounters with audiences who are 'invited in' as co-storytellers and co-performers. Joel's works are informed by his body, his experience, and the intersection of songlines including his Indigenous heritage, skin-colour and queer sexuality.

Welcome Joel.

Joel Bray - 02:28

Thanks, Tom.

Tom Pritchard - 02:30

Dan Koop is an Artist, Producer and Facilitator working in public and unusual spaces.

Creatively, he makes performance works in unexpected and public spaces that engage audiences to become participants. Professionally, he has worked for contemporary multi artform venues and festivals in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and London. As a Facilitator, he has hosted conferences for hundreds, taught small tutorials and worked as a conduit between community groups and arts organisations. He holds a Masters of Public Art from RMIT University and casually teaches at several tertiary institutions around Melbourne.



As an Artist, Dan has created collaborative works with Polyglot Theatre, for Hotel Obscura, Going Nowhere and the Green Room Award winning *The Stream / The Boat / The Shore / The Bridge*.

As a Producer, Dan has worked at Battersea Arts Centre in the UK, Brisbane Powerhouse, Sydney Festival, venues around Melbourne and was the Creative Program Producer for the 2015-17 Melbourne Fringe Festivals. At Melbourne Fringe Dan produced the Made By Fringe program and facilitated the Artist Development Programs for emerging artists.

Welcome, Dan.

Dan Koop - 03:46

Thanks, Tom. It's quite confronting to hear all of that in one mouthful. So, thanks for having me.

Tom Pritchard - 03:53

And without further ado, over to you Joel.

Joel Bray - 03:56

Thanks. Thanks, Tom. Hello, everyone out there.

I am coming to you today from Eora country of the Gadigal mob up here in Sydney. And just take a moment to acknowledge the people and the Elders and Ancestors from here. This is actually where I was born. It's kind of my...yeah, where I was born and where I would spend my childhood and a lot of my extended team are here so it always feels a little bit like a homecoming and I thank them for their welcome.

I am a fair-skinned man wearing a black shirt and a little pumpout to House of Dizzy earrings saying 'deadly'. And I'm sitting in my very bland Airbnb that is my accommodation while I'm here.

And I'm super happy to be joined today by Dan Koop. One of the things that was missing from tha bio was one of Dan's roles at Melbourne Fringe was to coordinate the Deadly Fringe artists of the time, and that was how we met. In fact, you were the person who called me to say that I got that first opportunity, which was basically my first opportunity was coming back to Melbourne. So you're...you will always be in my heart Dan Koop.

Dan Koop - 05:27

Oh Joel, when you're doing these EOI's, you have to make a lot of really sad calls and those emails that you write going "I know, it was a lot of efforts, I thank you for applying...". So the ones where you get to call somebody and say something like that, I cherish them too. So yeah, and what...what you were able to do afterwards was amazing. So yeah.

Joel Bray - 05:44

Yeah, do you want to just introduce yourself?

Dan Koop - 05:46

I should. So I'm a light skinned cis-gendered man. I'm sitting in my backyard so behind me you can see the blue sky, you can see red bricks of my garage, you might be able to see the parsely going to seed and I've got a blue shirt on. And if we're lucky, my cat Catzuki will come and join us. That's part of the reason I'm out here. I think she'd make an excellent dancer.

I want to acknowledge Country too. I'm in my backyard, but I'm really on the land of the Wurundjeri people. And during lockdown I've spent a lot of time I've been down the Merri Merri, and it has been an absolute saviour, sincerely. I know land isn't everything in First Nations cultures. But as I was walking through spring, I started to notice the wattle and I was like "Oh great, the wattle's out" and I took a closer look because I had time. And I noticed there was two different wattle trees sitting next to each other. And then that same walk I realised it wasn't two different wattle trees with two different varieties, it was eight. So, how long have I been walking past things in this country? How much do I

have to learn is kind of what I've been contemplating recently. And when you think of 60,000 years of culture, knowledge, ceremony, ritual, all the things that we know we love in art and culture, I'm just humbled, and really thankful to be here. And I just want to pay my respects to that 60,000 years of culture and you know, for a lot more to come. Hopefully, I can work side by side with that and learn from that and play a positive role in that. So that's the future too, hopefully.

Joel Bray - 07:26

Yeah, that's been that's been a real the silver lining, maybe, to find in this year has been the opportunity to, like, return to the same place. Like yeah, for me, it was the same like...the Merri was, and to start to observe. And also with the people...I don't know, like, I tell you what...what I miss from Melbourne in lockdown now that I'm up in Sydney. I went to a coffee shop first time I got here, and I went in and I smiled and said "Hello" to the barista and they were just kind of like, "Hi". And I realised only leaving Melbourne, how much we've all been making an effort in Melbourne to be kind to each other and take a little bit extra effort. I'm thinking about when I would go for my jogs, I'd probably pass like maybe 100 people and we all smile at each other. I kind of hope that's something Melbourne holds on to once things return a bit more to normal.

Dan Koop - 08:26

Yeah, I've never made so much meaningful eye contact with my barista as I'm making an order. And I've started to notice people do have beautiful sparkling eyes that I've, you know, wouldn't have had to look at because of the mask. And yeah, that people know each other down the road now. And it turns out that my old drama teacher who, you know, is the reason I'm here in this industry today, Gabrielle Panset, she lives 500 metres away. So I see her every second day now just... just in happenstance. And so that is...it is lovely. And I want to keep that too.

Joel Bray - 08:58

Yeah, awesome. Awesome.

Well, so a few weeks back, I read an article online that was from Canada, actually. And it was talking about the...the kind of experiences going on there of, like, people whose parents may be identified as non-indigenous discovering they're Indigenous...that they have Indigenous ancestry. And it's quite different over there actually, because they have like, kind of different identifications through history of like Creole and like, you know, if you lived on the reserve or if you didn't live off the reserve, and I don't totally understand all of the complexities of that but the work with...the article is talking about the challenges that are being faced in the community there between people who are kind of newly identifying as Indigenous and those who have maybe deeper roots in community.

And it kind of got me to reflect a little bit on the some bits that the version of that that's happening in Melbourne and it's not uncommon for someone...actually *Biladurang*, my show that I am still doing in the hotel rooms. Like that's one of the most common things that would happen after the show when I would chat with people is someone would come up to me, like "my family's always identified as you know, of, you know, English ancestry or whatever. But we've discovered that there's Aboriginal bloodlines in our family". And then so and so I kind of wrote this post where I was like, kind of reflecting a little bit on it. And I was because it got me...it got me thinking about how like, as blackfellas, we recognise other blackfellas. Like, but it's not like it's not even like in America where they have, like tribal register...enrollment, I think it's called 'tribal enrollment'. It's not...it's much...it's an informal identification system. But it's really clear, like we know who each other are, we kind of recognize.

So it got me kind of thinking a little bit about what, what was that? What were those mechanics? And I wrote a little bit of a post about how I think culture is not just a passive identification. It's not just, you know, like, your passport says you are Australian, just because you are Australian, right? It's not that kind of...It's actually something that you practice something that you...you, like...you do, you enact, you embody your cultural heritage. And yeah, and that was, that was when Tom and Lucy asked me to have a conversation about this. And I first also be like, I don't know if this 45 minutes in that I kind of

said it all in my Facebook post. But then you and I started yarning. And I was actually like...yeah, that's been really interesting.

Dan Koop - 12:13

Yeah, well, I mean, to take it back to *Biladurang*, I remember, You know, without giving spoilers, there's a moment where you're in the hotel room, and you're talking about where you really are. And I haven't seen the work in other cities that you've been to, so I remember looking out over the Birrarung and, and you just asked him the question of what was my dance?

And and so, yeah, I hope that's not a spoiler, but that must be an interesting question to have to ask yourself as well, because we know about the, you know, problems of being able to practice culture, there's lineages that have been broken as families that have been taken apart, there is removal from land, I could go on. And so yeah, that question is a pretty profound question you must have to ask yourself, and, and it actually, yeah, your right foot, the back and I go, what's my culture then? If I'm Australian, if I'm standing in this city, you know, what, what do I really have to be proud of? What do I really have to fight for? There's some similar kind of contracting questions I must ask myself as well.

Joel Bray - 13:12

Yeah. Yeah, I think like actually looking for my dance is, in a way it's, kind of like, it's the theme that crosses through all my work and my whole life stretching back to when I first decided to...I was doing a law degree at Sydney Uni I decided to leave that because I was terrible law student, like appalling. And I went to NAISDA to study dance, but actually what interested me was connecting with my culture, I wanted to learn about it. Like you know, I always I always grew up knowing my Black relatives my family, I knew who I knew our nation and I knew swear words! But it was, I kind of... as I became an adult I had to kind of go actually that I don't really know that much, I'm not really that connected, I'd like to be more connected.

And I went to NAISDA and that was a...it was actually a bittersweet encounter. One, I discovered dance and fell in love with it. I remember the first class was like an old school Broadway lyrical jazz class. And I was like, seriously, I hadn't done any dance and I was five minutes into it I was like, "yep, boom, this is it. This is the thing I want to do for the rest of my life."

Dan Koop – 14:34

... can be a bit of a gateway drug, can't they?

Joel Bray – 14:36

Totally, totally. And what was amazing was for the first time I was I was kind of in a Black community being every day with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dancers, students, teachers. It was...that was awesome.

But then, I had I kind of found myself wrestling with how do I, how do I respond to that? Because, you know, I speak the Queen's English, I spent most of my time growing up with my, with the white side of my family like, I don't, I don't really speak the...and I started to kind of like artificially try and embody what I saw around me. And it just felt really, yeah...I felt really uncomfortable in my own skin, I felt really uncomfortable about being so fair skinned. I felt like I wasn't black enough.

And that's, I mean, that's something that I've struggled with all the time. And it's something that I talk with a lot...like it's a, it's a thing that crops up in conversations between blackfella artists a lot is actually no matter how dark or fair skin is, we're often struggling with the feeling that went not cultural enough, we're not black enough.

And, and yeah, and then the other thing that kind of compounded that at NASIDA...and NAISDA's amazing, I love what they do and I'm really grateful I went there. But there was also it was kind of compounded by the fact that we, the traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance forms that we were taught were from the north. So, they were from Jokalo, Turkey Creek, or from one of the

Torres Strait Islanders. And it kind of subconsciously confirmed for us that the real blackfellas are not from here, they're not from the southeast, they don't look like us, they don't talk like us there, you know. And so, I ended up leaving NAISDA, partly for that reason, feeling a little bit like, I went this searching for something that I half-found, but I didn't find actually the culture that I connected to that my ancestry is connected from. Yeah.

Dan Koop - 16:50

Yeah. And well just think about that. Like, I'm a teacher, you know? And so part of what I'm trying to do is share my knowledge of, just, skills in the industry and connections and a map of how the place works. But even...everyone at that age is dealing with their kind of personal identity as well, right? You know, who am I? How do I fit into this room? You know, I used to be the funniest guy in the class in high school, but now there's a whole bunch of funny people or talented people or people who can sing. And so, you know, that kind of step up in training is really kind of a bit of an intense moment, as well as the things you're talking about. Yeah.

Joel Bray – 17:28

Yep. Yep. And then, and then I went away. I went to WAAPA went overseas. And then overseas, there was just no point, right? I just was...you'd explained to someone in Europe, I'm Aboriginal, they just look at you like, "what, like, what does that even mean? How can you be one?" So like, I kind of really, really disconnected from my culture, and then it's been this like, process of coming back. And dance is still the gateway for me, you know?

I think for a lot of people, it's different things, you know, some people like language, and, you know, particular crafts or whatever, mine is still...I search and I learned about my culture through through my choreographic research, actually. And sometimes, that's, you know, like a really formal way, like in 2019...was 2019 last year? Yeah, last year...I went to the National Library, Australia, and actually, like, literally pulled out old documents and looked at descriptions of traditional Wiradjuri dance and ritual. There were even like, songs that were scored, the melodies were scored, and like these amazing

photos that were like, pretty staged, because I think that's what photography was, like back like, you know, over 100 years ago.

But um, but also, like, I don't know, just making a real effort to spend time with my family, to spend time with my dad. Dad and I travelled around country for a few weeks, yarning in the car, learning about family history, and all of that, then kind of all of that informs my practice. All of that informs like how I make my work. Yeah.

Dan Koop - 19:26

And, yeah, that that question of practice is kind of, you know, in our faces at the moment, I think, because, at least down here, we've been in lockdown for so long. So, if our practice is working with other people, if our practice is going to a studio, even if my practice is going to site and kind of getting inspiration from places that I want to stage experiences in, so much about practice is taken away from us.

So the question, the confronting question is, has our culture been taken away from it? So it's kind of been an interesting creative challenge to kind of work through as well, and, and I think you articulated in that post, that culture isn't something you see. It's something you do. So, it has to be done. And we're doing things in different ways at the moment, which is kind of, yeah, it's a bit of a challenge. Really.

Joel Bray – 20:18

Yeah, cos your practice is really connected to place and people, isn't it?

Dan Koop - 20:23

Yeah, yeah. So, the best time someone ever asked me, but what's your medium? I was like "What? What are you even ask me that for?" Because medium...I'd done public, sorry, performance art and kind of theatre and drama as my Bachelor. And then I started to stray into this kind of staging



performance events in unusual places and public spaces. And so I ended up doing a Master's of Public Art, which was in the visual art school. So not that far apart, of course, it's all contemporary stuff. But the language when a photographer who is my colleague asked me, "yeah but what's your medium?", I couldn't just come back and go, photography, I couldn't come back and just go theatre because it's not even theatre that I do really. Dramaturgy so important to it. And the live bodies are so important. But...

So I kind of had to think about that for a long, long time. And my kind of glib answer for that now is that my medium is people. I can't do this without people, whether that's working with them, sharing the experiences with them, getting inspiration from them. And I'm kind of interested in the social. And then the other medium that you and I definitely working together with Joel and dancers and theatre people all do is time. So I think about time a lot now, and I could really try and use time in my work. Yeah.

Joel Bray – 21:44

And this year, what...I mean, like it's almost like a cliche that we say to each other, right? Like, "what is time? What is the meaning of time anyway?"

Dan Koop - 21:53

Yeah, I mean, the best little meme for this period, I think, has been 'there's only three days now. There's yesterday, today and tomorrow. And after that, there's not much else'. You know? The kind of longer picture is hard to say. B

But that's for me again, like, yeah, repetition is time, isn't it? So, to have walked down the Merri Creek so many times now, I've actually run up and down there for the last five years. But to walk it again, is just different. So again, same journey, same time of year, maybe, but to walk in a different pace, is that manipulation of time that is really crucial and interesting to me, and to kind of think about that as medium and as material.

Yeah, so in some respects, I have lost a lot of the social. But like I said, I've bumped into my old drama teacher, I've kind of met some people down there who I just love their dogs. So I'm kind of always talking to them, because I really want to pat the dog. I know about the wattle. Now, I know about the Tawny Frogmouth now and that time, you know, I've watched them kind of nest and now the little Tawnys are out there, little fledglings, and they're like all fluffy and everything. So yeah, I've lost stuff. But I think I've, I've made a conscious effort to try and think about what I've gained or what I do have, rather than what I don't have. And that that has helped, I wouldn't say to solve everything. And I wouldn't say I've like coasted through the time. We've all had challenges. But yeah, it helps to focus on the parts of my practice that I do have.

Joel Bray – 23:14

Yeah, right. And is there something? I don't know, what do you like, what are you working on? Are you working on something?

Dan Koop - 23:24

Yeah, I mean. The project that kind of broke normality for me, and I realised I couldn't finish it properly, was, um, I'd been working at the South Melbourne market, and doing a project with my colleague, Jamie Lewis. And we, um, we'd started off just interviewing traders at market and customers and people behind the scenes. And we couldn't do the third week of our residency there, which was a shame just because we're having a lovely time hanging out there eating the food, getting to know everybody.

But then it meant that all this tape that we had, it really turned into a time capsule. And so it became much more of an oral history project where we thought we were going to get you know, the grocer's son who had grown up there to host a tour and to get people moving around and have this kind of like, cast of experts and non-professionals kind of doing this event. But now when you listen to the tape, it's prophetic and it is a kind of crystallisation of all the things that changed so quickly.

So, everyone talking about the market as a social space and all the people they know there and the family really that exists there. It just clearly has been broken and one of the amazing traders there, she's got this cheese room, and cheeses are in there from all around the world, actually. So, it's this little wunderkammer of cheese, right? And, and she was just feeding it to me. And I kind of asked because the bushfires were happening. I said, "so where did this come from? Are the bushfires going to change the taste of the cheese?" And she says, "Yeah, it will. Everything's going to change this year. Everything's going to change this year." And that's this, this kind of thing. She didn't know really what she was saying. But she, she was right.

And so I guess yeah, so to finish that, like, I've got all these kind of ghosts of people in my work when I've recorded them. And so actually, I've been working with the traces of people rather than the bodies of people or the kind of social dimension of people. So yeah.

And another project I've been working on has happened in the Gold Coast. And that's also an interview project that we talked to more like ecologists, and people of culture from the land and people who know about food and bio regions. So, I've actually weirdly, also, in my head, I've been on Bundjalung country, and Yugambeh country and places like that kind of thinking about those projects that have happened. And my colleagues have been there on site. So yeah, I've kind of had this remote relationship to places as well. Which has been weird.

Joel Bray – 25:55

And have you gone back to the market?

Dan Koop - 25:58

Yeah. When I could get there. I went through and it was, um, it was really sad. I really, yeah, really felt pretty sad. I hope those businesses survive. And you know, like, I know that there's dancers in here and other artists in here who would be feeling the same thing. And yeah, I feel like actually, I felt really close affinity with hospitality people recently, actually. Because we're kind of we are on the frontlines,

actually. And we do provide an essential service culture. And it is as important as food, it is nourishing. Yeah, they...some of them won't survive. You probably know, some of our artist friends might go off and do something else and might never come back. But also, I think, yeah, I'm going to be like, bold and exciting and forward looking. Now, I just know that we can't survive without it, can we? So many of us.

So that's lived culture. Again, that's not the industry, all of a sudden, we're talking about, we're talking about practising culture. We're talking about culture being the thing that connects us to the world and helps us make sense of the world and helps us meet other people and ask questions. And that's, that's my practice of culture, not my practice of art, cos that art is in the industry that my culture lives in my society. So yeah, I don't know. I feel like I've just rattled off one there. But that's what I've been thinking about a lot. When the word culture comes up.

Joel Bray – 27:23

Yeah. And that's it. Yeah.

And I think sometimes we can, when we get kind of like zoomed in, we can feel like we're just stumbling from project to project. And then sometimes when I'm in that headspace, a) I'm not particularly good at being able to select what to do, or how to how to devote my time, because, like, I can just keep going from like, project to project, but it's useful to, like, zoom out and go, like, what's my relationship to the broader culture? Of the place I live, of the country I live in, of the community I live in, like, and what...how does my, what I do, how does the art I make tinker with that? Like, what contribution does it make? Or what...how does it nudge to the needle in some way? Is it doing that? If it's not, maybe I'm better off spending my time doing something else or whatever.

So, being able to kind of zoom out and think of things rather than just as like, like a practising artist or like, you know, I make choreographies, going I make culture in collaboration with all the other people who are making culture.

Dan Koop - 28:40

Yeah. But yeah, don't we miss performing? All of us in all their different ways, you know? Because that's the moment of exchange. So yeah, kind of what are we if we're makers if we can't share and show? That's kind of been a confronting question, I think. Have you...I mean, you've done a few digital projects. So you've kept making pretty consistently, haven't you?

Joel Bray – 28:59

Yeah. Yeah. And I've done everything from making film, to doing live stream performance. Um, and, actually, I think...*I think* the most successful thing I did was actually was the furthest away from my normal practice. I made a choreography for Instagram. I've made it was through Chunky Move's Solitude One residency. And I made...and I like...because I really dove into what that form was. I didn't try and port over what I do to an online space, which is hampered by, you know, I don't have broadcast level equipment, the Wi Fi keeps on breaking down because we've got the liberal national parties', you know, broadband.

Dan Koop - 29:50

Yeah, so we're talking about essentially infrastructure, the NBN they really dogged that one. You know, give us the money and we'll deliver a national network. Don't you worry. We're good at that in culture. Yeah.

Joel Bray – 30:01

And so...and I kind of like spent time...and also because I don't really like social media. I don't really use it. Instagram, especially I don't really understand it, like, and so I kind of dove into Instagram and I didn't have any...because I'm not really a user of Instagram. I didn't really know how it was supposed to work. So I just invented a way to you use it? Yeah.

Yeah. Um, and so I think I think that was probably the thing I had the most fun with. I made 120 short films. That I like then embedded in this thing you can kind of get lost in. That was the thing I had the most fun with.

Dan Koop - 30:43

Yeah, that reminded kind of when I went, you know, if I'm trying to do a project or if someone asked me to do a project, I kind of ask, you know, can I afford it? Financially dah dah dah, but what's my curiosity here? And so I will do things for free or nothing, not money that is, if my curiosity is mega. And yeah, that's the most important resource for me: curiosity. So yeah, if you found the curiosity in Instagram, even if you knew it wasn't your new thing, and you're not trying to pivot to become a, you know, influencer and know,

Joel Bray – 31:14

Haha, me and my 800 followers?

Dan Koop - 31:21

Yeah. But that's the curiosity of finding a new form. And I think I think dance on film is actually kind of a cool thing. I have admired it for a couple of years. I think there's more to come there. So, I think I think that could actually really kick that along. Which is cool. It'll be interesting to watch. I think that, you know, it'll take a while as well, won't it? The nudge is going to push us forward. And we all tried some different things, but the real output of the quality output, it's probably a couple of years away still, isn't it?

Joel Bray – 31:47

Yes, I mean, dance on film, video dance, whatever, screen dance, it's been around for like a long time. And there's... it's a particular art form in and of itself, you know, like someone like Sue Healey has been practising it [phone rings]...of course, someone called me in the middle of a Zoom.

Dan Koop - 32:09

Oh, and just as I have...my cat jumps up onto the table.

Joel Bray – 32:12

Hello! Oh, what a beauty.

Dan Koop – 32:15

Katsuki. So, around here, she has been employee of the month since April. She is just on such a winning streak. I mean, the amount of work that she gets through every day is amazing. She just sits right in their seat all day never moves. She's just so diligent.

Joel Bray – 32:30

Amazing. And she's off.

Dan Koop – 32:32

And she's gone.

Joel Bray – 32:34

I can't even remember what I was talking about. What was I talking about?

Dan Koop – 32:37

Well, I think we talked about experimentation, we're talking about how dance on film isn't necessarily a new thing, you know? It's been around. We're remembering some things that way as well. You know, like...

Joel Bray – 32:47

I just I don't know, I'm not I'm like I'm not convinced about...and I kind of didn't delve into it. I tried it. It's just...it's just, I don't know, it just doesn't...it's not thing thing. I don't know I need three dimensional dancers. I mean, the breathing, the sweat, I need to smell it, It needs to be like...

To be honest like I also I also find I struggled say if I'm in a massive capacity venue, like at the Art Centre Melbourne or Sydney Opera House or something and I'm...invariably can't afford the good seats at the front and that distance, even that distance, I find myself kind of flicking off.

Dan Koop – 33:23

If this is interesting, so my interest in dance is purely just as a pleasure, you know? I kind of ...basically what happened to me was I worked at the Art Centre as an usher. So I work on all the shows. And one day I went into a show, I had no idea what it was had to sit in the back of the dark room. And I was pretty stressed. And then by the end of the dance show, I was...I wasn't relaxed, it wasn't like it had kind of done a health thing on me. It just changed my perspective. I was breathing differently. I was watching differently. I felt happier. So from that point on, I was like, how do I...how does that dance experience impact on me?

And so I realised that dance makes me happy to watch. So, I don't necessarily look at it from the technical perspective. But I love seeing the choreography from kind of like the back of the room almost like I'm watching sports people sometimes. So I love that aerial view or the kind of view from the gods. I'm always loving that kind of chess pieces moving and the way that big picture kind of comes together is such a pleasure for me.

Joel Bray – 34:16

And the other good thing about watching from the back of the theatre is I love watching the audience because, like, really engaging choreography it's infectious and you see everyone else like moving with it. And then like their attention is on the stage so they're not even aware that they're doing it so there's

this kind of like...like a kind of a secondary choreography that's happening as a result of the choreography on stage.

Dan Koop – 34:44

Yes, yeah, my absolute favourite seat in any cafe or any theatre which are not that different in my opinion, is the one in the back corner. Because then you can see everything that's going on and you can even hear the kitchen, you can even hear the bio box you know what I mean? That is my favourite scene. Yeah. I'm obsessed with the audience. I just kind of sit and watch. watch them half the show, I reckon as well. Most of the time.

Joel Bray – 35:06

Yeah. Well, I'm obsessed with my audience. I want them here, around me. I want us to be like...Yeah, I like to try to think about the work that I have in rep and how I can make it COVIDSafe. Like, it's pretty...

Dan Koop – 35:24

I mean, that's...that's it. I mean, we kind of thought about this image of like, is this a talk about COVID? Or I think it's actually a talk about practice and culture, like we started off with saying, it's just in the context of COVID. And neither of us I think, are in love with this turn to the digital. Are we? I don't think we're kind of thrilled about that, are we?.

Joel Bray – 35:45

No, no. I mean I'm super lucky. I'm up in Sydney, making a work on New Breed on Sydney Dance Company. It's been incredible to get into the studio. And yeah, yeah.

But I'm like, I'm rusty. I'm rusty talking with live human people. Like this almost feels more, like I'm a bit more au fait with this than with actual, like, live conversation with people.

Dan Koop – 36:12

Yeah, yeah. There's something interesting about this. It's like, I feel like I'm on the radio right now. Because you and I are talking. And I know that there's other people out there, listening. I hope they bought tickets anyway. But isn't it curious? Because it's only the belief, it's faith actually, that there's people out there rather than what we so love is the proof, is the human physical proof. So, yeah, an interesting kind of conceptual shift our brains are doing.

And you read that piece to me the other day, I think that...I know why I think it's a good segue. Do you want to read it again?

Joel Bray – 36:46

Yeah, I can pull it out. Absolutely.

Dan Koop – 36:48

I think it's ... think it's something you've been working on but I think it says something as well.

Joel Bray – 36:54

Yeah, it's...I'm making this new work called *Considerable Sexual Licence*. And we... it's a new new....we actually did our first development online. And same as this right? Like, we started out again, let's not make it about like COVID and not being out and of course, that was where we ended up.

But um, yeah, and so I wrote this, but I think we're turning it into a song. It's gonna be my song. And I've got a voice like a chainsaw so it's gonna be like, very funny. I won't sing it.

A Requiem for touch:

I sit. I look at the screen. The angle is wrong. All double chin and exposed incisors. Change the angle. Better. Your throat appears. An enormous fist fumbles with an unseen keyboard. The picture lurches



and your face appears. Unheard words evaporate from moving lips. I can't hear you I shout at the screen as if that would make any difference at all. Your voice materializes, booms through my shitty speakers, the sound phrase and shudders at its peak. How about now? I pumped the f11 key frantically. You are there. Your face is there and your voice is there. But none of it is here. You and your face and your voice broken down into zeros and ones scrambled and spat out into the ether and reassembled at my end into what? You? No, no it's not you. It's a facsimile of you. I am present in your absence.

We wrangle our way through a conversation, glitches and delays. I laugh at your joke but you've already moved on. Say that again. Sorry I lost you. It doesn't matter now. My eyes tire, my thoughts wander, a Facebook notification pulls my attention. I miss you. I miss you. The you that my skin remembers. The you that if I really concentrate I can taste on my lips. You in all your three-dimensional glory. You smelling of coffee and that cigarette you didn't have. The scraggly bristling of hairs on the chin. A rubbery ear lobe pooled and bouncing back into place. The hardness of tailbone disappearing into the fleshiness of arse cheek and brittle, cuddled bones vanishing into hard shoulder muscle.

Your hands. God, I missed your hands. I remember how I would place one palm over my mouth and nose, fingertips caressing eye sockets. How I would inhale you. I remember every crease and knuckle, how your fingers would curl into mine just so. We sign off, chat tomorrow? Lean In for our customary kiss. Enormous slips leer into camera, we both pretend it's sexy. We both know it's not. The screen freezes with your face locked in bewilderment as you try to turn the damn thing off.

Topical, right?

Dan Koop – 40:21

But it's, um, you know, it's the second time I've heard that and just the other day and yeah, it's, it's topical, but it's timely. It's the times we're in. And I think that the thing that you've nailed is that there's all this noise in front of us. And all these kind of topics of the day in front of us. There's the numbers of

the day. But actually, that overwhelming feeling and the sensation is one of an absence. So it's not the presence of all these new things. It's the absence of some other things.

So yeah, that's partly why I've tried to kind of...I mean, I cottoned on to that doing a piece where I realised that um, yeah, absence was really what the piece turned into because that's what we're all dealing with. The absence of bodies, the absence of rituals, you know, going going to the theatre, going to the footy, I love the footy, going to cafes, going to...the rituals of our birthdays, and, you know, seasons. But yeah, so, I've tried to kind of not focus on absence, but focus on the new things that I have got, you know, the glass half full, or the other side of the coin.

So, yeah, I've got something to read, Joel. After I thought.... it's the book of lockdown for me.

Joel Bray – 41:36

Oh yeah, you were talking about this? Yeah, yeah.

Dan Koop – 41:39

Yeah, it's, um, written by an artist called Jenny Odell and she's based in California. And her book is called *How to do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*.

So how to do nothing, it seems perfect for you know, lockdown, but she actually wrote it beforehand. And it just so happens, it's chimed with the times. And I think that her thing about resisting the attention economy, she is talking about Facebook and all that, but she's not talking about it in a way that she's anti-tech. She's actually done residencies in Google and Facebook. So she's a kind of digital artist. But she talks so much about presence. And so here's my kind of little quotable from her thing.

To me, the only habit worth designing for is the habit of questioning one's habitual ways of seeing, and that is what artists, writers and musicians help us to do. Significantly, these encounters are not optimised to empower us by making us happier or more productive. In fact, they may actually



completely unsettle the priorities of the productive self, and even the boundaries between self and other. Rather than providing us with dropdown menus. they confront us with serious questions, the answering of which may change us irreversibly.

So I guess I feel I'm still noticing, I'm still questioning. So I must be still participating in culture. I hope.

Joel Bray – 43:08

I like that idea that one of our roles as an artist, or one of the possibilities for our roles as an artist is to, like, be a circuit breaker of habit. Is to, like, get people to go...because we are such creatures of habit, right? The habit of what we see, like she says, but also the habit of how we be, how we, like, move, you know?

Like, it's something that I like with Bernadette Lewis, who's one of my collaborators. We started this whole kind of like, improv research that we've been doing for the last five years based on the observation of like, every time I walk into the studio, I respond habitually to that space, because I've been to the studio. Studios are a kind of, you know...they all have a barre and a wooden floor and a mirror...

Dan Koop – 43:54

Yeah, yeah. They're generic, familiar. Everything is a bit different, but pretty much the same.

Joel Bray – 44:00

Yeah, totally. And so, then you enter the studio with the expressed desire of finding something new. But the very act of doing that is a habitual act? And then we hope that somehow...Yeah, so like, I like...and so in a way that's the skill of an artist, right? Like, is to find how we can break that circuit, how we can find the new, how we can respond in a new way, or whatever.

That was great. I'm also like, I'm very bad at doing nothing.

Dan Koop – 44:32

Haha, this is the one for you, Joel. When I'm finished I'll send it over.

I can't help myself. I can't. Tom, I know that you said. There'll be questions and I think Joel even we were talking like, it's lovely for us to have the chance to talk but we're really keen to hear from others, aren't we? To join the chat as much as to ask a question. Usually you say to people, now make sure it's a question, that's more of a statement I'll move on, but some statements might be okay here because we're, kind of, keen to know what other people have been noticing. And...

Joel Bray – 45:05

Yeah, yeah, totally.

Tom Pritchard - 45:07

Sounds great. So yeah, if any of the audience wants to pop a question or comment in the... let's keep it all in the Q&A function, and then we'll, kind of, read them out. What I might do is just get things kicked off with a question that...it kind of builds on what you were just talking about Joel, in terms of your work with Bernadette. And Dan, I'm interested in hearing a bit more about your work with Jamie Lewis. And it was interesting to read that both of those relationships, or at least the kind of the En Route practice, both things happen in 2014. So they've got this, you've got this fascinating synchronicity between these ongoing, ongoing relationships or practices, or methodologies.

And I wonder if you could both just talk about what that offers you as an artist, you know, something that sustains across there isn't related necessarily to a specific project, but it's something that sustains across. And Joel, you spoke a little bit about this, but maybe also just to touch on where those things emerged from in the first thing, and, you know, sometimes these things come from necessity. So what necessity drove you to kind of come to those ongoing things?

Joel Bray – 46:15

Well, I mean Bernadette was my best mate and my housemate at WAAPA. And then when I first started moving back to Australia, we applied for and received a STRUT residency. And then it was just through conversation that we identified this irony of like, habitual...moving habitually in response to the space that we habitually arrive at. So we're like, Okay, so what if we, what if we took ourselves to a totally different place. And so we chose to do...originally, we're going to do the visit 10-day hike in south-west Western Australia, which is the Cape-to-Cape, but we were too chicken to do that. So we just did a three-day section of it, which was still completely gruelling.

But we chose it...we specifically kind of chose a bit that we thought would have lots of different terrain. So we had like, climbing up and down hills, we went through forests, through sand on the beaches and over rocks and, and we strapped GoPros to our head, and we like, went for this walk. And we just kind of talked with each other and tried to observe what was happening to our body. And like what, like a really interesting observation we made was that....and we call it, we still call it 'finding zero'. Like when you walk across really soft sand, you use your muscles and you'd like...you, you harden your body to resist the softness of the sand. But then if you're picking your way through like hard rocks, you like soften your body.

So, we noticed that there was a kind of inverse relationship between our muscle tone and the terrain we're walking across. Anyway, sorry, geeking out, right. So this was the kind of...and this was the beginning of this whole exploration that we've now done into like muscle tone and being able to use it. And so then we went back into the studio, and we tried to move in response to the memory of those different terrains. And that was, yeah, 2014/15 something like that. And we've been meeting once or twice every year, like really making an effort. And it's been amazing because we meet not to make a work, it's been purely about practising practice. And it totally...all the stuff we discovered together without the pressure of an impending opening night, I then use all the time in everything my teaching, when I'm having a hard day and my bag feels heavy, as well as like creating choreographic material for my work.

Dan Koop – 48:57

Um, well, for me, it's interesting that, you know, when you hear a biography, maybe it seems like oh, there was a trajectory. And I don't want to kind of claim that it was all by accident either. But, you know, gosh, I didn't plan much of this. And so when I think about my practice, for the longest time, I actually kind of worried I think that I couldn't stand up in front of a group and, and claim a practice, a system by which I operated. I just had these instincts. And so I kind of felt like maybe I'm not an artist, maybe, at least for the practice, maybe I'm just an artist with a portfolio of projects. So I'm a project-based artist.

But the longer you keep working with people, and you know, Jamie is a good example. I started working with Jamie on *Stream boat shore bridge*, and that was after we just kind of, you know, went to a workshop together, you know how these things happen. But then, you know, now it's 10 years later, more. Anyway, it's eight years later, and yeah, we've kind of worked with each other. And so the shorthand of that develops and the skill sets, we know who's good at writing the marketing copy, we know who's good at messing around with resizing the image, you know, so all those extra self-produced things we're good at as well now, and you know, you're good at writing this bit, you do that.

But I think the best thing that I've got...get from Jamie and you know, love working with her, so shout out, is that we started this habit of asking what's not here. And it's really useful, because I'm a cis-gendered, white guy. You know, she's born in Singapore of, you know, kind of Chinese descent and, you know, like, all the mixes that we have. She's a woman. So, to kind of have these counterpoints and to ask each other what's not here, and what is your instinct that you need to challenge. And so, you know, kind of actually it becomes an act of noticing the things that we're not noticing. That's our striving. Haven't formalised it into a, you know, handy little thing that I can teach everybody yet, but I do kind of just think about what we're noticing, and try and notice more.

Tom Pritchard - 50:56

So, there's been a comment from sorry, if it's Sarah, or Sara, Sara Daly in the comments and I might just read that and just if you either if you have a response to it, and that would be lovely.

She says, "I love what you said, Dan, about working with traces of people rather than bodies, when COVID ended your in-person experience at South Melbourne markets. interesting to me, because it makes me think of traces generally, traces of our failing systems, etc. and many other ways that can be thought about. But also, a lovely image traces of things physically."

Joel Bray – 51:31

Yeah, I think it's pretty...Dan, did you actually use the word ghosts, did you? Or was that...

Dan Koop – 51:39

Yeah, I think I did. Yeah I think I did use ghosts. So I've been I've been using the word haunted a lot lately. Yeah.

Joel Bray – 51:48

Yeah. Hmm. It's just weird. I've just been I'm working with Steven Nicolazzo at the moment, we had a week of development last week on my new work. And we've been talking about... the work is about...one of the things that work is about is the erasure of queers from Black history.

And so we've been talking about the idea of queer ancestors, queer blackfella ghosts who can't rest because they've been forgotten. And so, one of the things we need to do with ... [inaudible] ... is to conjure up their memory again, so that they can rest. And I think...yeah, this is...I'm totally nicking this like little phrase around traces, traces of things. I think it's really beautiful.

Dan Koop – 52:31

Yeah. Look, anytime you talk about requeering the canon, you've got to talk about Taylor Mac, don't you? And that 24-hour show that happened. Did anyone see that?

And, hey, Taylor is one of my favourite artists. I saw *The Be(a)st of Taylor Mac* at least 30 times because I was working as an usher at a venue. And so I kind of know that show back-to-front. And yeah, the way Taylor talks about queerness as well is amazing. Because, yeah, I'm actually a straight guy, but, it depends who I'm with, but I'm sometimes...I'm the quickest straight guy that anyone's ever met, especially when I'm at the footy, let's say or whatever. So quick...Tsyler just talked about queerness as, you know, "if you're here, you're queer".

And I even heard the other day, Tyson Yunkaporta, who's this amazing writer who's written this book, *Sandtalk*, but that's another conversation, he was saying that people invite him to go to panels all the time, and some queer gardeners asked him to come. And he said to them, if you're just a bunch of queers who want to hang out with each other and garden, then I'm not into it But if you're the queer kind of gardeners, you want to re-question how this gets put together, what it means and how we can change the process of gardening and the relationships then I'm in.

And I love that kind of thought about queer and the queer canon as well. You know, it's all...it is all the experiment-taters, and it is all the boundary crossers, and it is all the outsiders in a way as well, you know?

Good project by the sound of it, Joel.

Joel Bray – 53:56

Geting excited. Yeah.

Tom Pritchard - 54:00

So, I might just jump in and ask one last question. And it's something that we've kind of touched on during the conversation. But I wonder if it's a good place to finish up.

And it's how the two of you think about audience. Because what's really clear in the conversation today is that you don't think about audiences as a passive viewer sat behind a fourth wall. And that's clear in...I mean, you both kind of centre that in your biographies and how you write about the works, and, you know, *Biladurang* and the *The Stream / The Boat / The Shore / The Bridge*?

[correction]

Dan Koop – 54:31

Yeah, I know. What a title. We didn't think...

Tom Pritchard – 54:34

and how, you know, these days, these kind of...you've made intimate works, but their audience also engages in works that are in a, maybe, a theatrical space. So I wonder if you can both just maybe finish up today by talking about audience and whether or not this period of time has shifted that or whether or not it's actually it's reaffirmed some of those kind of beliefs in what the audience is for you and your work.

Joel Bray – 55:00

Go Dan.

Dan Koop – 55:02

I never realised how much of a gossip I am. I thought I was out of the gossip of the industry. But I've realised now...so this is my way to get into audience...the foyer is my news. I get all of my industry news from the foyer. I've never read anything in *The Age* that's ever been of any use to me, I've got to say.

You know? And so think about that, that even when I'm not on the stage, I'm participating in that culture by talking to people in the foyer and you know, I'd be hearing about Joel's new work. And oh, you're working with Steven, that's exciting. And oh, you know, so-and-so also worked with Steven on that project. Yeah, it's that connecting, is what I'm into.

And so, yes, the audience is crucial. I can't do a single thing, I can't write a line, I can't imagine a scenario without knowing who that audience member is, where they're sitting, how they're standing, if I'm, you know...what their day has been. Like, I am obsessed with that. And because fundamentally, I kind of think of the process of artistic exchange is like electricity. And if, if it's not all connected, and if it doesn't go in a circle, then the electricity doesn't flow, and the light doesn't go on. So yeah, that's my version, if you know, 'if a tree falls in the woods and no-one hears it' kind of thing for performance. Yeah.

Joel Bray – 56:20

Um, I am constantly trying to dive deeper into how I can make...how I can make my work in a Wiradjuri fashion. And what does that mean? And we didn't ... we don't have an idea of...the idea of an audience is actually, like, it doesn't make any sense. Because the place in which we danced was in a ritual, in which we shared our stories and our songs and everything was in a ritual, and that by its nature, ritual doesn't have an audience. Even a witness is a participant.

And actually, it's the same with European theatre to go back all the way to Greece, it was a participatory practice, right? Like everyone was there in order to, you know, appease Poseidon, or whatever the point of the ritual was. So yeah, I think it's a kind of, in a way, the idea of the passive audience of sitting in the dark and watching the stage is a very unique innovation of history in a very particular place that we've ended up with, yeah.



Tom Pritchard – 57:40

Feels like a good place to finish, particularly as the sun is setting ove, Dan, at the moment. We've got a lovely, lovely visual reminder of time happening. So, thanks for that, Dan. That's, that's very committed to the notion of time.

So thank you both Joel and Dan, for the last hour. For your generosity and insights. It's been a really fascinating conversation that's touched on culture and place and people and queerness and gossiping in foyers and COVID. So, thank you both for the time that you've given us.

Dan Koop – 58:14

Thank you for the invitation, Joel. Thanks for the call Tom. To everyone for organising at Lucy Guerin. And so, because this is this kind of act of faith that there's other people out there, if you see me in six months' time, and you were here, just say hello to me, please and confirm that thing because time might also make it happen in the end, you know?

Joel Bray – 58:34

Thanks, Tom. Thanks, Lucy. Thanks, everyone out there. Hopefully see you soon in IRL

Dan Koop – 58:40

Oh Joel, Joel. Simon Abraham's will kill us if we don't shout out that Melbourne Fringe is about to launch right now. We met in Melbourne Fringe. I'm part of the fringe family, I would say here and internationally. You're on the board. So...

Joel Bray – 58:52

Yep, I'm jumping over as soon as this is done.

Dan Koop – 58:55



Exactly. Switch switching over from the cup of tea to the glass of champagne. Switching streams. Yeah. Thanks, everyone.

Tom Pritchard – 59:03

So, thanks, everyone, for joining us today. And we will have another talk in a few weeks' time, so keep an eye out for that. And that's all from us this evening.

END