



Transcription of recorded conversation

Dance Dialogues: Tere O'Connor & Lucy Guerin

10 December 2020

Tom Pritchard - 00:00

Hello everyone and welcome to this Dance Dialogues conversation between Tere O'Connor and Lucy Guerin.

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. I want to pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and extend this to any First Nations or other Indigenous people joining us today.

We're delighted to welcome Tere and Lucy and a transcontinental conversation exploring what practice is now. Before I hand over to them, some brief reintroductions.

Tere O'Connor is the Artistic Director of Tere O'Connor Dance and a Center for Advanced Studies Professor at the University of Illinois. He has created over 40 works for his company and many commissions, including for the Lyon Opera Ballet and Mikhail Baryshnikov.

He received a 2013 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, among numerous other grants and awards, and has won three BESSIES. He was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2014. An articulate and provocative educator, he has taught at festivals and universities around the globe. He's currently researching his new work Rivulets to premiere Dec 2021 in NYC. Welcome Tere.

Lucy Guerin is a Melbourne based choreographer and the Artistic Director of Lucy Guerin Inc. In 2002 she formed Lucy Guerin Inc to support the creation of new works and to extend the discourse and practice of dance.



Born in Adelaide, Australia, Lucy danced with choreographers Russell Dumas and Nanette Hassall. She moved to New York in 1989 for seven years where she performed with Tere O'Connor Dance, the Bebe Miller Company and Sara Rudner, and began to produce her first choreographic works. She has toured her work extensively in Europe, Asia and North America and to most of Australia's major festivals and venues.

And with and without further ado, over to you Lucy.

Lucy Guerin - 02:06

Hi, everyone. I am a white woman, I'm sitting in front of a white background, and I'm wearing a grey and white top. One splash of colour, some red lipstick.

Tere O'Connor - 02:21

Hello, everyone. Thanks for coming today. I would start today by acknowledging that I am presently situated on the lands of the Peoria, Kaskaskia, Piankashaw, Wea, Miami, Mascoutin, Odawa, Mesquaki, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, and Chickasaw Nations. These lands were the traditional territory of these Native Nations prior to their forced removal; these lands continue to carry the stories, dances and images of these Nations and their struggles for survival and identity.

I am a cis male, white, 62 years old, I have brown hair and brown glasses, and a green shirt and a white and black scarf that Lucy gave me and a red wall behind me. And I think that's everything. And I'm happy to be here.

Lucy Guerin - 03:26

So, some of you might know that Tere and I have known each other for a very long time, I think since about 1989 when I moved to New York for a while. And I met Tere, I think I did a workshop with you, Tere, is that right?

Yeah, and then was very, very excited when he invited me to be part of one of his works, that I think we was then going to tour to Bogota, and Columbus, and...

Tere O'Connor - 04:08

...Rome and The Hague.

Lucy Guerin - 04:11

Yeah, which was, you know, one of the first dance experiences that I had, when I moved to New York, which was just quite pivotal for me, and we've had a connection ever since. We've had quite a quite an ongoing discourse. Since then we speak probably, I don't know, once every month or every couple of months. And Tere has been a real mentor for me, but also just someone that I can really talk to about the kind of, I guess, more abstract and nerdy aspects of dance that, yeah, not everybody wants to engage in. That's been really very, very supportive for me over all this time. Thank you Tere.

Tere O'Connor - 04:58

Absolutely, yeah, you too.

I mean, we've talked to each other for so many years about dance, even about the same things over and over again! But there's a shared kind of questioning and positing of questions inside of the talk that isn't necessarily at the front of it. But as we do this talking over the years, it starts to bring up new ways of thinking and it's very fertile for me to talk with you.

And also, there's very few people that are interested in talking the way that we talk about it. So, I think both of us are people who problematize ideas inside of our work. So, it's not just visual information. It's coming from various thought processes and seeing how do these get applied in a kind of non-representational way representational way to choreography? And how do we do that? I think that's something at the centre of both of our work.

Lucy Guerin - 05:57

Yes. And I actually, it's interesting, you say about the problematizing, because I was thinking just before about how, often, my works begin as a kind of, I don't know, a spark or a sort of an idea that's very...that excites me, I might even be able to imagine it on the stage or think of a kind of methodology or way of developing it that I'm very excited by. And I do find that probably about halfway through the process, I realise there's a set of...it's like a puzzle...there's a set of problems, to overcome in a way. Not in a negative way, but just that things are starting to bite up against each other and there's a certain solving of the work to make it clear and to make it what it should be. Do you, do you?

Tere O'Connor - 07:02

Yes. But I think...and I think not but...*and* I think the questions just constantly re-double. And I think we both try to find containers for that, without...there's very much pressure from the world and from critical voices and from audience to make the thing move towards cogency. And the experience of making it in no way invites you to do that. In the room, it's just subdividing all the time into new questions.

So if you're kind of open to that, you can create a complex nexus of inclusion for those ideas. And it's not...it's not lost on me that that's a kind of way of looking at the world that I think we might have both adopted from choreographing. We're processing the world, by the way we do. I mean, not...I don't mean to say that in any kind of, like, arrogant way, but that's just what we're doing. That's the action we're engaged in.

And then there's a result from that, which is the dance.

Lucy Guerin - 07:58

So do you, you know, do you feel that you have to, at a certain point, shut that off or make choices? Because I know that that you have a way of developing work that is not necessarily about only having



one thing that's dominant on the stage or in the performance, that it's a kind of field or a texture or a way of being able to move through a work and look at different aspects of it as an audience member. I'm wondering, you know, even in terms of aesthetics or, you know, movements choices, do you reach a point where you have to kind of say, "Okay, this is what I'm working with?"

Tere O'Connor - 08:47

Yeah, I guess so. But it can be pretty ample.

And I think less, less than less. I feel like my work right now is going to a place where I want to be able to include everything. And whatever that ends up looking at may not look necessarily like something that really works in any way. But it's what it is. Like, you know, a person that has a weird eye or something, you just accept them, they just have that. You don't have to be like, "Can you fix your eye before we talk?"

You know, that's the thing...this idea of that I think a lot of artists are in a room trying to fix their work. And I'm trying to allow my work, which is easier to do when there's not a narrative arrival point. It doesn't necessarily serve an end that everyone can agree upon.

So, it's not always a happy thing. And I think we have both enjoyed validation in our lives, which I think is really a privilege, you know, to say like, "Okay, keep going", even if that can be not like a huge, you know, hollywood endeavour. But inside of that, I've been able to just allow myself to let go and not have to answer the questions of liking it or not, but really be engaged in a choreographic kind of thought process and see, what is that? What can that do? You know?

Lucy Guerin - 10:12

Yeah. So, yeah, I feel like there's a constant kind of conversation going on inside me when I'm making a work because I...you know, there's many different things that interest me. And, you know, some of my



works are quite formal, and I do still enjoy choreographing in the kind of traditional sense of making movement and learning it together with the dancers.

But then there's all these other layers of collaboration with the dancers, where we're coming up with the material together. And, sometime...and all these different layers are working towards I don't know what. And so, yeah, I think it's, for me, it's just a constant kind of discourse and dialogue in my own mind about one thing suggests its opposite all the time. So, yeah.

Tere O'Connor - 11:20

Yeah, I mean, they're all...they all exist in your work. You know, there's such refined things, next to something super craggy. And then kind of rhythms of indecision, fall into rhythms of certitude and they go back and forth like that. And so, I think both of us are looking to, I mean, I'm definitely looking to kind of move outside of mainstream or common denominator, rhythmic places that are imprisoned, imprisonments, and come up with another super textural rhythmic world that is expressive of consciousness more than the history of music, or something. Some kind of variation.

Lucy Guerin - 12:02

Yes. Oh, sorry. That's something I think I really learned from you actually, was that, you...you almost are kind of choreographing the motions of thought and the way that thought works, because what is not a narrative, you know, we don't think in stories we don't think in a linear way as a progression.

You know, one thing jumps in, and then there's nothing and then there's, you know, something really clear, and then there's something really amorphous and blurry. And that's, that's always been very interesting to me about your work is that it is more about consciousness and about our process of...not about it, but that's the form that it takes. Yeah, which is really interesting.

But, you know, and our conversations over the years...I think we started out, we would go and have martinis, and we would talk about three subjects. And the subjects were cooking, boyfriends, and

choreography. And the three things would be very kind of embedded in and mixed up together and sort of, somehow, connected and jumping from one one thing to another. Which was, I think, you know, one of the most enjoyable times in my life. Those times having a martini with you.

Tere O'Connor - 13:37

And at the same time, a real enactment of what we're doing. Like braiding disparate things together, you know, and seeing how they ricochet with each other or separate from each other, you know, so.

And I feel, I also feel...one of the things about my work that I think is important, although I don't...it's not a matter of display or pronouncement, because I don't I'm not a kind of artist that feels like, I have something to say that the masses don't know. I don't feel that way. But there is a queering of logic going on, you know, like, there's, there's a kind of bringing into evidence, the kind of fact of surface in a dance and subterranean kind of forces. And those two ideas of like, how one exerts pressure on the other is very much a queer stance, and the kind of code shifting that goes on all the time.

And I think that's what started out in my work. And then by doing that, I drew out an understanding that that is really inherent in the project of choreography, no matter what. It's just moving along, and going through these different places from visibility to felt places, and that's...those two things kind of like, have evolved for me. But it does start from there, I think, from the queer aspect of it.

Lucy Guerin - 14:59

Yeah, I guess for me it's this kind of conversation between really desiring clarity and desiring kind of form and visibility. But at the same time, I think I'm drawn to dance because I find that's a form that actually can express what's not visible and what's..what is less formed and less decided. And I guess it always has been, in a way, the conversation between that, the known and the unknown. That's what I've used in my choreography to, to develop the work. Yeah.

Tere O'Connor - 15:48



I think one of the things about your work that is so, kind of, a constant duality that I think really is an intense, dramatic aspect of it is this very rarefied kind of commitment to artifice. And at the same time, something that's really raw happening underneath. And almost the raw thing can only exist, because of this, kind of, you know, transcendent other form that's coming out of you.

I mean, what comes out of your body is so, so special, and it's like...it feels like there's an urgency to it. It's not a decorative form. It's coming from an internal place. So, I think that's really something about your work that's a Trojan horse. It gets delivered in from this place of very crystalline magnificence, but it has a bark, and it has multiplicity, and it has difficulty all over it.

So that always is informing it, I think.

Lucy Guerin - 16:49

Oh, that's amazing, Tere. I wish I could say that about my work.

Tere O'Connor -16:54

Well it's being recorded so just use it!

Lucy Guerin - 17:00

Yeah. Yeah.

Tere O'Connor – 17:02

So, like, we were gonna maybe go to where we are now, what are you thinking about right now? And maybe compared to how it used to be when we started, you know?

Lucy Guerin - 17:12

Well, I guess, you know, I think making work in New York City is very different to making work in Melbourne. And, you know, I think when I was in New York, I was just...I just started choreographing, I was just really following this thread, that all my peers, you know, were very familiar with and



understood and all the references, all the sort of choreographic references, were a kind of vocabulary that everyone knew, or a lot of people knew, and that we could talk about very easily.

And I think, probably since moving back to Melbourne, which is over 20 years ago, now, and when I initially moved back, I had to rethink that a little bit, that I had initiated my making process in a different place. And yeah, to try to reconnect with Australia and how to articulate my work here. Which I found actually really useful in, in a lot of ways.

But I guess, it's funny, I've sort of been through many, many stages of working with text or working with digital mediums and visual artists and, but I almost feel like I'm coming back to something that I was exploring in New York in a very different way. But I guess...and sometimes it's having to split into two works. Sorry, I'm rambling but I'm going to get there!

Sometimes easier to make two works at the same time, because I...because of the fact that I've, you know, always been trying to...I have this sort of oppositional thing going on in my work. At the moment, I'm making a work with a composer Matthias Schack-Arnott, which involves about 50 pendulums. It's like an installation. And it's, it's a collaboration with six dancers, and it's very much...it's about it's kind of very simple. The structures are very clear. It's a grid, it's dances, it's sort of pedestrian movement and rhythm and just sort of building up a texture. And that, you know, that's, that feels really, really good. And kind of something I know and I understand.

And then I'm making at the same time another work called *Flux Job*, which is basically just about the, the complication of, of being a human and a container of so many things. And how, how we deal with just being alone as one person as an identity. And how that, I guess, shifts when we come into contact with other elements, particularly other people. So, it's kind of great to have those two different places to put ideas.

Tere O'Connor – 20:34



It's kind of edge I mean, I've seen a little touch of that, the pendulum piece, and that you keep talking about it, like, you know, a simple thing. But I've even the choices you make for them to just move around with them, they're very, very much...they're coming from you. They don't look like a kind of rote situation of, like, just modern dance, the way the body would flow, they always come from this place that is another consideration. So it's just really interesting to see that worked out in a simpler, kind of, arena somehow. Although it's pretty magnificent, simple arena, it's going to be 50 pendulums. But I still see that, that happening there, you know.

And right now I'm working on this, the next thing I'm going to work on is a piece, hopefully with 16 people, because I've come to the idiotic conclusion that my work is not interesting to me, unless it has a lot of people in it. Now I don't want to do small works. I've done two, I did a work called *Bleed* with 12 people in a work called *The Goodbye Studies* with 11 people. And those are really places where I could start to get this, these ideas of complexity and convolution, and, and tangent and disparity, all really come up and start to have a presence that wasn't an apologetic in any way. And I still want to go further.

So, the next thing I'm going to be trying to do, and you know, as we say you set out on a journey, and then it goes somewhere else. But I want to do a work that has no unison in it, and has no repeated movement, which is probably impossible. But that's the idea. To pose a question like: what, beyond visibility, what is going on in a dance? And what is the connective tissue in a dance that I could use?

My hope is in my...the way I'm going to work on it is that it's qualitative place, a tonal qualitative place that comes a lot more from internal sensation, and is probably much more open to being battered by what's going on Earth right now. Again, it won't be literal, or named those things, but I think it can include a kind of very difficult physicality in it, and like difficult, even trafficking of people that could be dangerous. Of course, with their agreement.



I've done some I during *Goodbye Studies*, we did one place where everyone had movement that was fixed, but they could go anywhere. It's the kind of idea I did with my piece *Rammed Earth* that I was calling 'liquid space'. That the piece is the same, but it fits into any area, all these different areas that it can go. And that's what I want to play with again.

So, that's what I'm looking at doing. I don't know if I'm going to be able to do it. But my...since the time we were younger, I might have thought of my work expanding and in a way it has expanded. But it's also reduced itself back into being just about bodies; that the bodies are the fabric of what I'm using to make things. And so it's interesting, and a lot of it has to do with that, you know, I can't dance that much anymore, although I still get at it somehow. But using the specificity of the people before me. And that kind of diversity, which I think a long time ago...I mean, we...the way you danced in my work definitely affected me. There's all these micro-messages coming from the dancers that are, you know, changing what you're doing, although it's not necessarily stated. But it's a slow osmosis back-and-forth. And I want to really let that kind of live out so there's not a signature kind of movement in it. There's just a bunch of crazy stuff in an interactive state somehow. I hope it's not awful!

Lucy Guerin - 24:27

No, we always hope that, don't we?

But yeah, I think the....always, always no matter how you're choreographing, whether it's just, you know, making movement for dancers or, you know, working with them to come up with the movement, they are just so influential and such huge collaborators. When I think back on my dances, and I think, I don't know how many there are but I've been making them for over 20 years. And I can almost categorise them by who the dancers were and, and that really strongly pushes the, you know, the direction of the works. And they get me interested in things and I get them interested in things. You know?

Yeah, as we've often said before, we just absolutely love and adore and are so grateful to those people.

Tere O'Connor – 25:28

Oh yeah, yeah that's whole part of it that's, you know, the people. And I think the way that both of us work, it is pretty tight and familial. It's like, it's not like, it's just a business thing. It's also personal somehow. And that's a part of the fabric of the work. Absolutely.

And then there's...there are people that you have, that have come into your area that are... they're working on something, also that they're ready to go far. And so you say would you...I want to do this like, like the works, where people danced and sing and acted like crazy, like with Becky and other people, like doing amazing things about like a mother who lost her child. I mean, in one day, they're like, okay, we'll do that. And they were amazing at it, you know? So, these amazing people that, like you say, I want to go here, and they're like, yes, that's been a lot for me.

But I do feel like even in my work, even though it has raised great questions for me, which I think has kind of made my work remain in a kind of area that's not necessarily like, [trumpet sound] and announced to the world, but I'm okay with that. And I feel like all of the questions I asked, and sometimes I asked, like, really difficult things of like my grad students here and stuff. And I'm like, I have to ask those questions of myself, too.

And so I feel like I would like to go further into what I've been thinking about, and really let it go in this next piece, you know. So I mean, right now, especially with the COVID stuff, and all the kind of the changes that are in the, you know, the inequities in the world that are going on, I just really feel like, what does it matter? I should just let this thing rip, you know. Although I have to get money for it and that's gonna be another question. But just in terms of like, aesthetic land, it's exciting to feel just unleashed, because what does it matter anymore? Really?

Lucy Guerin - 27:26

Yeah, yeah, I agree.

And one thing I've been thinking about with this new work *Flux Job* is trying to make this kind of shift from I guess, what we received...like, it's very much from an audience perspective, in a way and it's sort of the kind of information, the kind of sensations or emotions that you...and thoughts that come to you through watching dance, and to kind of lead into a kind of a shift into language. I'm coming back again...which I'm kind of annoyed at myself...but I want to go back into exploring aspects of language in this work, and to make that that shift into linguistic thought and the way that language communicates, so sort of, you know, familiarly and succinctly to us.

And so, yeah, so it's, it's going to have a play, embedded in the middle of it to sort of shifted into...but yeah, could be a disaster, as we know, but I'm pretty excited.

Tere O'Connor – 28:45

No, but you've always had, or often had, like a kind of tableau vivant, or something that moves towards narration. And sometimes it's gone all the way to completion is become a play or things like *Tense Dave* that you did with Gideon, that *really* went there. And then other things that retreat from there. So, I mean, it's kind of obvious and again, like the absolute luxury of being able to work for a long time, which I have done, to understand that you're gonna just go back and forth to these places.

You know, you're gonna go, no language, some language; yes, no. And that, each time you get to one side of that you feel like a kind of adamancy like: "this is it". And then you're like, "except, no it's not". And then it's just a constant chasing around a dust ball in your house, you know. It's just, it's...but that's what I think is the thing to value about it and to try to kind of keep alive. And not this kind of basic cry of choreography, this like: "I am unending. Don't make a sculpture out of me. I'm constantly changing", you know, it's kind of a hippie, you know, like pothead like "man, that's gone. Now that's gone, now...".

But it is like that. And that's what I want to keep in the work somehow,



Lucy Guerin - 30:02

I think that that's what's enabled you to keep going into being so you know, in touch with, you know, what's happening, Tere, is just that, you know, that constant desire to keep unearthing and keep moving. Not, you know, not reach a final place of completion. And I think that's, that's really important if you want to keep working as an artist that you really have to have that constant sense of moving.

And I think, when I was younger, I really hoped that I would one day, you know, *know* what I was doing, we all have that hope. And that I would be able to work walk into the studio with a sort of confidence and clarity that I knew where this was going and I was in control and you know, all of that. And I thought that that would happen, but that just doesn't happen. Or, not the way that that you want.

Tere O'Connor – 31:02

But you try to affect it the first day, though. When you go in to be like, you want to look pretty sassy and smart. But they don't know. You know.

Lucy Guerin - 31:09

No, you have to, you have to...yeah.

Tere O'Connor – 31:13

Yeah, no, I mean, that's the one thing I learned a long time ago about, you know, especially, especially here. I mean, you're not going to make a lot of money at this. So, the currency of it, for me, is the ability to just really go down your own road, because it does not matter. I've gotten to the pinnacle that you can get in New York City, I mean in the United States. And there's no money involved in that, you know? It's just, it's great to be validated, I will not, I will not ever let go of how much support I've had in that way.



But if you were in Hollywood, and you made one good film about trees, they'd be like: "let's get that tree guy". Yeah, you can't go all over the place. It's the qualities of capitalism, dude, of capitalism and commerce are not in my work. They're not a part of my work. They...I mean, of course, they are a part of my life. But they're not they don't rule what I do, nor do they are they any part of the system that finalises my work.

And so, it's like a kind of weird secular heaven to not have to answer those questions. For me, you know,

Lucy Guerin - 32:24

So, Tere, do you want to just say a bit about how you do, you know...about your, you know, your way of surviving, as a choreographer? And, you know, we were in that...we were in the East Village together, and teaching and waiting tables, and doing all those jobs that dancers do and going to class, rehearsing in the afternoons. And so how's that...so we've gone to different companies...

Tere O'Connor – 32:54

I mean, teaching, which kind of used to be a moneymaker kind of, I mean, I taught ballet at NYU for nine years, that was my thing. And along with that came free studios and stuff and a lot of other great stuff. And they'd let me tour and come back and keep my job. So that was pretty great.

But then teaching, kind of like, not composition, but teaching classes about facilitating other people's dance making, became really enmeshed with my making, it's not separate from it anymore. Because this kind of idea of like, what...what's next? What's going on? What's hidden here? Again, like I say, I ask difficult questions of people in the class for them to adopt for themselves not to answer to me, but. And I have to redouble my efforts to do that myself.

So, that that's what I do now. And I have this job at the University of Illinois, which is an amazing job with astounding peers. And I am only here, I only teach for one semester. And the other part of my



year is basically considered like a research fellowship, where I work with my company. So, that's like seven months or eight months of that. It's a gift, really a gift. It's amazing, my appointment.

And so, and I again, like right now I have a great, I have a really great cohort of grad students that you get in a class and then you go around, and four people say a whole bunch of really different things. And you're like, you're dealing with, you know, like diversity now, and all these kind of new ideas, and, you know, particularly gender nonconformity, which I think is probably one of the most amazing ideas that's really come forward.

And I think it's...choreography is a really great holder for that. Just the idea to come to a juncture of idea making and not coming to it from this or that, but just all. And this, this idea of there not being there's a spectrum, but it's not even that because the endpoints aren't even that specific. It's a kind of beautiful, difficult erasure of what's going on. So being with younger people is amazing for me. It's...we have an old expression from where I grew up called, 'your face is cracked', when someone like calls you on something, it's like a face crack. And I get my face cracked all the time, and it's pretty helpful.

So, and you, you moved into the system, amazingly, you know? I mean, you made such a great transition to being able to do this very difficult thing of creating a business and not losing yourself. It's impressive what you've done, you know, I mean, it's very impressive.

Lucy Guerin - 35:43

Yeah, I don't know if I'd call it a business, but...

Tere O'Connor – 35:47

No, well, well a functional organisation,

Lucy Guerin - 35:49

It's definitely an operation and I have been so very very fortunate to have had a lot of support and, and over a long period of time to be able to build something up. And when I think back, I think there was a certain point...because I think, especially as a woman or as a girl involved in dance, you're spending a lot of time trying to make yourself into an ideal or emulate others or try trying to sort of change yourself. Which is a really useful part of training. But, but not so much time spent understanding what you actually as an individual have to offer.

But I think there was a point when I realised that, that what people, you know, what was interesting to an audience was actually not me trying to be like somebody else...it's really obvious but it was a realization...but actually to just to sort of, you know, find my own my own approach. And it was such a relief, and I've just...and that's been something that's really sustained me, I think. And in a way allowed me to continue to be.

Tere O'Connor – 37:15

Also, I think you've, you've shared your trip with the community. Yeah, they're really important. You know, it's not...it's not like a kind of trick. It's really how you are as a person. I mean, there's no, there's no kind of like separation or arrogance, or anything. That's really natural for you.

And it's...and I mean, when you were at the old studio it was such a beautiful atmosphere, beautiful place and beautiful atmosphere. And I know, that's just expanded now in the new place, you know. So, I think that is just something...you having an organisation or a business, whatever, but you did it so naturally. And it's so much about, like, actualizing something, not just gaining something, you know?

Lucy Guerin - 37:59

Yeah, well I think too, like, what you're saying about the face cracking, and I also don't, you know, I'm not so comfortable being in a very hierarchical making situation, I'm not creative in that world. So, having, having others, other choreographers, other dancers, and it's sort of an expanded community I think has really helped me. And, yeah, and I have been...I think it's also something that, you know, from



our time in New York, because I felt like we had such a great, you know...like that we pretty much made ourselves but it was so sustaining to me to have that and that's very important. Yeah.

Tere O'Connor – 38:44

I was thinking now like the new the new city is a diaspora. A dance diaspora is the new city. There's not going to be a central place anymore.

We just have gone through the very unfortunate sad moment of losing Kathleen Hermesdorf. And people have gone crazy reaching out. She's a...she was a teacher and choreographer who really changed a lot of people's lives as a teacher and I can't believe how present this community was like on Facebook and email and stuff, like people just...it was like, a bunch of flowers rose up. And I just like, I know, that's there. And, you know, one has to kind of activate it with things other than sad moments, but I think that we can realise that it's just, it doesn't exist in a city anymore, because it's Kardashians exist in cities, not humans.

So it, you know, art is just on the run, more or less, you know, and that's where you find it somehow, for the time being. But it was really amazing. And I mean, that, you know, like, I've told my students, "please punch me right in the face if I talk about the early 80s too much". But you know, it was a really amazing, amazing time. And you know, the source of what we're doing now.

Lucy Guerin - 40:01

Absolutely. And it's just interesting to think back, you know, because it was sort of this post, kind of post-Judson time. And I remember us thinking, "Oh, you know, must have been so great to have been able to get cheap lofts to rehearse in", and you know, "all those great things that that generation had". But now I look at us and realise how privileged we were.

Tere O'Connor – 40:26

Oh yeah, we still had a cheap space then.

Lucy Guerin - 40:29

Well, we could work in Manhattan, we had a very centralised community. And yeah, and it is getting harder and harder. It's more and more difficult.

Tere O'Connor – 40:41

Oh, New York right now. I mean, I don't want to get down in New York. But I mean, you walk down the street, and you're like, "Who are these people", you know? And I live in the West Village, and it's just completely changed. Like, it has the look of what it used to be but inside there's just money, you know, it's money everywhere. And it is really, really kind of discouraging to be around that as a goal.

I mean, in some of the things that they built the most heinous looking expressions of glass and metal that you've ever seen. They look like really cheap salt pepper shakers from a museum gift shop. They're just horrible, the aesthetic is so horrible now. So anyway, but I, you know...other people are a little bit more open about it be like, "well, things change" and I'm like they do, that's true. And you may or may not like how it changes, you know?

Lucy Guerin - 41:35

So yeah, that is so true. Yeah.

Tere O'Connor – 41:38

Melbourne's getting like really changed, isn't it now? Like there's a lot of building?

Lucy Guerin - 41:44

Yeah. A lot of new buildings going up? Yeah.



But, um, and, you know, it is it is difficult to find rehearsal space, but I think it's not impossible. And that, you know, probably, it's kind of, I guess, a place where dancers do come, and they can do class, and they can find rehearsal space.

But yeah, there's definitely a sense of the independent community now becoming a much more cohesive body and finding ways to have more agency and more influence on what's happening. Which is really, really I think, probably, partly just because there's been a lot of funding cuts, but then also, because of what's been happening because of COVID. Which, yeah. So that's really exciting.

Tere O'Connor – 42:44

And also, like, I think newly empowered populations, you know, like, with Black Lives Matter here, and black dance stories and stuff that are going on, is a real change, and it's not coming from the top. It's coming from, you know, the participants. And it's really creating an altered state, you know? I mean, that I think, is kind of happening in the city.

But even people like, you know, I was just talking to a young person who is an African American artist has been quite successful. I won't I don't think I should say their name, because they haven't given me permission. But they are like, “well, so what's next?” How am I going to...? Well, you know, a lot of the dancers can't really afford to stay in a company like that so they've gone away now. And he's got to redouble his efforts to couple you know, the logistics of it in the United States are very difficult. I mean, I would imagine for young people in Melbourne, they are as well. It's not like you just say, “I'm starting a company”, you know?

Lucy Guerin - 43:40

No, no.

Tere O'Connor – 43:42



It's amazing to see all these young people activated so much, and like, making their shit happen, you know, it's pretty astounding. And I feel like, I can just, kind of, ease back a little bit. It's not...I'm not coming up with a brand new radical idea. And they are, you know.

So it's interesting to just, like, be I'm older, I'm older now. You know, it's just...we've talked about that. It's like, kind of natural thing. Some people well, most people except for some presidents in some places don't want to, like, come up with...admit that. But yeah, I mean, it's interesting to just, like, keep up with the moment you're actually in it, and just like face it, you know?

Lucy Guerin - 44:29

Yeah, absolutely.

Yeah, I think definitely, for me, there's a sense of I do feel like there's, there's a place for older artists within the ecology of art making, but I think your role does slightly change and it should be more about enabling and supporting as much as, you know, mentoring and inspiring.

Tere O'Connor – 45:00

I also feel like, you know, saying what I said still, like, avant garde, which is a kind of like a 20th century idea that I really reject, but newness kind of comes for the individual relative to his or her kind of, their own revelation, you know, or the ability for them to go forward in their kind of, you know, realm somehow.

And so that can happen at any age, you can still push into that, you know?

Lucy Guerin - 45:33

Yeah, that's it. I think it happens...it kind of happens in at certain times, you know, it's not, it's not like a gradual progression. But, you know, it feels it's a bit like what you used to say to me about ageing,



Tere, that it doesn't...it's not gradual. It's like one day you look in the mirror and you're older, and then you stay that way for quite a while and then you look again.

Tere O'Connor – 46:00

Yeah. And you're like I have to admit that or not?

Lucy Guerin - 46:02

Uhoh, Tom's here!

Tere O'Connor – 46:04

Oh, welcome back.

Tom Pritchard - 46:06

Hello. Thanks. thanks both for that last little while. I think I'll just jump to some questions now. We've got a few in the Q&A. This first one's from William McBride, and it's quite chunky, So, if you want to open the Q&A and have a little read of it, Lucy and Tere.

Lucy Guerin - 46:24

You know them Tere. You know, Alice Will Caroline.

Tere O'Connor – 46:28

What did you say?

Lucy Guerin - 46:29

You know Alice, Will and Caroline.

Tere O'Connor – 46:31

Yeah, that's Will.

Lucy Guerin - 46:33

It's that Will, yeah. Just so you know.

Tere O'Connor – 46:36

He spells it differently...

Tom Pritchard - 46:40

Alright, so I'll read the question out from Will.

“I saw a clip from Fran Leibowitz pop up on Instagram last week from the *Public Speaking*, where she spoke of the massive loss of the AIDS pandemic, not only of artists, but of informed engaged audiences for, for example, the New York City Ballet, where everyone knew everything about the work being created. She said something like, ‘audience connoisseurship is as important to culture as artists are’. I was really struck by this, and felt it strongly working in a small and peripheral art form that is always on shaky ground that is both obscure, and also has a small clutch of devotees.

“So what do you think...what do you think about audiences and audience connoisseurship for your work now, both local and when on tour? And what do you think about cultivating that or meeting an audience where they are, etc?”

It feels like particularly the conversation, Tere, you're having around the dance diaspora and it not being, kind of, city-centric. And you know, everything we've gone through this year with digital delivery, etc, etc, it feels a really pertinent question.

Tere O'Connor – 47:54



I mean, the way I look at this is it's come up in different ways, at different times where you we can be looked at as elitist, or as complete losers. And it just really, there's different populations that would see it in that way.

And I sometimes think I lived in Italy for a while, I don't mean to drop the name, but I did. And we would go to these places where I went to Umbria once where these women did this kind of like a drum-based embroidery and I thought like they just did it in that one little town, I thought, are they elitist? Or is there something about that that is just specific? Does it willfully leave out big populations? And is that okay or not? And so these questions are constantly reshuffling themselves and stay alive in the work.

I don't look at my work and say, "is this okay for audiences?" I really...no matter what's going on in the world, the way I make work, not the way I decide to make work but the way I make work, comes from the inside. Beginning a piece is the way that I begin to think about the moment we're in.

So I don't think this will be good for the people or I don't work really out of a good / bad paradigm. I think like, "I made this as a result of a convergence of things that are going on right now". I hope it's something that you can find some porousness in and come into, but I'm not making explanatory statements. Sometimes I think obscurity looks like it is willfully kind of secretive, and cryptic. And instead, I just think it's an engagement of otherness that a lot of people do not care for.

I think Fran Liebowitz is talking about something that's true, but the audience wasn't only filled with connoisseurs, there was a whole realm of other people that would go to see those things. And again, it was like a white class in the days she's talking about, so that's part of it. But the connoisseurship is something that's going away. But it's also being replaced by something more ample, I think. So.

Lucy, what do you...I don't know what you think about that?

Lucy Guerin - 50:20

Yeah, um...I think, you know...I do think about this, how there's certain dance that exists in different cities. And say in Melbourne, for example, that, because it's been going on, like, because it's been going on for years, it's in a way, it's training an audience, or it's building an audience to look at that work and to see, um, to see that work.

And then sometimes, when you take that work to another city, it just doesn't, you know, it doesn't resonate. They don't have the capacity to make sense of it.

And, and I guess, for me, what I hope is that, as usual, I want to operate on both levels where I'm not kind of making something for an audience. And I am taking my next step and going, you know, developing my work the way that I see, but I also hope that there's some...some other plane, that if I take my work to France or Indonesia there is there is something that that people can connect with and engage with.

So, I suppose I do think about the audience. Yeah, in conversation with, you know, me needing to sometimes ignore them during the making process. Yeah, it's a bit of a, it's a bit of a conversation.

Tere O'Connor – 52:13

I think, also, the one thing that we're talking about dance. So, dance itself is not something that a lot of people practice looking at. Pop music is. So if you come in, and you're a little bit different, it's easier for people to just take that change in. Dance is something that people, many people start out with a kind of resistance to or kind of a shadow over, for many reasons. And it's the dance itself that's the issue. They're not free to let it go in a million places.

So, you know, in Europe, a lot of people are, but I think the responses to my work in Europe have been some of the most kind of contained and difficult sometimes.

52:55

Yeah. No, I...

Tere O'Connor – 52:57

You want to take one more question?

Tom Pritchard - 53:01

Yeah, I think let's jump to Ricky's question. And I wonder if there's a way to kind of open this up, because I feel like this might be directed more towards Tere. So, Ricky asked: "Would you say that, in general, your work has a queer aesthetic? What elements can you point out that identify with this aesthetic and which ones do not?"

And I wonder if there's a broader conversation about how you consider aesthetic within your works? And you know, what points towards that. So, maybe, to you, Tere, first.

Tere O'Connor – 53:30

I think my work is very queer. And because it comes from like...the basic creation of it was coming out of...I was in an old school closet situation, like a small town, rural, you'd be murdered if you were a fag, that kind of place.

And it creates a certain type of human being. And so you live on the surface for normativity. And inside for a kind of other place, and an alternative place. And a place that is difficult initially, but then becomes like a whole other world, you think like, well, this has a potential I could offer this as a value system in my work. So that's where the queerness lives in my work.

I think some of the gender kind of...I've been working with androgyny, since I started my one of my first pieces was called *Boy Boy Giant Baby* and it was myself and another woman as a man and I gave birth to a child in it and it's just been something that I don't identify really as. I didn't have names for this,



but I, I definitely feel like a Mom with a beard. I don't necessarily feel like a big tough guy or anything. So, all of that is all over the work.

But mostly, it's like having a kind of marginalised, and I don't say a good or bad thing about that, but a marginalised point of view that sheds a different kind of light on the kind of behaviour that capitulates to normativity.

And so in definitely, the rhythm in my work is a lot about that. The kind of sometimes the persona, the characters that will come down towards the audience and almost engage and then run away. There's like enactments of it that are almost literal inside of the abstraction. So, it's all sewn in there. But it doesn't come out and state that. I have a kind of allergy to looking like artists who thinks they're announcing something for other people. I don't...I've never learned anything about a politic from an artist that I kind of didn't know already. So that stance is unimportant to me.

It's more about let the work become infused with queerness and let it become something.

Lucy Guerin - 55:44

Yeah. Yeah, in terms of that, that sort of speaking about gender within dance, I think, for me, from very early on, I just had a really natural dislike actually of those very strong gender roles. Like those romantic male / female duets, and that always the story is about, you know...and it wasn't anything to do with gender, really, but just with the sort of, lack of complication or lack of, you know, exploration of different subject matter. And the sort of obviousness of those sort of love relationships.

And so I think, you know, I, I haven't ever really worked a lot with gendered roles in my work. Generally people are constantly shifting, they might, you know, they might at one point be a texture, or they may become a woman or a man, or they may become part of a story, but then it also may just be embodying, I don't know, a physical principle. So, the idea of fluidity, not only in gender but through embodiment has been something that's always been there.

Tere O'Connor – 57:09

I feel like my work starts from a kind of place, which isn't necessarily queer, but it starts from a place of fem. And it's sometimes the masculinity that gets turned up and comes down. But everyone kind of starts from a kind of a pretty fé place ever. All the men and the women are very much basically psychologically on tiptoe. Like little children girls. And it goes through these kind of psychologies. But that's not necessarily about the people, it's more about the state. I think.

Lucy Guerin - 57:42

The state? as in?

Tere O'Connor – 57:44

The atmosphere, the atmosphere, the psychology of it, you know? That's not so representational in that way yet. But it does kind of get enacted there also, so.

Lucy Guerin - 57:57

Yeah.

Tom Pritchard - 57:59

Wonderful. Okay. Well, look, thanks, Tere and Lucy, for this last hour. It's been a really fascinating conversation. Thank you for your generosity and insights.

Lucy Guerin - 58:11

Thanks. Thanks, Tere.

Tere O'Connor – 58:15

Oh Lucy, it's good to talk to you again. We'll talk soon, I'm sure. And thank you, attendees. Thanks for coming.

END