



**ABOUT
TRANSMISSION
– artistic positions
on improvisation
and composition
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Artistic positions on improvisation and composition methods

Interview 1: Charlie Morrissey, 11.12.2020

Introduction – Judith Hummel, 16.3.2022

The content of the research is the question of how to transmit improvisation and composition methods in the field of somatic dance and movement. The initial question for the research has been: how can a contemporary archive of tools and tasks evolve by making artistic positions accessible? Starting point was the book „Are we here yet?“ edited by Jeroen Peeters about choreographer Meg Stuart. One chapter presents exercises that Stuart uses together with her dancers for her creations. Back then I was preparing a workshop for young adults, looking for scores to inspire me. Reading the book I realized how important the transparency of working modes is in order to create new individual ways of transmission with a clear reference to the respective author. From my point of view, open sources like this offer dancers, choreographers, teachers and other people interested crucial impulses for their work.

I met Charlie Morrissey a few times when I took part in his workshops during Tanzwerkstatt Europa in Munich. His playful and intuitive way of offering and transmitting improvisation and composition, including a lot the use of touch and images, was every time a very joyful and moving experience for me. It is/was my wish to find words, a written language for the tasks and scores Morrissey uses in his teachings, dealing with sensation and awareness. It is my future wish to expand this first interview and collect a series of artist interviews that offer insights into their improvisation practice.

Judith Hummel (JH)

How did you get into movement today, Charlie?

Charlie Morrissey (CM)

I started with my daily online practice called Open Practice. It grew out of my own morning practice of coming into a studio and moving each day. I always used to move in silence, and then I added music more recently. It's a little bit of a leftover from working with Steve Paxton, and his practice of moving to the Goldberg Variations. I started to put on Bach's cello suites, played by different cellists, and to dance and move with that as a support and as a way to have company in the studio- they offered something to negotiate with and navigate through - a more or less fixed point in my practice - something to be in relation to. Numerous cellists are playing the suites, and so I would have different experiences of the music on different days. After a while it occurred to me that it would be really great to open something up to others. I didn't want to teach, but more to open this hour of space for other people. And I wanted it to be open to all kinds of people who might have practices which were very different to mine or to people who didn't yet have a movement practice but might want to develop one. I recently moved to a place in the countryside where, along with my partner, I've started to make things happen in an old chapel just around the corner from where I live. The building has a big room which was the Sunday school, and I have been using it as a dance studio. Myself and my partner have been curated dance related events here and I just wanted to make something regular available to people around an idea of practice, whatever that could be. A daily practice - something that could be returned to and deepened and learned through. I was influenced by what's been going on around the Black Lives Matter movement and conversations around gender, and my sense that there is so much suspicion at play between people right now. It brings my attention all the more to the fact that it's easy to make assumptions about things without even knowing that you're making them. So for instance, in the somatic world of dancing which I move in and out of, dancing in silence or to particular kinds of ambient sound, and notions of a particular kind of listening to "the body" are notions that mean very different things to different people - they are, perhaps, largely associated with a white projection of what a body is. And I thought, probably clumsily, that even to do something with music - all kinds of music classical/pop/rock/metal/rap/grime etc. might challenge my assumptions and approaches to listening to my body and to the kind of space that music could open up. I was interested in the idea of different musics living side by side in a space. And when there's cheesy

pop music, or metal, or rap music, whether somatic practices can survive alongside them - or what might be revealed - or open up, or become possible/impossible. So I decided to start this morning practice, opening it up every Monday to Friday when I was around, and then asking other people to open up the space when I wasn't around. I would make a playlist and people would come and we would move. It's been a really great thing with people coming from all over to move in this shared space. Quite apart from anything, it has been a massive education in music for me. Then lockdown happened, and I was very resistant to doing anything online at first. But eventually it felt like this morning practice could be something to offer out. It wouldn't be about me leading something, and it wouldn't be about looking at the screen the whole time either; it would just be about having a shared something, in this case, the time slot and the sound, to be in relation to.

JH

Just that I got it right: the practice started by people being in space, you preparing a playlist, and only when the lockdown happened it changed into an online format?

CM

Yes. And as I said, I was kind of resistant to that at first. But actually, the online version of it has been running now for about 13 weeks and is hugely popular, with people joining from their bedrooms, kitchens, dance studios, parks and so on. And it has been a really interesting thing for lots of different reasons for me. Like I said, usually I'm working in silence when I'm teaching and I like to work with live musicians. Music often feels like it can be something like a crutch to lean on and it just takes over, it is just so seductive, but this was an opportunity to embrace that and just go for the ride on, alongside and in relation to the music. When I proposed this online version I was thinking that this practice was really about dancing. For me there was something quite practical about it like just getting a sweat on - getting my heart rate going personally for myself. I wanted to get moving, to feel that my body was getting a bit of a workout, and to monitor inside of that. It has been a joyous thing to share this practice with people from all over the world online. It made me realise that it is possible to feel a sense of the others through the screen and to share something through moving together. What happens afterwards is that I've started doing this thing with my partner. After all these years, we've begun to do some moving together. Just a very simple practice where we close our eyes, make contact, and sometimes I give information into that but most of the time, we just follow our noses and

move together. And it's always in silence. It's really about sensation and listening to the other person and yourself, into yourself through the other person.

JH

This is already leading to the next question of how do you teach improvisation methods? And what are important questions or issues that you face in your work? What is it that you want to transmit when teaching and do you have certain structures of how you create, lead, build classes? Maybe you don't even know how you do it, but when thinking of it, you might recognize structures. So basically the question is how do you teach improvisation methods?

CM

Well, it's funny because I don't really think of myself teaching improvisation methods at all. I don't say that I teach improvisation. But I probably do. I'm interested in movement, I'm interested in why we move, I'm interested in how we engage with the world. I am interested in the senses and perception, how we see and how we feel through the senses - the tools of perceiving, but also in our choices and habits and all of these things. I've always just been interested in what it is to be a physical being in the world and how I'm in interaction with it and in noticing what I'm noticing about what's going on. My teaching purposes something about the question: how do I know that I'm here? How do I know that I have a body? How do I feel my body? What do I feel the world with? What do I see the world with? And then, how do I compose or do one thing after another - how do movements come together? How am I composing my moment to moment actions/experiences? How am I composing myself to function in the world? A lot of these things have come through a journey: a journey of initially working with improvisation. My first improvisation teacher was Katie Duck – a major influence on me - a teacher who sticks out and then Steve Paxton, who I began working with in the early 90's. And his work which is so much about asking "What is a body?" "What forces are acting upon it?" "What happens when I move?"

CM

How can I make experiments with my body? How do I know what I think I know? Things like that, questions which are asked and taken in different directions by Lisa Nelson who I also worked with and who is asking about perception and how we experience, and how we compose ourselves. And then: how do we make dance? Which of course is a huge

question. I've always made work right from when I first started, when I left college and even before that, I made work, I just made stuff. I didn't really know why or how, I just made it. I've always made things. I guess am a maker. I made things out of cardboard or wood or movement or anything. So making is a bit like asking questions of materials of me: how do I begin to ask a question about the body? That's maybe what I'm interested in. That's where I always go back to. How do I begin to ask anything about what's going on right now? And that constantly obsesses me and interests me. Interests me as soon as I get into a room with people. That we could all start to ask that question together. That's what I'm working with. How do I do it? I think I find ways, examples of experiences. Things that seem generative. That's what I do. In a way I try to find examples of experiences that we could try together, that one person can try with another person. What happens when I touch you/when you touch me? What's happening now? What do I feel? Do I feel myself? Do I feel you? Are you an extension of me? Am I an extension of you? Where do I feel from? Where do I feel to? Are we in touch when we are apart? How far do my senses reach and so on. My way of teaching is very much influenced by Steve Paxton and what I thought I observed him doing. He seemed to ask a question in his own body with real rigour, and then to articulate both the question and the response. He'd ask: what's happening in my body now and he would talk about it and transmit it very beautifully - with a searching and precise use of language. In a sense, that is what I am trying to do. I'm just asking questions with my body as I go along. And I'm also asking from my observations of others. I'm seeing things happen, seeing things happen in people's bodies and then I'm articulating what I see and feeding that into the mix. So that's the first thing I do: I ask questions about what's going on here? And then what's going on if I add this idea, this information or question to something? It's a series of experiments. Some of the experiments I repeat over and over again because they seem to do something. Where people appear to have an experience of their own. It seems informative, or valuable, or to open up something else, to open up other interesting questions.

JH

What would be a question that you ask yourself when entering the space? What would be a question that you ask yourself? Where do you start from?

CM

Where I start teaching from?

JH

Well, also for yourself. I mean, you go into a space – what is happening first, what is the routine? ... Is it maybe not structured? So there is one thing and then the mind might switch to something else?

CM

I guess my question is still always what's going on now - in my body in this space, and then I'll bring my attention or it will bring me, to something in particular, like what is my sensation of lightness and weight in this moment in my body? What happens if I attempt to unlock, let's say, all of the spaces between my joints? What happens if I transfer my sensation to my skin, to this membrane? I think about the things that I think I know about the skin or the things that I think I know about the space between the joints and then there's a conversation between my own suggestion to myself and what happens in my body - the feedback. I think it's a process of asking questions and noticing something happen in my body and then following what happens to the next thing and on to the next thing - taking detours and following distractions as new information appears, accumulating and shedding as I go along.

CM

I struggle with this word improvisation. Steve Paxton – I'm paraphrasing his words here – when he said something to the effect of, *I'm too busy attending to all of the current information to improvise*. Sometimes the word improvisation implies making things up, as if it's a constant process of invention, but when I think of improvisation, it's not about making things up for me, it's just noticing more and more of what's present and attending to that in movement, and then practicing that attention and becoming more aware of the choices I have as I move. It's an unfolding thing. It keeps developing. I can't think about my skin, having researched some aspects of what the skin is doing, without a whole load of things happening, and the sensation of it and even just the attempt, the attention - to anything, shifts my experience. My whole experience. Because then maybe I become aware of something about the room because my skin is an intermediary between me and the room and to space in general and then it goes on and on. So often, for me, it's more about honing something down and being specific without cancelling out the wider context within which it's all happening. I'm just going to look at the relationship between my little finger and my little toe. And that's it. And I'm going to wonder what sort of relationships there are between my little finger, my little toe. There may be anatomical relationships

and there may be spatial relationships and sensation relationships and nervous system relationships - relationships which appear in my imagination and so on. That's what I'm going to explore. So there's something about those kinds of things which feel like they are physical explorations. And composition is always implied in all these things because I'm composing myself to have the experience or to enter into the experience. Maybe where I start to really work with composition it tends to be so influenced by the scores that I was introduced to in the work of Lisa Nelson. The Tuning Scores.

JH

This would be the next question, if you could describe one or three scores that you like to share from your practice?

CM

My own scores have different functions. There are experiments in experience or in the application of embodied imagination as an individual or collective act. One of the scores that I have been developing just recently because of COVID - the not being able to be in touch with each other aspect, has been a score which is (let's try it now): Two people face each other with an intention to include each other in their own experience. The idea as we face each other, is that one of my arms is going to touch the other of my arms - we will both do this same action - mirrored. I have to see your arm and you mine. One arm will eventually find its way to the other arm and touch it (I've not done this on a screen actually yet so this is the first time now with you). Neither of us will lead. And neither of us will follow - or perhaps we'll both lead and both follow. The process is one of investing in a felt relationship between your body and mine. We might ask the question: How is it possible for me to be inside of your body and for you to be inside of mine so that your arm becomes my arm, and my arm becomes your arm. The movements and the details of your moving arm are the details of my moving arm so that my arm is moving your arm. Your arm is moving my arm. We are inhabiting each other. We scrutinise the details, the sensations of the arm - the movement. And because it's the arm it's also the body. There's an investment in the details, in how the arm is supported, how it experiences the motion. It's reaching to touch and there comes a point where it's really about touch. My arm, your arm. It's so strange because your hand is touching my hairier arm and your spotty clothing arm (we're doing it now). So this becomes a phenomena - this sense of your arm being mine and vice versa - it's somewhat supernatural - I love these oddities, and they ask questions about the nature of perception as a subjective phenomena - personal to each

of us - what we see and how we enact reality - invest in our own version of what is happening right now, which feels particularly prescient in this time where notions of truth and reality are under so much scrutiny.

This exercise that we just tried works with the idea and sensation of another body and my own moving or being moved through space, and I might then go on to explore ways in which we can then move together in more complex ways with this initial experience as a lived example - an experience stored in your body. We move, each one not copying or mirroring the other but being inside of this notion of both searching for the sensation of the other inside of your own movement, searching for your sensation of yourself and the other. These things interest me because, in a sense, they are impossible tasks. So what do you do to do an impossible thing? What's interesting is the how - how you fulfil such questions? Where do you go in your imagination; in your body? And where does an idea or image feel feasible, where doesn't it? What happens in our bodies, in space, in our attention? What does attention look like in our bodies?

JH

Just this short experiment changes immediately something. It's a different area that's touched. I have this word of focus and concentration in it. Not in a rigid way, but suddenly being so strongly in the sensation of the arm, that changes extremely. The sensation of being. Being in that moment of asking that question.

CM

That's one and in a way, there are hundreds, thousands, billions of things like that that we could probably come up with. All of them are questions for me. I'm asking, well, why is that interesting? What is going on here? I think maybe the reason I keep going with this is actually the feeling that there is something going on just beyond each experiment, that's of even more interest. And something like that just exponentially grows into lots of other possible ways of asking further questions from any particular departure point. There are a lot of things I do on the spot in my teaching. That's one of the things and maybe, again, you know, to me a value is to say: We're here now, doing this. I'm not coming in to deliver a load of stuff that I have completely fixed beforehand. That's not what I do as a teacher. I think I'm here as a researcher, because everybody in front of me is doing that anyway, or that's why I'm inviting them to do. But there are certain things that I do bring as they are. There are certain exercises, I almost teach the same every time. Because they feel like, that's the thing, but it's a form that holds the possibility of having a particular

experience. The ability to share some version of an experience seems like a crucial thing to me. Lisa Nelson's work is really interesting like that. And Steve Paxton's work - and many others too, of course.

JH

Do you want to give an example of that? What you use?

CM

Yes, one of my favorite things, something from Lisa Nelson, which is a thing that I will probably always do. And I kind of bastardise it sometimes as well (laughing). I mean that I play with different versions of it; There is a score called "blind unison trio". And the idea of this score is that firstly that it's a trio: Three people together go into a space, we propose this space as a kind of playing space, an image space let's say, that we're going to look at, some people are going to observe and some people are going to do, and the three people will go into the space, and they will find a unison starting point that, negotiated without words, just by moving around to find a place where they can start. And that can happen in different ways. Usually at the beginning, if you've never done it before, it would be something like: we move around, we look around, we negotiate and we find a thing - a movement, or a physical position that we have arrived at together or can all agree on without any verbal discussion. And then here we are in some version of a unison place with each other. And then one of us will say begin, when we think that all three have arrived at something together, which is a cue to close our eyes. And there's always room for a certain kind of negotiation here, though, there are these rules. The point is, I guess, partly that everybody understands those rules differently. Yes, there must be space for that also, because maybe, yeah, that's important to notice that different people perceive things differently and can also therefore maybe test the thing in different ways and perhaps reveal something new about it. So; three people find a moment of unison, somebody says "close" and then the three people close their eyes, and they attempt to move in unison with each other for a number of minutes, I think six minutes is a common frame - it could be shorter or it could be longer - but six minutes is a timeframe that pops into my head as a reasonable amount of time to test out this idea. Three people do it and the point is that people are observing and people are doing. So three people do and then they come out and three more people go in and do their version of it. So we're kind of revealing to each other things about ourselves, about our tendencies, about our imaginations, about the form of the thing itself, the possibility and impossibility of unison

trio and the kinds of unison it reveals that you would never otherwise dream of. It's a great score. Something of interest happens in it every time. It reveals a lot about what we do, you know, when we get up there basically what we look for, how we look, how we search for things when we can't see, what strategies we use to know or imagine what the others are doing, how we give each other messages, what we're listening to, what affects our movement.

JH

I think I remember well this task. Exactly these kind of things are so important. I think to keep something alive, it's good to have it somewhere and to transport it and to make it transparent, where do things come from? And that's something I would love to do by collecting tasks and scores of making them accessible for other people who join later, who come later, who transport it further on, this is what I would find really valuable. And probably the understanding of a written language on something that you try in space is for each one different again. The understanding that you already mentioned, how do you transport something in your words? And what do people hear? What comes across?

CM

Yeah, I guess it's different for each person that would describe these scores. You describe it differently. I know, because I work with lots of people who have worked with these materials. And of course, that's what's interesting about it. One of the things that interests me about Lisa Nelson's work as well is that; it's something about the of space inside of the thing - the proposition. There is something very specific which is proposed, but there is room to question or expand or test that proposition - it's just a space for research to happen. There's always this question about what the rules are, because somehow the responsibility is always with the people who are doing it. It's not somebody telling me: No, you mustn't do that. Don't do that. Or it's fine, go ahead. But how do you discover what there is to discover about this thing? And that's very interesting for me. So anyway, there's lots of different people who describe these scores in different ways, I think.

JH

Some more things that I wrote down...I was wondering if you have central key figures in your biography. Who has been influencing you? Or where do you come from? You already mentioned Lisa Nelson, Steve Paxton and Katie Duck. Yesterday, I read your

last writing that you made on the kitchen table, featured on your website. This is very beautiful. It already answered a lot of questions, actually. Do you want to add other key figures in your experience or in your practice?

CM

There are many people actually who have influenced me. Steve Paxton lives on one shoulder, and Lisa Nelson lives on the other shoulder, that's just the way it is for me. I met them at crucial moments in my life, and they both... yeah, I admire them both so much. And they also drive me crazy in different ways. I mean, that's what happens when you get to know people. But, there's something about what they have followed and their particular-ness and rigorousness, that has stayed with me and is always with me in a really brilliant way. But many other people as well, like Kirstie Simson, and K.J. Holmes, and Karen Nelson, and Scott Smith, who I worked a lot with – really important people in my development. And Becky Edmunds, who is sort of from a very different world or performance making who I worked with a lot. All of these I admire and respect so much because I think all of them in different ways brought me back to something like, to ask what is the work that we are doing? you know. Don't bullshit. What is it you are doing? What are you doing? Why are you doing it? What do you mean, when you say that? These questions, you know, that are really important to ask and to re-ask and to re-ask and re-ask and re-ask over and over and over again. And I think what I admire about the people is that they continue to be rigorous in their question asking. Rosemary Butcher – I mean, hugely so you know. It's people who really have been brave and specific and particular and follow their interests absolutely. All of those people have been very important to me. It is an interesting question about being a teacher. I've always taught you know.

JH

Yeah, it's what I also read yesterday that you started very early, right from the beginning of teaching or transmitting. And it's I think, the other thing of your artistic work. How does your artistic work influence, inspire your teaching? And the other way around? Is there some thoughts how it inspires both sides, or influences? Maybe it's both together?

CM

It's just a huge question. Because I'm learning about these things as I go along. You know, I feel like I'm right at the beginning. That's the truth. I guess my teaching has often

been a laboratory for learning about movement. So it's a place where I work with a lot of experiments that interest me. And of course, those things then, in making performance and creative work are there, they are present. I can instantly grasp hold of them. They are things that we can start to do as a way to begin to make something. So they are often absolutely right in there, in the process of making. And then of course, the discoveries that I make in the making of things goes straight back into my teaching. It's also really complex, because teaching in a class situation is not the same as a performance situation a lot of the time. Although, you know, there have been places where I have tried to explore something about that. For instance, if teaching gets to be so much about telling me what to do or what the conclusion is, then it's losing its point and that's the same in performance. It questions me. So, one can help the other but there are no fast answers to it. In my teaching, I want people to understand something, to get something, to go somewhere and to have something to work with that opens something up for them. When I am performing, I want to be able to understand something through the doing of it and for something to be experienced in the watching. Sometimes that's problematic because actually, how do you just leave the space for the thing to happen rather than answering all the questions in the thing you make?

CM

So if I ask these questions, it always throws me into a kind of: "Oh, my God, what am I doing?" kind of thing – which is fine. I really do feel like I'm at the beginning. I sometimes feel like I wasted my time doing too many things. Not wasted it but I did a lot of different things. Maybe because I have an appetite to try so many different things and because I got presented with different opportunities. And I've got a lot of energy. And so I've done so many projects over the years. But I think that I often followed a thing which was great, the thing happened, and that was really good. But I think I also missed opportunities to really take the work that I'm doing – in these classes for instance – further and to explore more. As I get older, I feel something starts to clear a bit. And I start to begin to figure something out. So maybe when I am like 102 and I make something I'll be like: „Oh, yeah, that's it - that's what I meant to say...“. I really have been a late starter in that way actually.

CM

I know I've done a lot of things, but I do feel like a more focussed phase is starting at this time.... I feel like when I look at a lot of people that I know, I see their work what they did early in their 20's and stuff. It's like: wow, you really nailed it - you really went through

some really interesting things there. I don't see that so much in my own work. I mean, there are moments of things, but I think they're always too many ambitions to fulfill, too many different things going on.

JH

The word of focus comes to me when you speak, it's maybe that today you see more clearly where you want to focus on?

CM

Yeah, maybe that's just me. Things are becoming more clear to me. There is something about Wainsgate (Wainsgate Dances at Wainsgate Chapel in Yorkshire) for instance, starting this up and realising that for me, there's a whole thing just about how do you create context for things to happen? And that's the one thing about teaching, teaching is that context for something to happen in. Performance – the context for something to happen in.

JH

Wainsgate really is that place where you moved together with your partner, and you build up that space for things to happen, right?

CM

Yeah, I mean it is a space where lots of things happen. There's a lot of workshops that happen here. It's also a space where I can keep returning to my own practice with some sense of continuity. It's a place where in a way I have been able to find the things that I want to (showing the place) create context for performance and for you know different things to happen...kids are in here dancing.

JH

Also you have the café as a side thing?

CM

Yeah, the café it's not been open for a while, but the café is really my partner, Rob's thing. But what has happened over the last five years, we sort of realised that we we're doing this thing together. So it's been a thing, you know.

JH

And Rob is also now integrating into the world of dance?.

CM

Rob has to come into the world of dance through me, I guess. We've done a few things together now. When I first met him, he was studying architecture. He used to be a nurse, studying architecture. And then we did some projects together where he created space, architectural space and in one of the things he performed as well.

CM

Yes, so Rob and I do this together. We are building something which is about...I mean, it's just as crucial as anything else. It's like, we're asking a question about, how can this work happen? And in what kind of an environment can it happen? What's that about? and this again, has been influenced very much by Steve and Lisa from where they live in America in Vermont. When I first went there, I saw their place. And it's like a farm, lots of different people have lived there. People like Simone Forti, Deborah Hay and all these kind of amazing American Dance people. And I thought: wow, this is incredible, to be in the country and to travel and do work in other places. It's not about being isolated, it's about being in connection to, and so that's what this has been about in some ways, how can I create, how can we create a space in which the kind of work we're interested in can happen in a place where it's not about setting up an organisation. It is not in a kind of space where people are judging you based on all sorts of different kinds of values, it's just a space where it's like: „Come – do your work – go again“. No questions asked, well, I mean questions asked, but not like, those kinds of questions. Not about: does this have value? No, we know that this has value so: here you are, come and do it. And what would that mean, you know? And that's the same for the performance. We're not going to dumb down the performance in the community, we're going to make the community really welcome to see these things, and to invite the community to be a central part of it. So that's what it's been about. And the café is a thing that Rob started up, and then I went in and helped him do it. And again, it becomes another part of this community building, we are just being in the community, talking to people. If you are not a kind of remote thing that seems like it's really exclusive, then maybe people feel welcomed into it. And the morning practice, going back to that, is also very much about that. It's about: this is a space where you can come whether you're a dancer or not.

JH

Is that welcomed by the people?

CM

Yeah, I mean, you know of course, there are some people who come, some people who don't, and we're very much aware of and wanting to engage with that. The community here is very divided in many ways, and also very cohesive...you know, the world is divided. Clearly, you know, this is big. And this has been exploding over the last few years very particularly in the West. And that's another thing about Wainsgate, when we first came in, I felt like I was just standing, spending all this time shouting at all the things I couldn't do anything about. So what can I do something about? I'm gonna stop shouting, well, I'm not gonna stop shouting, but I'm going to turn my attention to something I can do something about. So yes, it's divided here. There's like a kind of middle class liberal version of people. There's also a liberal working class, but there's also the working class people who have lived around here for many generations, you can feel that they have been side stepped in favour of all these lovely people who read the guardian and own their own homes and have moved from other places - Like me and Rob. So there is a divided thing, and a lot of people are probably still not coming to Wainsgate to engage with contemporary dance! But some of them are - more and more in fact through different activities. One of the things as well that we have been trying to figure out is what if I get involved in other things, like Rob organizes this Wainsgate bazaar, which is a craft fair with food and music, and there are other things we do like heritage events, and running a bar. The building is open and people can come. People love the building. It's a combined effort of lots of different things that might still also bring people to some experience of dance. But some people from the local area are definitely coming and getting involved in dance and others aren't. One thing that really helps is doing the things with the local school, because then all the kids come, and they are just everybody's kids, and then their parents come and watch what the kids have done. And it brings them into the building. So, you know, I'm not trying to sort of teach the world to dance, but I love what dancing does. All of those things are just questions. How do people come to things?

JH

The children is something that you lead or that you propose?

CM

Yeah I have done, and continue to do. And so it's also been great that some of the other dance artists, there's a woman called Katie Hewison for instance, she's a young dancer choreographer who recently graduated a couple of years ago, I guess and she started to do something called "Impro-play", which she's developing with the children. Basically she wanted to do this work, and so she came here and worked with the school. And that was really great. When I first came here, I went to the school and I said: I'm living here, do you want to do some dance? And they were like: yes! we do want to do some dancing. And then they all came and I worked with them for a day and then we made a performance and they did that performance at the end of the day with the parents which has happened a few times now.

JH

Nice.

CM

I mean, there is a great teacher there at the school. Sally, she's really into dance and she was brilliant. It's been years since I've worked with children. She basically kept them focussed while I brought some different ways of moving together.

CM

Maybe clarify something about the fact, it's a thing, you know, all of these things are informing something...

JH

There are three more things I had written down and one is what has been moments of teaching or of sharing that stick to you: memories of people, of dances, how important is resonance in your work? Also very big questions, I know. Maybe it's not to think everything, just something that came to you maybe from the morning classes just now. Something that makes you warm and also makes you continue in your research with other people.

CM

There are many different things sometimes coming in my direction, you know, sometimes from teachers. I mean, teaching is an endless source of sort of heartbreakingly beautiful

moments, I mean, it just is, you know. I was just in Leeds teaching at a school, a Conservatoire, the Northern School of Contemporary Dance. And we did this exercise we just did, and then that developed into into this drawing (like how I draw or attract your mass with my mass) thing and then down to the floor and then into this very focussed duet. I mean, to see young people go into this place of such total immersion and attention and focus towards each other, to themselves, to see the attention in their bodies and the investment, commitment, the rigour, the absolute focus, you know, the generosity of that, and the vulnerability of that, and the intimacy of that. Just really really very beautiful. To observe and to be there for a year and to be involved in. Yeah. So that's the thing. For me.

CM

Working with the kids in here, I'm was doing this thing, which is basically a sort of mass version of blind unison trio with all of them doing it, and all of their parents are there. You know, there are these kids, all kinds of kids. And there's one kid there who is like, just totally all over the place during the day. And then he is there in this thing now where they all try to imagine what all the others are doing. And he's there, he's got his eyes closed, and he's just like totally immersed, it's just a thing of great wonder, I mean, Christ!, what a brilliant thing. A lot of the time people say what kind of dancing do you do? And they're just imagining all sorts of things about contemporary dance, or ballet, or whatever it is, or street dance, or anything. And all of these things, of course, which are brilliant in their own way, as well. But sometimes it's just ???, you know, It's just to see somebody having an opportunity to just be in themselves and have that moment away from where all of the other stuff that's happening in life is not... all of the comparing, all of the difficulty... the judgement. So for me the moments like that, they keep me going. It's just a brilliant thing to be able to do. And in my own experiences as well, you know, things like, being in the studio with Steve Paxton, him talking about, I can't exactly remember what it was, it was a long time ago in 1992 or something. I'm just exploring something which has to do with molecules. And this is something that stayed with me forever, and is in my work I've developed. I had an experience where I was that boy, standing there, feeling my body, I'm going through this whole process of considering, bringing attention to the idea of my body as a mass of molecules - of stuff, but it felt like I was just dissolving into..., just literally, and there's a moment of fear in it. Of like: Oh my God, you know, my body is dissolving. But it also just brought to me this thing about we are able to initiate these experiences ourselves, I can do that. And somehow to me, it just seemed like it's just

such a brilliant and amazing thing, that I could do that. But also, of course, it's telling me something about well if I can do that, then what am I doing all of the time to my experience? You know, what am I telling myself? What am I convincing myself of? What is actually going on out there, and in here? That's actually just to deal with me. What I'm projecting into, what I am imagining into, what my history is telling me about it, you know, it seems to me that this is the material of dance, you know. That we basically are exploring and manipulating and engaging with and inventing and constructing and composing our own experience and collaborating, interacting with it. When you have these kind of really full-on experiences, it feels like: Oh, this is really real and it is actually telling us something about the nature of being in the world. Then dance and this kind of research seems to have a value because it's somehow getting into questioning that and it's reminding us of the fact that: no, everything isn't just as it appears, it's us making it like that in different ways. I find that really moving and challenging and frightening and it opens up a lot of possibility.

JH

I think a lot of things are already answered in different ways. And your last words felt very crucial. Maybe you remember from the Rosemary research I was asking about the motor, what you thought her motor was for creating. So this question of course, is going to you and I wrote down: what drives you for your work as an artist as well as a teacher in terms of movement? What is your motor, your engine, your motive for working? Like I said, you already said many things, but maybe there is something that you would like to add.

CM

Curiosity. I'm interested in what's happening to me. I'm interested in what's happening to other people. I want to know, to understand things about what's happening with, around me and with other people - how they see it, how we can engage with each other. I'm very interested in interaction. I like to make things. I've always liked to make things. Whatever - to be in the process of constructing things and seeing what gets made. I like to arrange things. I am trying to make sense of what's happening to me. And I think I'm trying to undo some things too - habitual ways of seeing and experiencing. And I also just love to be in a room with other people moving and thinking. Exploring things, feeling into things, sense making. And I think I have a fast motor, you know, maybe it's my metabolism, it's high, so I'm just always looking. And these things keep me busy.

JH

There is one last question: what situations are you facing in times of the pandemic? I didn't want to concentrate on the pandemic. But it feels wrong to not face it because it does change a lot with our lives at the moment. Combined with the question: what is hopes and concerns of yours? Is there certain values that the work with touch, with movement and improvisation gets in that times? I wish to focus on what possibilities actually is in there. Maybe future inspirations? Maybe just the hope that it ends?

CM

There are many things. There's all sorts of things...Oh, my God, what a thing... there's people dying. So there's that - the huge cost to some and the diversity of experience. But my experience, let's say, the personal experience of how it might have impacted on or affected or shifted things in my work and all my thinking around my work, or my inspirations is maybe quite particular. It has forced me to work in new ways. Contact for me is a very fast track to having certain kinds of experiences, to feeding myself through somebody else, to surviving or navigating the physical circumstance of what it means to move in another body and how it kind of challenges you, brings you into a kind of physicality very quickly and all kinds of experiences and questions are just inherent in it straight away. So all of that seems useful. So to take that away has been interesting in that it has made look for experiences of touch in other ways and to explore expanded notions of how I'm in touch with the world. You know, like this thing that we just did, for instance, it has been a really great discovery for me, because it points to a load of things I'm sort of interested in, just clarifies some of those things. Then the touch is full of questions again, so when I've been here working with Rob, some of those things have been clarified, it's like when we are touching, you know, it's like: Oh!

JH

Does it have to do that you don't take touch for granted?

CM

That's one of the things sure. But also that it starts to ask you, I mean, I've always been interested in how we're in touch anyway, through space in our perception, but this has been an opportunity to have to explore that and almost to prove it, you know? It intensifies that of course. That has been very interesting. It's like, what is my felt experience of you? Of the other in a physical sense - as a felt mass or physical body? That question has

been able to be asked more fully and considered more fully. And it leads me to other ways in which I can actually make experiments with that. Because in a sense all the things I'm doing, they are all experiments as if they were taking place in laboratories. Like this experiment I also do, which is the one about drawing, touching, and then drawing the mass of another body to mine. It's an experiment where I want the conditions to be quite specific. It's not just anything, it's not just pretending - both people need to invest in quite specific modes of attention and physicality and then to report back from that experience and to test its edges. What is that place where it feels as if you can go towards such an experience the most clearly, and where doesn't it happen? It's a research point. So what's going on there in order for it to happen? I'm just interested in those experiments. And so this has allowed a few other experiments to take place. And Lockdown has also very practically done something for me, where I've actually been able to practice every day, in a way that's less disturbed by traveling around all over the place. That's been interesting as well and made me wonder more about the extent to which I do so much traveling. That's a good interesting point, actually.

CM

I think that there are other things, too, I think there's something much wider around. I think, one of the things that's been quite interesting for me is maybe about contact improvisation, and problems I have with it.

CM

There's been a whole thing that's happened this year, which of course was happening for too a long time before with the Black Lives Matter movement with George Floyd really come into the fore. Of course it's been in many people's minds and lives for a long time. It was present definitely, quite present to me. But because of that happening and because of the reflection, in a sense in the space, of not constantly being in teaching situations, is bringing me to something more about the kinds of assumptions that I make in my teaching about, when I talk about "the body" or "us". There are all these mind/body notions of "just being available" or "inviting". All of these kinds of things, I just need to question these things. What do I mean by that? How available can we all feel depending on how restricted we feel in our lives? How much freedom do we feel that we're offered in a society? These kinds of questions. Those things are present to me as well - about the social/racial/gendered perspective from which I see, think, teach, make. And it's not necessarily just come out of the pandemic, but this whole year has brought more focus

to these questions of where I see things from and how that needs to be challenged in my work and in my holding of space.

JH

Maybe there has been more time for thinking about these issues.

CM

That's where these kinds of things of closing your eyes and doing things can be helpful and you can offer a space for people to experience these things. I mean, what I often do with younger people is that we just do something really full on, something where they're going to get to dance around, jump around, fly around, doing something that they know is dance, this is dance, we're dancing now. We're definitely dancing. We're dancing, we're dancing, we're dancing and then we'll do something that doesn't look like dancing, but because they've done the dancing they are okay to do a crazy weird thing. And I say to them more and more now about some little experiment I'm proposing for them to do: "We know that this is not possible to do. So what do you do to do an impossible thing? How do you do something impossible? What does your mind do? What does your body do? How is this thing to be done?" And one of the things I've found with a lot of young students is that I have to insist when I'm proposing something: "no, it's this. It's exactly this."

Transcribed by Judith Hummel