



CONVERSATION

VELOCITY + ON THE BOARDS + INVESTMENT IN THE CREATIVE PROCESS IN THE PNW

FEATURING TONYA LOCKYER | ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, VELOCITY DANCE CENTER + LANE CZAPLINSKI | ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, ON THE BOARDS

TONYA LOCKYER: So, what was your thought?

LANE CZAPLINSKI: Well, my thought was we talk about a range of subjects and emotions and histories and contexts whenever we're hanging out. And it's not just about, in the context of dance in the Northwest, I don't think we get together and just talk about dance in the Northwest, we talk about everything around what informs our organizations, why we're here, this community. And then we get into particular artists, or our likes or dislikes, our hopes our dreams and all that. So I thought, if we had an aimless conversation we might be able to pull some nuggets [from] two people who care a lot about this community. And maybe that's useful.

TL: Velocity and OtB [On the Boards] always have a relationship, whether it's direct or indirect. It's very clear that there is a copacetic relationship there that has really helped foster this region.

LC: I think it's pretty rare that two organizations in a significant arts town, like Seattle is, have a joint interest in the creation, development and presentation of new work by artists who live in a particular place. And between us, we represent a fair amount of resource, as opposed to nothing, and a history to go along with that. And I think a shared set of values around supporting artists taking chances when they're making something ---people in the contemporary sphere, who are actually trying to do something a little bit different, either for the community in which they live in, or different for themselves.

TL: I think our organizations also share a feeling that the boundaries of disciplines oscillate. Velocity doesn't have a narrow idea of what dance is, more of an expansive view. And OtB has a clearly expansive view. There's a lot of interdisciplinary investigation in our town that we are both fostering. Obviously at Velocity our mission is to support dance, and OtB of course has a broader mission, but what's shared is how we support artists and create a really safe place for unsafe ideas – a safe place for new processes, and for doing things that don't fit into clear, tidy categories. And I also think both you and I inherited programs that were already in place which were looking at artists' development over time. From emerging, to developing work, to creating a platform to then reach out regionally and nationally. Those were built into our organizations in a beautiful way. And they even cross –people can move between the two organizations as they develop their careers in a way that's really quite organic.

LC: I'll say that when I started at OtB almost 14 years ago there was a real uncertainty within our organization about what our future responsibility needed to be to local artists. And soon after that, after having a conversation with KT Neihoff [Velocity's co-founder] where she was describing renting the space at OtB, I forget the name of the project, I remember she had a really robust project budget, and I also had the sense in talking to her that people were going to show up.

TL: Was that "Speak to Me"?

LC: I think so, but I remember thinking, 'So you're just going to rent the facility, and all these people are going to

come see the show. It's going to be all this money to do it, and people are going to write about it, and it's going to be something that people are going to talk about.' I thought, 'How are we really improving on that by not having a relationship to this artist?' And so we started the Northwest series. And I would say about those multiple points of entry that you described, I agree, but I think something that has been, not just in our organizations but in the field, an increasing sense of what it is to invest in the creation process. So you know our commissioning budgets have gone up, the amount of money that we are able to put forward towards residencies – artists have hundreds of hours of time in our actual performance spaces making new shows. Oftentimes we are able to offer technical residencies. And, even Tonya, early on in our relationship, with you as an artist, you went through such a process where you worked in the space. You worked with a director/dramaturg, and I think that that kind of activity is also something that you've been able to add to what happens at Velocity, in terms of how you participate in projects.

TL: I think the fact that Velocity was founded by two artists, KT and Michelle [Miller], and KT was always asking herself, 'What do I need?' or 'What do my colleagues need?' was integral in developing those programs. I know that since I've been there, Velocity has increasingly become an incubator. And I think that—ditto—we give away thousands of hours of free studio time. It's really important to have these creative residencies. People need time and space to create work, and think. When I work with our Made In Seattle artists, we're committing to them for an entire year – or as long as it takes. I don't say to them that it has a deadline. It takes as long as it takes. And I always ask them about their goals. And those goals don't have to be a product, or production. The production will come. But often as an artist your goals are your questions. In the case of Ezra [Dickinson], who created a beautiful art and social justice project about his mother who has schizophrenia, it was: 'I want to find out why people like my mother fall through the cracks of our mental health care system.' And, 'I want people to feel my love for my mother.' So then we go on a different kind of pathway about how to do that. That's how he went from making a piece for the proscenium, to a piece that ended up taking audiences through the streets of downtown Seattle, where his mother had been homeless. So sometimes I have relationships with artists like that. Similar in some ways to a dramaturg, we also realized that a journalist might help him track down his mother. So I asked Christopher [Frizzelle, from *The Stranger*], if he'd be interested in working with him. I do think that there is a culture in Seattle that supports the ability for me as a curator to think that way, and know that that's not an anomaly.

[...]there's a baseline of support and a culture here that says, 'We'll give you space and time to do your work.'

Tonya Lockyer

Also, Zoe [Scofield], might be AIR [Artist in Residence] at Velocity for a year, then the next year she's in residence at OtB, and she's got this extended amount of time. So artists don't go, 'Oh my god, I have this one little moment.' They know that there's a baseline of support and a culture here that says, 'We'll give you space and time to do your work.' The fact that you can give these production residencies is fantastic, Velocity can only do that in the summer. We don't have a program that is not an incubator program. Take Velocity's *The Bridge Project*: you get a month of rehearsal time, you get auditions to meet a new cast of dancers, you get a fully produced performance. Whatever artists that we support, if they want to get to OtB, we share with them their desire to get to OtB. And we want to help them be ready for that moment too. And

sometimes, they've gotten to first develop an idea at OtB that is 20 minutes, and then they come back to Velocity and we help them develop it into an evening.

LC: You're hitting on something that first of all, we have an interesting feeder in terms of Cornish [College of the Arts] and UW being in Seattle. So these programs over decades have fed into who often stays after school and lives here and decides to make work. And then we have some émigrés who show up. KT was an émigré.

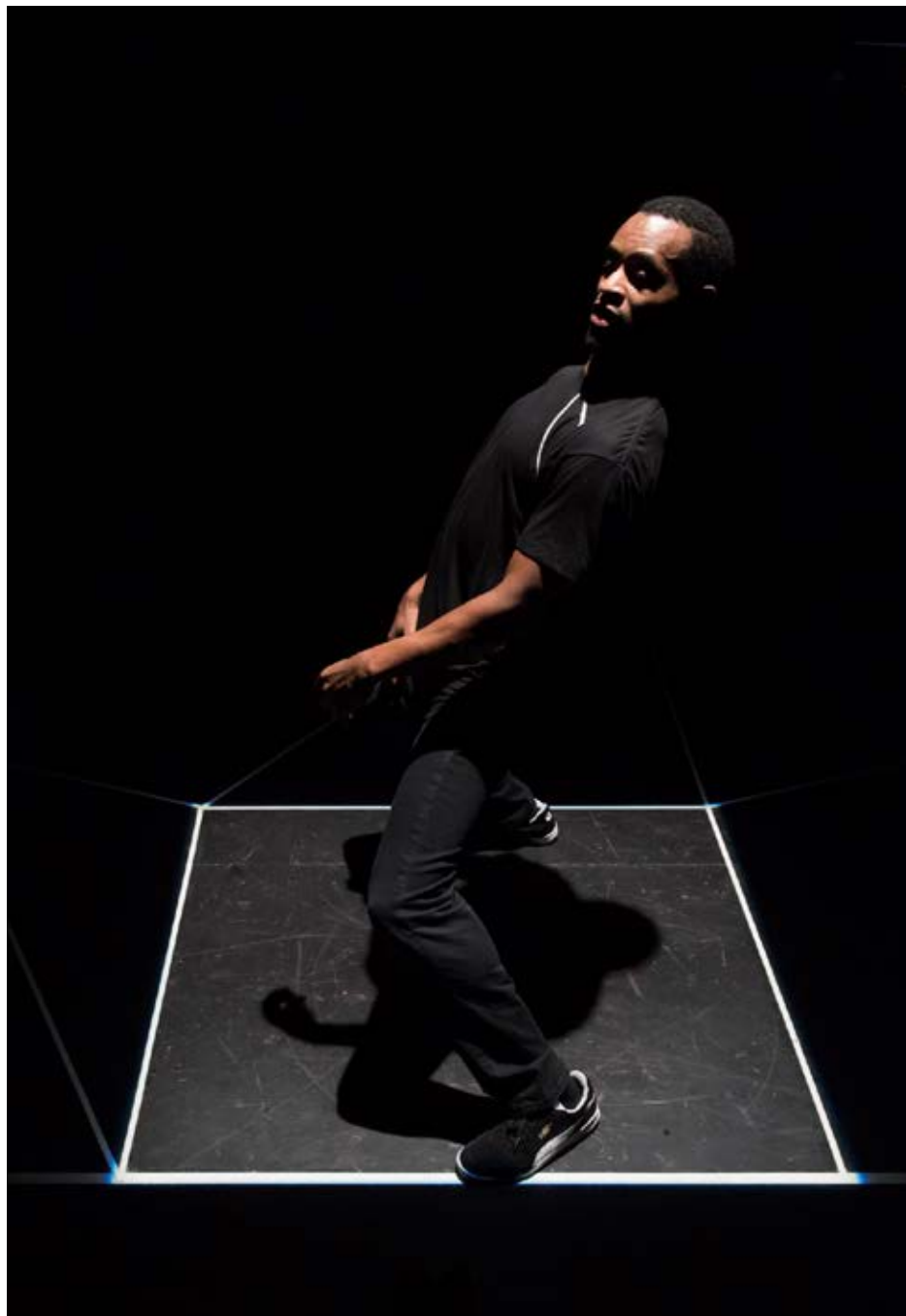
TL: And I have to say the number of émigrés have grown the past few years. It used to be that people got to the point where they left Seattle. What we're seeing is that our teachers at Velocity are saying there are three new people every week in their classes. We have become a place to go to, because people know it's a creative city.

LC: But you know I'm curious about this idea, let's say that an artist develops in their 20s. What allows them to transition into a space, or a place where they are able to keep practicing beyond that? How can they begin to actually take advantage of these more robust production mechanisms that we're talking about? You know in this program we have Kate Wallich, who you've been a champion of and a mentor of for a long time, who just did a project at OtB. During that run she turned 26, so maybe she's a precocious example for the booklet. I would say that's more of a rarity, or exception to the rule than how things typically work. When I moved to NY, I kind of naively thought that the cutting edge artists were in their mid to late 20's, and I learned that might be the case but the cutting edge part of their careers wasn't necessarily going to be the time that I worked with them at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. They were going to be a lot older by the time they got to BAM. And that's its own specific example but, what do you think helps somebody make that jump from being an artist who is trying to find themselves in their 20's, and commit to

a practice, and what allows them to continue to evolve and to become a dedicated dancer and choreographer beyond that?

TL: One thing it makes me think of is when I first started at Velocity. I knew that Zoe and Juniper [Shuey] were thinking of leaving Seattle. And they have a lot of support here. You were a huge champion of Zoe and Juniper since the beginning, and I've known Juniper since he was a student at Emerson College, so there's a long history there. So I said to them, 'While you're our AIR, help me create the kind of community that you want to be a part of.' And they really were collaborators in that.

What does it actually mean to have a sustainable career? I personally think it is in the kind of culture you have to create early on. A lot of the training for dancers, ironically, is not about agency. For example, the other day someone said to me, 'Oh you go to the studio?' And I said, 'Yes, I go alone, like writers and painters . . . I have a practice.' and I realized I surprised this person because so much of dancers training is still about taking direction from someone. But I think most people who have sustainable careers, have a sustainable practice. They become resourceful, they realize that presenters are collaborators, and they start to partner with people. And I think that needs to be part of their education process. Sometimes I've said to an artist, 'Here's free studio space, figure out what kind of class you want to teach, because you're going to need that practice to actually have a career.' And in the beginning, that helps them think through those kind of career choices, and honestly in most dance training, you don't get that guidance. Instead, you get: 'This is how you write a grant application.' You don't really get: 'You're your own CEO and this is how you create a sustainable life for yourself. It is absolutely inherent that you make



ARTIST AMY O'NEAL PHOTO DOUG GIFFORD

yourself part of a community.'

LC: I talked to Zoe and Juniper about the same thing a lot over the course of their careers. We've talked about a codification of your creativity, and that you need to be the ones to chart that. When you're not sure what to do next about that studio practice, feeling like you can get in there and do anything you want. As sort of a creative impulse. And I think that their work is increasingly showing that kind of range and flexibility.

TL: The other thing I would just say too is that when OtB stopped being a rental, KT and Michelle created a theater, Velocity, that would be for rentals. Because I do think that another way that you can help people is when

you see a gifted choreographer you can say, 'Here's an inexpensive way, let me help you produce a show at Velocity where you'll make money.' And that's honestly what offer, we help them through all those steps.

LC: Alright so let's go further into this – along those lines, because we're speaking in an industry situation. There is definitely a tension about what you just described. So, let's give young artists a space to make work. Then, there are all the attendant problems that go along with that. Consider their sophistication, their means, and their resources. These factors oftentimes leads to work that our peers, the public, and potential funders find unpalatable. I was on a panel recently where a producer said, 'There are two different schools amongst us. There are those of us who have a very systematic approach to production, and we have ways of working on this. And then there are others of you, it's a little bit like the wild

west. You create a sort of paradigm and people go in and they sort of try things, and do whatever.' I took real exception with that because one I'm like, 'Clearly you're talking about me, as a wild west person.' But I was also taking exception to the fact that this producer actually isn't trying to seed or germinate careers or creativity of these early 20-something or 30-something – or even beyond that -- artists that you and I actually try to champion in our organizations. People are starting to get more interested in, 'Well, what do artists need?' But it gets into this place where it's almost as though producers are trying to insure themselves. Like, is there some way we can ensure that their work will be successful? Or how do we protect ourselves against their failure?

TL: Well I would maintain that you don't. I would maintain that if you aren't willing to implicate yourself and your organization, and you aren't willing to sign up for what is most likely going to be a failure – because most things that are new, and most pieces of art are going to be a failure – then your organization can't support new experimental work.

My first thought is that I always question things that are presented as strict binaries. I would say that, yes, there are people that we get in there, and we're helping them explore through a process, and helping them get the resources to do that. But honestly there are people, like Molly Scott. She is an artist who is coming back after a 5-year hiatus, who has been doing work here for 30 years. Or take Pat Graney. I worked with Pat, you worked with Pat. And to me, that's a really different experience. These artists are at a different point in their careers. So I would say that that's really different than working with artists who are in their early 20's or 30's.

A good example is when we worked with Amy O'Neal. Amy has a very successful career. I think she's one of those people that came out in her 20s with a very clear vision of what she wanted to do. Then, she gets mid-career, and like so many artists mid-career goes, 'Wow, I need to re-question what I am doing. I just disbanded my company *Locust*, I'm not getting grants like I used to. . . ' And what is it to give her space to be emerging again? To re-question and be emerging, and think about what her next project is going to be? One of the results is *Opposing Forces*, which has NDP [National Dance Project] and NPN [National Performance Network] support, and it's still touring.

LC: Those are great examples. I think there's a lot of new performance and dance happening. But in our field-wide

conversation a lot of people would say, or I think there's a schism, and they wonder if it's . . . Well what's the NDP criteria, 'is it regionally significant versus nationally significant?'

TL: Dance is very regional by its nature. So I think you are at NDP asking yourself, where are the artists who are going to translate outside of their regions? Sam Miller once said to me, 'You put the dye in the system and see where it comes through.' Take someone like Cherdonna [Shinatra, performed by Jody Keuhner], you put the dye in the system and it's going to come through in really different kinds of spaces. It's going to be cabaret, it's going to be burlesque, it's going to be experimental performance, it's going to be LGBTQ focused performance centers. . .but you'll find those are all around the country. It's a different dye in the system for Amy O'Neal's *Opposing Forces*. These are b-boys meeting contemporary dance. These guys are intergenerational b-boys, they've been with major dance crews. This is going to appeal to different kinds of audiences.

LC: So let's talk about this further though. How do you feel we do as a sector when we go in and look at different regions? And by a sector, I mean a sector of programmers or curators or whatever we call ourselves. How do you feel we do as a sector when we go into the Northwest or the South or the Midwest or Minneapolis or Philadelphia and look at the work of the community? Do you think that by and large people are generous?

TL: There are hierarchies. The fact that I've worked as a dancer in Canada, in New York, in Boston, in Seattle, that I've toured the country, was an Artist in Residence in Baltimore . . . that's definitely given me a lens into how different kinds of dance are coming out of their

regions, and why they are important where they are. And I also feel that my colleagues are very thoughtful. If you give a clear argument about the context, and what that might mean in that region, they tend to understand. But there are also people, say in the Midwest, who are presenters, who feel like they're not being understood, and feel that people aren't valuing the work that is coming out of their regions.

And so dance has all sorts of algorithmic possibilities as a tool for construction which I do feel like is as true as it's ever been in terms of how artists can take a tool, or a medium, or a discipline like dance, and apply it to any number of means[...]

Lane Czaplinski

LC: Well, I would say unless you are working with an organization that champions and actually produces new performance, you have a very hard time going into anyone else's region and understanding the dynamic of why things are happening onstage. I think you tend to look at the entire enterprise from a presenting lens.

TL: What is that presenting lens?

LC: It's audience-centric as opposed to being artist-centric. And there's nothing wrong with being audience-centric. I think one of my strengths is not being a practicing performing artist. I wasn't when I began this position and am not now. This has helped me to simultaneously advocate for both an artistic and audience-centric lens. And really, in coming to OtB, my education here is about learning how to be an advocate for artists. I know a lot more about how to do that now than when I rolled up. And I ask this with so much generosity towards our peers, because I have so much respect for anybody who is interested in what we are interested in, but I find a schism a lot of times when people go in and look at the work of a particular place. I think they sometime cringe and say: 'God, what are the implications of this for me and my community? How could this play in my own community?'

TL: Which to me is just such an interesting question. A colleague of mine, who I really respect, described herself as an audience advocate and I immediately said what you just said, 'I'm an advocate for the space in between the artist and the audience.' Meaning what happens *between* the artist and the audience. And to me, really interesting work activates many potentials there. It really activates that space. In Seattle you still often find the view that a performance, or a work of art, has an inherent meaning that will or will not translate to certain people. But I see a performance as changing all the time depending on its context. Something happens in the news and the meaning of a piece can change radically. Within every community the work is shown in, the work changes. Why do artists want to tour? Part of it is to find out how their work reads in different kinds of conversations. 'What else am I going to learn about this thing that I created?' Usually things that are really effective are really alive. So when you're inside it as an artist, you're going, 'What else can I understand about this piece we created?' And the audience can help you understand that. What I find so interesting, when I'm reading the engagement questions for NDP, is going "Oh, what is this? What else could it mean? What are all the different communities it might be able to connect with? What are the different ways that you could help be an advocate for making those connections happen?" That's the part that I think is really exciting about what we do.

LC: I have this thing, I always maintain that the name 'dance' is kind of ridiculous.

TL: It has a bad brand.

LC: Yeah, it has a bad brand. And it ends up framing

artists in a way that other artists don't get framed. I would be curious to hear your thoughts on it. I would often think about it in terms of shame of our own bodies, lack of arts education, stigmas around dancing and about how we either have danced or haven't danced growing up. And I think a lot of the work that we see happening here are artists really trying to – like Heather Kravas—She's drawing *through* dance, she's writing *through* dance, she's creating *through* dance. And so dance has all sorts of algorithmic possibilities as a tool for construction which I do feel like is as true as it's ever been in terms of how artists can take a tool, or a medium, or a discipline like dance, and apply it to any number of means, other than this really limited one: a presentational opportunity onstage.

How do we build a really robust country for dance, where all boats can rise, and where there is more exchange?

Tonya Lockyer

TL: That's really beautifully said. There's a point when you're a dance artist interested in expanding what dance can be, where you go, 'Hmm, should I start calling myself something else?' Or do I stick with 'dance'. Honestly, even at Velocity I've have made a conscious choice to say, 'I'm going to try and change the brand.' Because right now, yeah, dance is second class. It's marginalized, its

history is often erased. But what happens if instead, you point out how dance was a major catalyst. For example, Bruce Nauman is very open about how much dance and Meredith Monk and Merce Cunningham influenced his experimentation in performance as a medium.

LC: Well [Robert] Rauschenberg, same thing. When we were at the Walker together Susan Wilde was talking to him and him said, 'You know, Trisha Brown and Merce Cunningham' . . .

TL: Exactly. But you've got this history of erasure. I remember once saying to Brendan Kiley [a Seattle theater critic], 'Brendan, I feel like when you really don't like something you call it 'interpretive dance', when you don't like it you call it 'dance', and when you think it's cool, you call it 'performance art'.' And the fact is, it's still dance, and you can't say to dancers, every time you do something interesting we're just going to rename it. I remember asking Jérôme Bel, 'How do you feel about people calling your work performance art?' He said, 'I hate it. I come to the UK they call it live art, I come to America they call it performance art. But dance is what is at stake in my work.' I think that's really interesting, this idea of what's at stake in your work.

LC: I asked Christian Rizzo that same thing and he said he deliberately located himself in dance because he felt like performance or performance art had totally gotten exhausted with such a loaded context. And for him dance was this completely open platform, where anything could happen. I've really hung onto that because I think he just felt like there was freedom in it.



ARTIST DANI TIRRELL PHOTO TIM SUMMERS

TL: I think dance does have more freedom in it than people might assume. But I also remember Rachel Rosenthal [who studied with Merce Cunningham] saying in an interview when she was asked why she gravitated toward performance, 'Women gravitated toward performance art because it was so open and you could make your own rules.' It's interesting how these things cycle around.

LC: On this issue of how things cycle around, how would we typify or characterize what's going on in our region at the moment? I feel like I... I guess this is what happens when you get old, and I've clearly gotten old. I feel like I'm seeing things come full circle. I almost feel like I'm seeing the young, and maybe this is just a shift in the generations to millennial and beyond. But, I feel like there's a young earnest person who feels a tremendous sense of 'can do'. And aesthetically you can see it in the choices they make because they don't really need any outside influence or any help. They say, 'I'm interested in what this means for myself, my collaborators and my community, and I'm less interested in what this means for history, or what came before, or whether this is fashionable or not.' They feel quite ready to make whatever statement they need to make, and they just need you to help them do that. They're less curious about what you have to offer in terms of feedback, or what history has to offer in terms of additional information. I find that they are really capable young artists, but they

seem to be less curious about how their work fits into other stuff.

TL: I think there's a generosity of respect for artists of different generations that I don't feel my generation necessarily had. Once, when I was teaching at Bates, there was a faculty conversation where someone asked, 'Why is it that if women haven't made it by the time they hit 40 they're over, but men can be emerging at 40?' And I remember thinking that was true. Women had a smaller window. But today, Pat Graney is a really important part of our community. So is Dayna Hanson, so is Molly Scott, so is Wade Madsen. And younger choreographers are interested in what they are doing. For my generation it was always, 'Who's the new exciting thing?', and you didn't have a chance to fail, you had to succeed, succeed, succeed. People still struggle through mid-career, but I see a bit more openness to artists of different generations.

To your other point, I taught a class *Live Art and Choreographic Culture since 1960* at Cornish and UW, and students were so hungry to learn that history. They were really hungry to contextualize dance within an interdisciplinary history. I also see the emerging generation working collectively, I see them actually succeeding quite well at collaboration in a way that I really admire. But I think it also means that they're a little bit more invested, 'I just want to create a really great

community here.' Now, we can do it here. "We want to make really good work here, we're building our audiences here, we're building our community here, we're working with great dancers here, we've got OtB, we've got Velocity, we've got other systems of support . . . we can do this."

LC: Yeah, that's what I meant. There's less trying to hit bells outside of this context.

TL: Or maybe it's because dance has become decentralized, so there's more centers than just New York?

LC: I worry that in that decentralization it's really less resource. It actually is an unhealthy lack of activity, a lack of support of the form, so that's why it's decentralized. It's not as though we have all these strong nodes, like in the French National Dance Center model, all around the country. I don't think it's anything like that that's happened.

TL: And I think that's the question we need to be asking ourselves. When we're on these panels, when we're talking about what the 'criteria' is, maybe the bigger question should be, 'How do we build a really robust country for dance, where all boats can rise, and where there is more exchange?'

I'm curious, you have to tell me this, I wasn't born in this country, but it feels like when I go to different parts of this country, they're all really different worlds. And I'm curious to hear why you think we should have exchanges between different parts of the country?

LC: Why have these exchanges? Part of that speaks to the deep divisions that occur within our country, within urban to rural, between classes, and between races. I think that leads to regional dynamics. But you know, that's the stereotypes of red and blue, the have and have nots, that are tremendous problems in our country. The other thing to acknowledge as two white programmers, in a region that oftentimes –you know Seattle is the 5th whitest city in the US apparently? The expansion of Amazon is making the demographics even whiter in our city. I've always talked about the diversity of our programming overall, but that's largely because we can export voices. I think that's a really big issue. I found, when I moved from NY to Seattle, I thought it was going to be more like Honolulu, where I lived for a year, and I was surprised by how segregated of

a community it is. Seattle is a tremendously segregated community and I think it impacts how we work with the artists from a production standpoint at OtB, and even at Velocity. All of us can point to examples of us trying to do better, create different types of relationships than we had before, but I still see this as a tremendous scope of work ahead of us.

TL: But I'm just curious, why tour companies, why bring someone who's not from your region, into your region?

LC: From a national standpoint?

TL: At Velocity it's much easier for me to produce a local artist. Audiences love it. When I bring someone from outside Seattle, they're like, 'Why would I go see this?' Do you find this at OTB? And is this happening around the country, regionally too?

LC: I don't know if other parts of the country are like this but definitely in the Northwest. When I first moved here, people who lived here talked about, how isolated it was. It's because everyone says it is. They all think it's isolated. And one of the reasons I like to bring stuff in from the outside is I'm not willing to just give in to the idea that we're only concerned with what happens here. I

do think right now given what's happening with the environment we have to be smarter about how we distribute new voices in this community. So I'm asking myself, why do we want to burn the jet fuel, and how can we continue to be really smart about how we do that?

TL: Our Seattle Festival of Dance Improvisation was a carbon neutral dance festival. It was Eric Beauchesne from Kidd Pivot who made us more aware of our carbon footprint. Eric realized the carbon footprint of Kidd Pivot was 30,

compared to the average American footprint which is a 15, compared to other parts of the world...

He's a great example of the power of an exchange. When I bring an artist from out of town, I think about how this is an exciting dialogue for us to be having as audiences and as artists, especially if it seems somehow to be continuing or pushing in a new direction a conversation that's already happening here. But going back to how open are people to looking at art from other regions, I think that's just a bigger question. How curious are we? Or are we just digging in our heels about defending our own perspective?

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Lane Czaplinski

LC: And I think there's an issue about reciprocal exchange not just an exchange one way. I think that's what's going to characterize our organizations a lot more going forward is I think they're going to need many more voices. Not just artists but producers, cultural workers, community activists to actually participate in what happens, when it happens, why it happens, and I think that will be a big shift in the field because it will be needed to incorporate many more different perspectives than just a single curator or programmer. But the problem is, when we do that, how do you make sure that it's still strategic, efficient and operates well. And I think that will be a big test for the field to figure that out.

TL: Velocity is already doing that. The Seattle Festival of Dance Improvisation [SFDI], a festival we now produce, is co-curated with the improvisation community. We have ambassadors, they go into their communities, they ask for recommendations, that becomes a list the community ambassadors and I equally vote on. Some of the specific programs during the festival then have curators who facilitate that part of the festival. So it's very collective, and I have to say that my role is very...well Onye Ozuzu, who was one of our SFDI co-curators this year, described it as "the delicate work of making systemic change". To this diversity question, its also about how to expand the point of view of what dance improvisation can be, and to do all this thoughtfully, delicately, strategically. Because change can be threatening to people. And it's really helpful having . . . Onye also had a nice word for it, "border crossers." She called herself a border crosser and said 'It's great you're also working with Ralph Lemon, and Darryl Jones, and Dani Tirrell. . . because as border crossers that can help facilitate the change that you're trying to create in a way that is deep and is really a systemic change.' Which means that after you leave, it remains. It's part of the DNA of what's going on. It's a value that's a part of the DNA of the structure.

LC: I think one of the problems is the notion of curating because it's so widely used. I would argue overused. If we can curate our drinks and our playlists...and the fact is that not every program you can curate or facilitate is the same. It's not the same scale, it's not the same price, it doesn't have the same means, it's really really different. All I mean is, there are ways from an engagement standpoint that you can curate or invite in or facilitate or create border crossings but that's much different than if you want to pull off a 12 member Ralph Lemon piece on a main stage theater and have an audience see it and be able to pay the fee and facilitate that. That's a much harder guest curation function. You're running an actual cultural facility.

TL: That's why I used the word ambassadors and facilitators. They are making sure that your relationships are genuine and being developed. And they're always informing me, and the whole festival, like a dramaturge, about what really is at stake for their communities, and what's important to them, and what are the best ways for engagement to happen. We've also had these

community forums, that can actually get quite intense. The first one, *Race + Realness*, was pretty polite: a diverse panel, having a conversation with a diverse audience, a few people spoke up, some emotionally moving conversations. But the last ones we had, *Identity Riot*, I invited three guests to perform a response to racial or gender inequity, and then the whole room went into smaller groups—it got really heated. It was a really important conversation. There were more than 100 people there. I was surprised by how heated it got. But we're processing as a group, as a community. And there are so many communities at Velocity, too. And I notice how even within our Velocity communities, there's segregation. Ratna Roy has got her Odissi community, Koach T has his hip-hop crew. . .but is there conversation between these groups? So, I have to say, we're doing some pretty intense work at Velocity to try to shift that dynamic within our community and bring more awareness and understanding so that there's actually a space for people to be talking to each other honestly and openly.

LC: Does contemporary performance come out of a situation of privilege? Is privilege one of the primary mechanisms that allows abstraction to occur? [...]expressive abstraction, or playing with form, or making nonsense because you can.

TL: I was thinking about this earlier today. What do you think?

LC: I think it's really easy to make that argument. I don't think that's the case at all. I actually think it's more of an issue of taste, sensitivity. Some people want to say things expressively in a more direct manner, some people prefer the techniques of the punks and the situationists and I don't think that only comes from economic privilege. I don't think that only comes from white privilege. Sometimes I even maintain that people who've had more hardships in terms of not having privilege. . .seeing that they don't trust reality, they don't trust less abstract ways or more realistic ways of framing things because that hasn't served them well. . .

TL: Contemporary performance has a history of pushing against the status quo. It's a history of questioning. And who wants to push against the status quo? Right? It's people that tend to not feel embraced by it. I remember in my own life, being in ballet training and thinking, 'Everyone here talks about harmony and unity.' I just couldn't buy into something that just didn't express my reality. I wasn't as economically privileged as some of the folks I was dancing with, and there came a certain point where I was like, 'I want to express the fact that I experience the world as irrational.' Herb Blau [theater director, former professor at UW] and I used to talk about this a lot—that a lot of the impetus for the avant garde was to push against the status quo. It's people who feel outside the system. That said, you know the futurists, [Filippo] Marinetti [founder of the Futurist movement] was a very wealthy person, funding the front page of *Le Figaro*. There's definitely people who come from different

kinds of backgrounds but I absolutely agree that I don't think contemporary performance is completely privileged. I do think it's willing to question.

LC: So when you talk about having the sort of symposium around race at Velocity.

TL: Identity: race and gender . . .

LC: One of the trends I see is that as a community we're beginning to have that conversation differently than we did when I showed up in 2002. And I think we can see that with the intention around Amy [O'Neal's] piece frankly, because it brought up a lot of it; created a kind of cross cultural collaboration and exchange, and brought up a lot of issues of: 'Who was that by? Who was it for? What did that symbolize?'

TL: . . .and I heard: 'Why not just give the funding to the b-boys and let them do the show? Why did they need this woman director?' And I think, honestly, what doesn't often get talked about there is the gender politics that's part of that conversation: people's response to a woman directing males in a piece that's commenting on masculinity in b-boy culture. To me, gender and race are so interwoven. A Japanese male's experience, a Japanese female's experience, are really different.

LC: Do you think the trend is increasing, decreasing, or staying the same, in the way our community nurtures experimentation and form? I'll give you an example. I would say one way of framing that is with Western Bridge and Conworks opening generalized spaces on one hand, that don't exist anymore, so it's actually harder now. On the other hand, we still see young artists wanting to make installations or frame their work differently. So that's a case study or an example. Do you think right now, in this realm of dance or performance that our region, our infrastructure, the appetite for audiences nurtures more experimentation than when you rolled up to Seattle? Or is it the same? Or less?

TL: That's a really good question.

LC: I don't know the answer myself, but I was just...

TL: . . . I think there's an increased professionalization. There are more professional companies than there were. There's Spectrum, there's Whim W'Him, there's zoe|juniper which is now it's own 501c3. Kate Wallich wants to create a company. So there's more professionalization. But I have to say, I remember when I first moved to Seattle we would do experiments like 'Ok, we're going to do a 24-hr performance, and we're not going to talk about it beforehand, we're just going to show

up.' And three dancers with Stuart Dempster [who composed for Forsythe and Cunningham] the four of us would do a 24-hour improvisation. Experiments would happen here (but people would just do them and drop them) that I would later see in New York. And I'd say, 'Oh I actually saw someone do something similar to this a year ago in Seattle.' And someone in New York actually once said to me, 'No you didn't.' But people in Seattle would do these interesting out-there ideas, but they would drop them. There wasn't a sense of development or professionalization, or an interest in that. There was just a pure interest and joy in really experimenting. I think you see that in Reggie Watts who has left Seattle. It was just so interesting to be here and watch Reggie figure out what he was trying to do, as a comedian...musician...vocal artist... And watch him just have a space here to really experiment. There wasn't a dance fundraiser where Reggie didn't pop-up and show something new. And now you see where that's taken him. There's a reason why Mark Morris, Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown . . . that so many people come out of this region. But I do think now, to your point, perhaps there's more focus on professionalization. And maybe there isn't quite that – I don't see people taking the same risks as when I first came to Seattle.

LC: Oh I think that we put more into production values and creation residencies. It creates more finished products that

people have strong reactions to, but it doesn't necessarily allow for a performance that can change from night to night, or a different kind of working.

TL: You know where one place you can see that: two new programs we both have created in the past few years. OtB created Open Studios. Velocity created something called SH*T GOLD, an open-mic performance night.

LC: Yeah, It's a really tough question, because on one hand I don't like overly romanticizing crappy experiments that happen on the steps in front of the theater. I'm much more interested in trying to have a conversation with someone like Kate [Wallich], about how she can coax that out in her own performance as it interests her. And I feel like that's actually a more dangerous proposition if you can actually with some intentionality take a really big risk or chance or put yourself into new territory. But with that said, there's still this tension about how produced it gets or the hubbub about coming to a show like that.

TL: I think she's a really interesting example in that, we had a conversation just yesterday, she had an interesting idea and I honestly felt like she wanted to go further with that. And it really took just asking her more questions about 'Why' to help her to go further

Do you think the trend is increasing, decreasing, or staying the same, in the way our community nurtures experimentation and form?

Lane Czaplinski

LC: I feel like someone like Alice [Gosti, Velocity's 2015 AIR], and artists around her, are endeavoring to make something that doesn't fit into a typical show-going situation. You know I think that's also part of the problem, dance is this never-ending endeavor to make this show. And there's always this amount of time. There's some idea that the longer you spend on your show the better. I am also interested in the other way, how artists can efficiently use their resources in bursts of creativity and more quickly make and show pieces so that they can work up an idea and move on.

TL: Well with Kate's next show [presented by Velocity]: that's what we've been talking about. These shorter spurts of time that are more intense. And for Alice's show it was a similar thing. But I think that sometimes the role of a producer/presenter is the role that any of us need: you have an idea, and you just need someone to go 'Yes.' Or to ask you interesting questions To get you so into your curiosity about that idea As opposed to, you're on that edge thinking, 'Oh I'd better not.' I think that's an interesting moment, because Alice's initial idea was that she saw a dress in a chapel. Which is really different than what she ended up doing – this five-hour event with four choruses. When I first came to Seattle, the one thing I felt about this city was, the reason I did these experiments and not anything with production values, was what I felt when I came into this city it was so under-resourced that I forgot how to dream. Even coming to the US from Canada, I felt like my ability to dream about what was possible. . . . what was possible was so narrow, that I stopped being able to imagine what was possible. I definitely hope that one thing I can do in my relationships with artists, is to help them not lose their ability to imagine what is possible, and to know that there is someone there who will help them try to activate, and harness resources, for what it is that they really want to do.

LC: Gideon Leister talked about how he is worried that no one is thinking big anymore, because everything is shrinking down in resource to the lack of existing resources. And I would agree with that, I would hate for that to be the case. I think simultaneously I look at being capable of responding to a variety of different ideas at different stages, as a process of gaining agency and control, and being able to control your destiny, and I think that's really important for artists. Instead of always feeling like that's outside of you. That it's really like "I have this idea, not only do I have this idea, but I have the tools to work this idea up instantly and deploy it in any number of ways. And I think these are strategies: you don't just think of yourself as a dance artist; you know work can only happen in a particular way. But that's what I worry about now—in *The New York Times* there's that

Twyla Tharp journal where she's travelling around and it's such a stereotypical view of how a choreographer might exist. It's like a 50-year career but it doesn't really relate to how anyone else exists in the world, making dance.

TL: No, it's very rare. I remember when Ezra first talked to me about his project. He had created these seven solos but he hadn't performed them. And I remember thinking, 'Well Ezra, maybe you don't want to do them on a proscenium.' So I asked him, 'if you could do them anywhere where would that be?' And he said, 'a courthouse.' And I think that's just an interesting first moment, Where do I really want to do this? What are the rules I've set for myself that maybe aren't useful now? An interesting trend that I see, are— some artists —making a project that is flexible and dynamic, so that it can adapt to different contexts. I think that's a really smart and resourceful strategy. I encouraged Cherdonna to think of her NDP project that way.

LC: Absolutely, that's something that I encourage non-stop.

TL: Erin [Johnson] just asked us if viewing art was also a question of privilege.

LC: Of course it is, but I think that, because there are ticket prices, there are social barriers, there are neighborhoods, there are any number of reasons that would prevent somebody from wanting to participate or being able to participate. But I think that we're also trying to work against these things. We all have programs and mechanisms in place to not make that the case. We often try to work off-site, we subsidize tickets, we work with community partners, we try to have programming that reflects a diverse series of approaches and backgrounds, so I think we work to counteract that.

I still think it's a west coast city, there's a sense of can-do. There's an idea of entrepreneurship, where you feel like you can start something or try something.

Lane Czaplinski

TL: I think it's very real, and a very interesting challenge for art in general. There are spaces and places that we can take for granted as spaces that belong to us: the library, the public art gallery . . . But these places that a lot of folks don't think belong to them, even though they are taxpayers, or citizens, and these places do belong to them. They exist for them.

LC: I want to be really aware of both how it is a situation of privilege, but I also want to focus back on how many people are participating in art that aren't coming from a standpoint of privilege. They're either making and or seeing art on the streets. Art is a vital proposition, it's important to our lives, it's why we should tackle more serious problems so that we can participate in things like art. It enriches our lives, so, I get hesitant only framing it



ARTIST EZRA DICKINSON **PHOTO** TIM SUMMERS

as a situation of privilege because there are people who fight for it actively who don't come from privilege.

TL: It's interesting because Velocity is located right on a park where there are a lot of people who are homeless. And it's been really interesting in the five years that I've been there, the relationship that we have to that community has really shifted. We have Path with Art classes, which is a program for people overcoming homelessness and addiction. But this summer at SFDI we also had folks who live in the park who paid to come to the contact improvisation jam. . . or, who we ended up giving tickets to performances to. When I started in dance, being from a geographically isolated place that didn't have a . . . it had one dance studio on the entire island, a really big island. I always thought that art was the great democratizer. And I learned over time, that isn't the case. There are definite ceilings, that occur based on what kind of economic access you have, or your own feelings of what is your birthright.

LC: As far as the question of why people should look at work from the Pacific Northwest. I believe that New York is our arts capitol, but it's a question of telling a more complete picture about what's happening in this country. We have a legacy and current activity here that warrants a deeper investigation. And if you consider that from Vancouver down through Portland there's a corridor of creativity that is very active, and has been for a very

long time, and it's not just in dance – across disciplines, there's a lot of activity that comes from this part of the country that is garnering national attention. I still think it's a west coast city, there's a sense of can-do. There's an idea of entrepreneurship, where you feel like you can start something or try something.

TL: I think increasingly the west coast is not the left coast. I think right now so much of the value of what is being created in this country is being created on the west coast. I think we are increasingly living in an economy of ideas, and a center of this economy of ideas is definitely Seattle. There's a reason why the president of China comes here before he goes to Washington DC. I actually don't feel isolated here. Maybe 10 years ago, but I don't now. I feel like we're at the center of something. When you think about the power Amazon has, and the kind of content it is creating in every domain. In Seattle I feel it's a place that's super entrepreneurial, really focused on innovation, and if you actually want to understand where this country is going, you have to understand what's happening in Seattle and San Francisco. The connection between Seattle, Portland, San Francisco and LA is also really growing – There's much more of a thread there. And I think that LA is also an exciting city. What's happening there in the art world is exciting, and the investment in dance that's starting to happen there is exciting. So what's happening on the West Coast now, is important to what's happening in the

country overall.

And the work in gender fluidity that's happening in our region is important. Cherdonna's work with gender is relevant and important, There's a reason why Wendy Perron wrote about Seattle leading the way when it comes to gender after she came to town. It's just such an intrinsic part of the work here without it being overtly political. It really is, 'This is how I'm experiencing myself in a gender-fluid way' and that's why it's a part of this work.

LC: I also think that there's a very simple idea that this has been a hotbed, outside of New York, for the creation and development of new dance. And so when you have Heather Kravis operating here making her next piece, that comes out of a many-generation development of this sort of dance community, or industry let's call it. So her ability to come back and utilize that to make new work builds upon a lot of activity that came before it. And I think that's one reason why people should continue to be aware of what happens here, because regularly a lot of stuff that is developed here can go on and tour nationally or internationally. Pat Graney's last piece was a major undertaking, and there are many pieces currently in development or that will premiere in the coming months that people should keep tabs on. For that reason, because there's just a lot of activity here – it's one of the hotbeds.

TL: And it's a growing hotbed. It's increasingly so. When young people, who are really gifted, are coming out of college, and they are deciding what city to move to; when more of them are moving to Seattle, that tells you something about what their perspective is, and about what is actually going on here.

LC: A few years ago, two or three years ago, I remember someone writing in *The Times* referring to some of the movement quality that she was observing in a particular piece as being informed by a Pilates or yoga or Gyrotonics and the implication there was, that it was good up to a point, but it lacked depth and maturity

beyond that. And that was kind of in the back of my head when I asking that question about somebody in their 20s or 30s and how they make a leap into another stage of practice or focus. So I'm curious about training and teaching and learning opportunities, how do you frame that for yourself, or how do you think about that for movers?

TL: Somatic practices have had a huge impact on dance and dance training. You see that in Gaga, and you see that in the work of Forsythe and Crystal Pite. It's a part of their training in the same way that somatics informed the Trisha Brown company's training and company. So somatics are a really integrated part of what we're talking about. I see a lot of Seattle dancers now who are really

doing a lot of kinetic investigation, and are really influenced by Crystal Pite who is also from this region, and really influenced by Gaga and, ultimately, Forsythe. And these developments also come out of the knowledge of ballet. One of the things I find really interesting about Forsythe, is how he separated the *knowledge* of ballet, which is in these dancers bodies, from the *ideology* of ballet. He recognized that within these dancers' bodies is a lot of knowledge and information about the mechanics of the body in space and time, and he started to explore the range of motion of the joints and their relationship to space and time. He also took the ideas of Rudolf Laban about space and actually started to apply them to a multiplicity of centers in the body. The same way how, once upon a time, modernism in dance thought of things as having a center or a core, but now,

in a world that's more deconstructed and post postmodern, we have a multiplicity of centers. He transposed that into the body so dancers bodies now have a multiplicity of centers that are expanding in a full range of motion in space. That kind of thinking, directly or indirectly, has really influenced dancers like Zoe and how she moves, and Kate and how she moves, and how Jody [Keuhner] moves as Cherdonna; and the kind of investigations you see with Whim W'Him, and how they're trying to take ballet and push it. So I think that's been a key movement in the last 25 years. And I can see how having Crystal Pite in our region, so near with people getting to watch her work develop over time, and take



ARTIST KATE WALLICH PHOTO CHARLIE SHUCK

workshops with her, and study with her, has had a really big impact on how people are looking at movement in this town.

When I came into Velocity, one of the things that I thought about is how do we create a space for training that is really unique to this region and really fosters what is strong in this region? And to me it was that you have PNB [Pacific Northwest Ballet] where people can go and take a really strong ballet class, but you also have a community that has a 22 year old festival of improvisation that is one of the leaders in the world. And then you have a deep history of leading somatic practitioners – a history of people like Peggy Hackney, who was also one of the cofounders at OtB, and Joan Skinner. One aspect of what we're trying to do with our training, is to have the kind of classes that have the articulation that you see in contemporary ballet but have the freedom where people are able to improvise and have creative agency, while at the same time somatic intelligence so that they can have long careers. When Eric Beauchesne taught at SFDI, he said out of all the places that he had taught the work of Crystal Pite, Seattle dancers were the most available and open to it. I mean you could base our training on Horton technique, or bring it back Martha Graham, but at Velocity, in response to what I was seeing happening in the city that's not the direction that we've gone. And I'm really starting to see the impact. What used to be very small professional classes, where you might have four to five people are now full classes.

LC: I think that's the question for lots of American dancers because there can potentially be situations like that where there are so few places where there is the state subsidized, European framework. And that's why we talk about Crystal, where she comes from, and why she knows what she knows. It's coming out of a system where the bodies were equipped. And that's fine, but in a typically American way it gets exported or imported into our country and it kind of goes through a cycle where people have access to it, which is fine because we can make it our own, but. . .

TL: Well it does. The only other thing I want to add is that what we've done at Velocity, is there are more urban styles, street styles, hip hop, vogueing, house classes than there ever were. Because there's a whole other direction of movers in this city and that's what they're drawing from. It is interesting Crystal Pite is Canadian, but she didn't go through the professional Canadian ballet school system. She trained at a really strong studio in

Vancouver, then she went into Ballet British Columbia, and then worked in Europe with Forsythe. Forsythe is an American that was by the fact that he grew up in jazz and tap and all these other forms, that he's integrating, in some ways. And when you look at European dance it's so influenced by Cunningham and Trisha Brown and American experimentalists. They're almost bigger gods in Europe than they are here. There's so many books that I want to read about American artists, and I can only get them in French. Because we don't have these books about American dance artists.

Artists [...] talked about internalizing a feeling that what they had chosen as their life's work was not a valuable pursuit. [...] One of the things we can do is say, 'What you do matters, we value it.' And that can seem like a small thing, but it can be a powerful thing.

Tonya Lockyer

LC: And it's sort of like – there was an initial relationship between the US and Europe, where culture was exported once, and it's had a really hard time equaling up to that. So a lot of times when the internationals look at what is happening in our country from a dance perspective they tend to poopoo it and say that it's athletic, or it's not trained enough or it's not conceptual enough. They have a very specific way of looking at it that isn't very flattering.

TL: I brought Daniel Linehan back to Velocity. Daniel was one of my students at the University of Washington, then he went to NY, then went to PARTS [Performing Arts Research and Training Studios, Brussels, Belgium], and now is working out of Belgium. And I asked him what it would take for him to come back to the States and make work. And he said, 'To feel like what I did was valued.' It really wasn't about

resources. It's about feeling valued. When he was here, we had a forum on sustainability, and I thought artists would talk about money and resources, but instead what they talked about was internalizing a feeling that what they had chosen as their life's work was not a valuable pursuit. And so the main reason why Daniel is working in Europe, is to be in a place that honors his choice of work. So how do we also change that culture? One of the things we can do is say, 'What you do matters, we value it.' And that can seem like a small thing, but it can be a powerful thing.

LC: I will say that compared to a lot of things that happen in Europe, when you go to see a show like Daniel's, the audiences can be conservative, and they can be a lot smaller than you think. And some of the pieces that we bring to Velocity or OTB are a lot more robust in comparison. Or maybe even more educated or tolerant or open in terms of the amount of work the audiences have seen or the range. I'm actually surprised sometimes when international colleagues come in and they're so surprised – 'You do this four nights? You get an audience like this for four nights?'