

Ben Ash - I'm Ben Ash, and it's great to be with you today. Yeah, what's your what's your full name,

Kat Hawkins - and depending on the day!.. Kat. Kat Hawkins

BA - I'm gonna sort of experiment and explore what might be the first of a sort of fun podcast series that we might, might share through Candoco. So thank you so much for giving me your time today. So I've been with the company now since September.. and maybe in a moment you could tell me a little bit about your sort of relationship to the company and how long you've been working in relationship with the company.

KH - So, it feels like I've also been with the company since September. But my relationship with Candoco has been going on for a lot longer. So I'm in a role now that I'm a PhD researcher. Candoco, are my partners in that research. It's based at CDare Coventry University, and I'm looking at the role of an understudy in inclusive dance. But I started working with Candoco.. probably about six years ago now. I had a full time job at the time, and hadn't danced for many, many years and just found Candoco. I already knew about them, but I got in touch and just said, if there's any opportunities to come and learn and dance with the company that would be amazing. And they had an audition that weekend! I emailed on Thursday, they had an audition on the Saturday, so I went to the audition. I didn't know my body in a dancing way at all, And I managed to cut my neck by lunchtime and left early. I got a call to the second round, but I made the decision that.. you know, I needed to find out what, what I was able to do in a dance environment. And, Yeah, I was working as a journalist, so I wanted to be able to have opportunities but wasn't ready to leave my job at that time, which came a couple of years later. Since then I've been doing research and some projects with Candoco

BA - So you have a kind of a fair period of time in.. through which you've been working in this context. Thank you. I mean, in terms of your PhD research looking at the role of understudy in Inclusive dance.. Maybe if I could just speak briefly to what we're doing at the moment as a company, which, you know you're involved in.. so that's, it's the 30th anniversary year of the company, and in this period of sort of uncertainty, we've begun working - although we've been working only at home - to begin to look at the archive as a way of getting in touch with the 30th anniversary. Maybe you can tell me a bit about what you're up to, like in the present time, in relation to that, because I think it connects to your PhD in really interesting ways..

KH - So, the dancers have all been kind of showing their interest in the archive, and finding ways into the archive, asking questions of what the context was in which the pieces were made at the time, and what the relationship might be with those pieces now. And Joel is working on a duet, and so I thought that that was a nice opportunity to see how dancers approach a piece that has been made on different bodies to theirs, and how they gather the information that they need in order to translate it into their bodies and the context now. My hope is that through this process I will be able

to see a lot about how an understudying role works, but also try and place myself in a way, in that understudy role

BA - Yeah, that's what I'm curious about with your.. like the proposition for your research, and I'm wondering like.. as you as you go about observing this process now, or whether in somehow, or in some way.. how do you place yourself, your own body within, or do you somehow do that? what's, what's that experience like?

KH - yeah it's challenging! I'm doing a lot of observing, which feels really great. But also I think it's difficult for me to even imagine what I might be in that duet or what my physicality might be in that duet. Joel's a wheelchair user, and I am a part time wheelchair user, but only very recently been discovering that physicality for myself, using that assistive device. So my natural inclination is to want to be Joel's role, and also watching some of the physicality of Ihsan within that duet, the way that he stands up on the back of the chair for example, I know that my balance would add all kinds of interesting and challenging scenarios into just how gravity works!.. and how I move as a double prosthetic leg wearer.

BA - Yes, super fascinating

KH- And it's also giving me insight into what it is to learn a piece, feeling like you're on the sidelines, a little bit. I'm still trying to come to terms, or like trying to come to grips with what an understudying role looks like for dancers, but there just seems to be like a lot of a lot of observing.

BA - Is it you, you know, do you have previous experience of dancers understudying roles, or is it sort of your first foray into

KH - Yeah it's my first foray into learning very quickly.! Like what that is, where it takes place, the psychological impact. The whole process is new to me.

BA - I guess like it might this might make me reflect at the moment, just how many different ways they probably are going about that role, depending on the culture and the context and what we want to do about it. You know how that wants to be taken like what the opportunities are to, to.. in a way like step in or have your place, taking on that responsibility of the understudy

KH - Yeah, yeah, in what context does that happen, I wonder. You know to really be able to invite somebody into the space to dance and learn with a company.. like do you have to be a company member in order to be an understudy in the work. To learn the incentive behind the piece and, yeah there's a lot of talk of like feeling like you get the piece or like feeling like you understand what the choreographer wanted, what their desires were, so yeah something really interesting about like filling in and trying to gather as much information of something that has happened before you've been there.

BA - Yeah, I think that what you're sort of talking to there is.. is true, for me anyway, in terms of beginning to look at some of the archive works in the company where really.. I don't know so much about choreographic intention or the process! So there's a lot of like filling in or second-guessing to do in a way, and also when we learn repertoire that, you know, wasn't made on us initially, which is also kind of quite a common experience is.. how that then might go through a process or a journey through which somehow it becomes 'me' in that.. it's quite individual.

KH - The issue of ownership really interests me, like who owns work. So for example, Joel is doing, Mark Brew's part. In this case, it was made for Marks body with Mark's movement. I think there's a really interesting, like question of 'Who do you go to for the information?' So like we had a really amazing conversation with Mark, and then I was wondering, like, how different that would look from talking to the other performer in the duet, and then how different that would look to talking to the choreographer, and whether you need all of those, or whether you need none of them, and yeah, I think that insight seems to be very beneficial though, through the dancers

BA - Yeah crucial

KH - Like, the musicality and the emotionality of it, which really fascinates me; like the phenomenology of memory, memory of making and performing a piece, and - this conversation with Mark happened on Zoom - and it was just so fascinating to me to hear Mark explain, and at the same time move around his space that he was in in his home, like going to the front of the stage and arriving, and then moving, and I asked him, like, what are you thinking as you do that, like.. are you remembering, is there imagery? He was like yeah absolutely there is imagery, and he described it as muscle memory, but it's much more than muscle memory it's like a full sensorial memory yeah beautiful

BA - Lovely to see someone in another space kind of embodying that process, I guess.. Lovely..

So yeah, We're all, as a group at the moment, sort of beginning to look into the archive in different ways, and yours is able to connect directly to your research which is fantastic! I'm looking at a piece of work called 'Looking back' by Rashid Orandane - I'm not quite sure how to say his surname - which was made about 10 years ago. And what I've noticed through doing that, well I've noticed a lot through looking at that! but, you know, in a way for me it's.. it's kind of through looking at something that I don't know really much about at all, although I can gather a bit of information through various ways, I think what's really helped me is to find ways to connect that to something that's meaningful to me. So it's been a process actually of kind of looking back at some of the work that I've made myself, been involved in, and it's kind of really sparked some stuff for me, which has been quite nice. But I'm curious about, again, like.. How much you need to know about something, to connect to it? Or like, in relation to my experience, at which point I can then somehow,

form a meaningful connection, at which point things feel like they unlock, which is quite a point of interest to me.

It's been an extraordinary time since we last.. since I started in September with Covid and all of that, and the lockdown, and it's been it's been quite hard. I'd say definitely for me it's been like, quite up and down, and.. yeah I'm just, I'm glad to get back in the studio. It's the first day in about three months in the studio today. And I think you've been in maybe once or twice recently up to this point. I kind of wanted to.. I don't know.. somehow, how to cover that ground or not, but I just wondered how it's been for you.. Obviously you don't have to confess about this time! but it's been an unusual time.

KH - Yeah, I'm happy to go Dark and Stormy.. Always! (Laughter)

It has been brutally hard for me. There have been moments where I've lost sight of any hope. Which is not a new experience for me. I am somebody that really struggles with my mental health, pre COVID. But I think it's just like, disrupted so much of my experience in the world, that actually when I have tried to hope and dream and imagine for future scenarios, that's been really difficult. And I think a lot of the release points that I usually use just do not exist at the moment. So loads of my coping strategies are just not there. It's really made me question so much about, like, who am I, who am I in the world.. and who am I when nobody perceives me.. like, what are my values and what interests me, and how do I really like dig down into that, in order to stay alive. Yeah, like it, it gets to that place.. it's always an interesting place to be in.

BA - (Sound of a door banging open) Yeah.. We'll just wait for the door.. That's okay, I hear you in that.. it's been challenging

KH - Really challenging! and I think like, also being in the dance studio during the second lockdown.. it was just, it was like really strange to be back in an environment that was really difficult for me to feel comfortable in, in any way. But then to, like, notice how different it feels when you're not able to touch, you're not able to be close to people.. just like the practicalities of wearing the masks and stuff.. it really shifts completely like your relationship with people Yeah Well for me and.. yes yeah I agree totally,

BA - And that leads on beautifully to something that I proposed to you before we agreed.. Well, as we agreed to do this I proposed to you a little creative thing to do in advance that was in consideration of touch, and how touch has been something that's both absent from us in the studio - which is quite unusual in our context I would say - but certainly also absent from us in our lives, maybe.. if we're on our own during this time. And so I proposed to you, to kind of consider the experience of touch as an impression; so touch is something that we both give and receive through, and we can leave an impression or receive an impression through touch. and when we are moved, we might even language it as 'being touched' by someone or something. So with that in mind, I'd set you this little task. Would you explore something about the memory of being touched, through making a collage with papers

that you had around at home, and maybe to pay attention to moments where you feel a sense of satisfaction or something like that.. and I can see that you've brought your collage with you! Maybe we could just take a moment to describe it.

KH - Yeah, super nice!

BA - Yeah! What's.. what's going on in it!?

KH - ..feels like I'm presenting my school project, which is amazing! It's like.. it's.. Okay, So I'm going to describe, So there's a yellow, pale yellow like sheet of card that has the original intention of being used as like a ring-binder a divider and I like cut one side so one side is a wave, yeah wavy isn't it, and then the other side, side has still got its holes for its ring binder.. and then part of what I cut out is stuck on the top with some bits.. of the cards kind of lifting up like a little flap yeah, and then with one of the flaps I created like a little pocket. So then I have another piece of card which is red that's.. I cut.. I cut a shape out of it, that really,

I just, like, I wanted to release like touch. I feel like the first moment when I touch somebody that isn't the person that I live with, is going to be like so strange that I just needed to be like 'Fuck it, let's do it!' So just cut that out.. and then the piece that has been cut from slots on to another piece of card that is blue and shiny

BA - Yes it's almost sort of like petrol shine and

KH - Yeah that like iridescence, and shine it in a different light and it changes the reflection. And that was stuck down, but my Prit-Stick obviously did what it could in the moment but then changed.

BA - It's got like, it sort of spans across the page from one side to the other but with space underneath. It's almost got a tensile quality a bit like a bridge like is a bit spongy like a spring or something, it's quite interesting

KH - yeah exactly! So I really, I don't know why, but as I started doing this I had this desire to create 3d, and then I got to thinking about whether collages are always flat or not, and at what point they are sculpture and at what point they are collage.. and I didn't know.. but I, I feel like I.. have been existing almost as a 2d thing, and reminding myself that I am a 3d presence in the world

BA - that really says something about Zoom!

KH - Yeah it's weird, it's like trying to see myself from behind and above and below.

I think touch really is an important part of that, like I miss, like the incidental touches, like a soft touch on the back, like something to remind yourself of a sensation that I often struggle to give to myself.

BA - Yes Yeah

KH - there's something about like the lifting out that I really miss when it comes to touch.

And then I got my pen, and I was just tracing, and I traced around all of the holes on the yellow card and then traced it all across the page, because I feel.. it's just like the lasting like tendrils of touch in my body. Yeah just

BA - traces

KH - it's odd.. and like memories

BA - memories, yeah

KH - And then I cut out some letters, and they're kind of like hidden under the raised blue structure, and down the side and it says, "Without Borders" because I've been thinking a lot about boundaries in relation to COVID and touch where end and another begins.. Yeah

BA - Yeah, and that's the boundary through which we first encounter touch is through our boundary..

KH - And then it's, it's a 3D collage, so did some writing on the back, like immediately.

BA - I love that!

KH - I'm losing bits..! and also there's a little picture at the top that is zoomed in a clip from a magazine that is hands, on an arm, and a needle. I wrote

"All touch, all memory, all medical all insert this here  
All dispose after use  
All deep in the in the veins lasting  
Too far, wrong bit, can't find the spot  
All poor bedside manner, ongoing, boosting cannulas, blood dripping..  
Can I drain you now..

BA - Ooh..

KH - Dark and Stormy man!

BA - Yeah! Yeah!. it's impactful..

KH - You know, I think is a really weird time, because I have so much medical trauma

BA - yeah

KH - and so much of like the imagery that we're encountering at the moment is medicalized

BA - yes

KH - And so when I think about touch at the moment a lot of it is like lasting trauma that is in my body and it's like bringing up a lot around touch for me, I love, like, reclaiming those things as well. Those times where touch has been something that I haven't necessarily wanted, which I think happens a lot with disabled people, and especially medicalized settings, like.. consent is often taken away and then your autonomy is brought into question.

BA - Yeah, that's something that I'm learning more about now, in this context of Candoco.. that I was just less aware of as a phenomenon around touch, and it kind of gives me, I guess the opportunity to develop greater respect for other people's experience, and to kind of in a way look at.. look at the phenomenology of touch in a more rounded way that's more Yin Yang as in the 'Dark and Stormy', as well as the Light or the 'wanted'. Thank you, that's really striking. I'm glad that you undertook that assignment with such gusto!

KH - Yes, happy to do it.. Thanks for setting me the task!

BA - Okay, so, I mean, that leads me on a little bit maybe to ask.. and I just have, maybe 1, 2 or three things that we can just touch on before we draw this conversation to close for today, but one was to talk more, or just briefly about Inclusivity; so I understand that to be quite a key term, both for Candoco but probably in the wider context around, ability, disability, ableism, disablism inclusivity. For me it's, it's a learning process around, like.. terminology and political correctness and all of that, as well as just trying to understand deeper, what we mean when we talk about 'Inclusivity'. So I wonder if you might have anything that you might want to say about inclusivity in terms of how and where you understand it to be working and failing.. or lacking.. or working and seeding well..

KH - Yeah.. I think it's really interesting the way in which, 'Inclusive' is used, and who it's used by and for what purposes it's used. For me, a space can't be inclusive unless everybody has access to it, Yes and that can be.. you know, all kinds of systemic reasons that people don't have access to certain spaces, and that can be physicality, and it can be accessibility for disabled people, and accessibility being a fully rounded model of accessibility that takes into consideration everybody's needs in this space. But it's more than that, yes you know.. it's elitism and it's race, gender, and it's whether you're thin, and whether you have access to money and whether you have access to housing, education, yes it's all of the privileges that stop people being in spaces.. where I see inclusivity modeled best that I've experienced is within disability justice movements

BA -right

KH - within activists spaces

BA - yeah, yeah..

KH - That, that feels the closest for me, to.. what inclusivity really means..  
yeah

BA - Yeah, it's a big one..

KH - Yeah, it's I mean everything is intersectional, like everything that we encounter. And so, like it is vitally important, I think that people look around every space that they're in and ask the question of "Who is not here and why are the reasons that they're not here?" It's a term that I'm having to try and define for myself in my research

BA - yeah, I thought it might be

KH - And it's hard.. it's really hard because.. I think dance in traditionalized formalised settings, is.. still has huge hurdles to overcome. And often I find myself being drawn back to community for the answers of how we progress, as a society of which dance is a part.

BA - Yeah.. it's big, its

KH - Massive.!

BA - Yeah

KH - It's Massive..

BA - Yeah.. Watch this space I suppose..

KH - Yeah

BA - it feels like a long term project

KH - yeah and I think that's one of the hardest things to grapple with as human being is, how much progress, am I actually going to see in my lifetime, and so then where do I find the impetus to keep going.. And especially within institutional settings that are so bound by the things, you know.. capitalism, and then within capitalism, ableism.. because ableism only exists alongside capitalism. Capitalism teaches us that certain bodies have certain worth, yes and certain bodies don't have certain worth,

BA - right

KH - and we know that we are only as disabled as the society within which we exist.. So how much can you progress within an institution that ultimately exists with income as it's foundation..

BA - Yes, and that's true for the environment and race and everything.



KH - All of these things are bound together. But I think, you know, it feels as though more people are willing to have these conversations now

BA - yeah

KH - And also I feel there is a really important piece in.. you know, there is there is a lot to be found, and a lot of beauty and a lot of things that we can keep from institutions, because I think it's important when we burn everything to the ground like.. which bits do we want to keep!?

BA - Yeah, save that part!

KH - Dance offers so many things that I think we should keep, yeah and I think it's actually a very anti-capitalist thing to be in touch with your body to be embodied

BA - it's pure radicalism.. yeah it is

KH - It really is, because they want you to be disembodied. I mean I'm 'Stick it to the man' every time!!

But there's, there is so much that I have learned through connecting with my body, like coming back to my breath, to what feels okay in the moment, around consent, and.. around respecting other bodies, and really focusing on what all bodies are doing in space and offering equal respect to each body, and the way that it moves.

BA - Wonderful, thank you for going in that one! yeah. So drawing things to close I mean there was this other thing that I asked you to do, which is sort of a bit of a riddle in a way, well.. I proposed it as a riddle, I quite like riddles. When it comes to kind of making or organizing movement language sometimes I'm quite, I quite like a bit of a puzzle, and a bit of a riddle because it tends to kind of provide me with things like couldn't expect at the outset, or something like that. So I asked you Kat if you could imagine being asked a question.. or if somebody invited you to talk or share about something that you might feel like, oh Yes! I'm really glad that you asked me that.. or, because it's really something I would actually like to speak to.. and then I thought that maybe what you might do would be to kind of feel what comes up for you as a response to that. So I wondered now if you could kind of share something about that. You don't have to tell me what the question was, when you imagined. Or you could just say it was problematic and I didn't know.

KH- Now I really enjoyed that.! That made me think a lot. It kind of reminds me of this question - which wasn't the question.. alright, this wasn't my question but I'm going to just dangle it in here as a question - which is the question of like "What do you need?" Yeah, it really reminded me of that, and of giving people agency over, being able to clearly define.. I need this right now and I am not afraid to ask for it. I found it difficult

BA - yeah

KH - and..

BA - I mean.. it's an experiment

KH - Yeah, I found.. I found I got like quite nervous, and I think there was something about imagining me being put on the spot, so it was interesting for me. Actually, being put on the spot makes me nervous.. that I'm not going to be able to answer that I will regret saying what came out in the moment.

BA - I really resonate with that

KH - Yeah, I think I do that a lot 'rumination station'! like 'I said that thing in 1995 that has really plagued me!!' I'm going to share the question that I came up with, which was, "What's interesting you right now?"

BA - What's interesting to you right now..

KH - and the addition of right now feels really important

BA - right now

KH - Yeah exactly

BA - right now..

KH - it draws me back to the present moment, and it kind of frees something in me that this is not me forever. Like now, right now.. what's interesting me is talking to you. Getting to be with you again in this space, knowing more about.. like, what makes you think and question and.. maybe I'm deflecting!

BA - that's entirely totally appropriate if that's of interest to you right now! So.. cool! Yeah, like I was saying that the experiments, there's no like right way or wrong way of doing, doing the right thing but yeah, I resonate with that thing of kind of being put on the spot, even though I could try and say there's no right or wrong way of doing this, there's still like a charge, sometimes, often find that, yeah, somehow I need to unlock that and then things soften and it's okay. And then lots of possibility..

So the last concluding thing I'd like to ask you which I mean, maybe it's a tricky thing, I don't know. I was just reflecting on it in, in conversation with Megan where we were, she was just saying about you know, we were discussing the sort of awkward moments where you might be interviewed for something. So I was like, what are you good at one thing that you're really good at, but earlier in the autumn when we were working in this process with Janine Dan and one of the, She was working on a score called experts, which is something that we would do, as well as you know in some of the warm-up she had us rolling around, and I've just anecdotally referenced Joel who, at one point we'd done like a rolling round thing and he said you know, like 'if I

was to meet my maker now I could lie down on this floor in front of God and roll around, perfectly contentedly.. like, I'm really good. No fear. I'm just really good at rolling' And I was really struck by that because.. it sort of startled me because it wasn't, it sort of depersonalised his experience in a really wonderful way. It wasn't like he was saying 'hey I'm really good at this and you know you should value that' but it was this example of him like, with nothing left to kind of give, or nothing.. nowhere to hide. But to sort of feel like, you know.. something about this is really Me.. I have a talent, I'm good at this. So if you had to lie down on the.. or if you were to like be in front of your maker or whatever like, you know.. what's, what would you say now is like, Yeah I'm really, I'm okay with this, I feel really comfortable being.. doing this

KH - Pffffff! Wow! I'm shaking my hands for everybody who can't see me!

BA - Yeah, it's a, it's a situation isn't it..

KH - yeah it's interesting!.....

Yes, it's really like... that is making me think straightaway of like.. I do carry this idea that there is no like right and wrong, good and bad, I want to say, but I obviously have my voice, and I disagree with other people's.. I think...I think I'm good at.. being vulnerable in most of the situations that I put myself in

BA - I like that

KH - yeah, vulnerability as like a radical act.

BA - Yeah, it is!

KH - Yeah like..

BA - it so is

KH - Yeah it's really important to me

BA - It's taking risks

KH - yeah, and trying to do that in as many situations as I find myself in, and sometimes it confronts people in ways that are hard for me, but... I don't think that I'm good at it!.. I don't think that I'm good at it but, if I had to crack it all open and say 'this is what I'm working on right now..' I would say it's that!

BA - Right! Fantastic!

So yeah, Kat Hawkins thanks you so much for spending time with me today, kind of the two of us getting to know a bit about what we're both up to at the moment.. in this context. And yeah, it's been a wonderful kick-start to hopefully what will be a process of growing and learning about these podcasts and forging our relationships in the group in this time, so thank you very much

KH - Yeah, it was fun!