

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Cunningham, C. (2021) *Ménage à Trois (COVID Breakdown)*. In: Marsh, K., Richards, M. & Campbell, R. (eds.) "In Other Words. London, Metal in partnership with Live Art Development Agency and Necessity", pp.72-73.

Cunningham, C. & Heddon, D. (2018) "Four legs good..." *Performance Research*, 23 (4-5), pp.198-203.

Cunningham, C. (2017) *First contact. This body has not*. In: Alland, S., Barokka, K. & Sluman, D. (eds.) "Stairs and Whispers, D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write back." Rugby, Nine Arches Press.

Ménage à trois (COVID breakdown)

Home alone. Or not really. It's the 3 of us here. Me and you. And you. Youse. "In it together" as they say. But some of us are not together. Not in the way they mean. Not in any of the ways they mean. There is worry that this lockdown will damage relationships, people forced to be together with no time away from each other. No escape. That was never our issue. I don't want away from you. I want you close, always....

Wash your hands is the rule. But when hands need to constantly hold and touch crutches, wheels, canes, it's not so straightforward. I can wash my hands til my skin peels off, but I have to touch you. Always. Before. After. Again. Again.

So I try to clean you. Spray sanitizer on you, wipe you down and it feels ugly. And sterile – in every way. Because you become an object again. Separate. Not a part of my skin anymore. Like I am wiping away a little of your life. As if I'm supposed to think of you like my cooker hob....

Weirdly I have hardly ever cleaned you. Maybe I should have. Maybe people will think it's filthy that I never normally cleaned you. And considering you like to lie down most places we go – on the grass, on concrete, on the floors of restaurants, bars, cafes, theatres, dance studios... (that's pretty much all the places we go), oh and airports, and hotels... but I don't put you on the floor in hotel rooms cos well, that's disgusting.

But maybe I have built up a good immune system because of you....? Am I a little bit stronger because of you in that way too? Like a kid that got to play in the dirt? That would be cool.

This sanitizing ritual. Trying to clean you every time I come home. I hate it. It feels like a betrayal. It reminds me of trying to dry off our dog when she came in from the rain. Her reluctance, cowering away. My reluctance at forcing her. "C'mon, you know you have to..."

I try to imagine now rolling with you, caressing you the way I do when we dance. Danced. And I think; how can you trust me when I've treated you as

though you were toxic? Shamed you. How can we be close again? When you smell... wrong. Can we be intimate with this ugly act between us? Wiping away layers of trust...are you clean? Are you clean? (Is this how we will start to look at everyone again?)

I miss your touch. Against my face. Your weight, lightly slipping, rolling down my arm, around my neck, your lift. Strength I can collapse into. To dance close in these days... the only touch I can have... if you can forgive me?

It was what I had wanted, ironically, at this time; a little "time to ourselves" Just the three of us. This body. In glorious isolation. But I didn't want this. To close down the world for this. I am looking, trying to find the love in this act, to see this new ritual as care. Attending to you and your skin and my skin and where they meet in our strange own togetherness. To be able to come close again. To dance with our skins again.

Claire Cunningham

DIFFERENCES

*Creating a Cultural Shift
toward Embedded Access and Artistry*

by **Claire Cunningham,
Jess Curtis, and Luke Pell**

The Way You Look (at me)

Tonight (2016) is an international co-production by San Francisco/Berlin-based choreographer Jess Curtis and Scottish choreographer Claire Cunningham, in collaboration with UC Berkeley philosopher Alva Noë, dramaturge Luke Pell (UK), video artist Yoann Trellu (FR), and composer Matthias Herrmann (GER). The international scope of this project provided an opportunity to consider a wide range of differences in cultural practices involving dance, body-based performance, modes of perceptual experience, and embodied diversity. The following conversation articulates some of those differences and the ways we've encountered them in the dance/performance communities in the San Francisco Bay Area, Berlin, and the United Kingdom, both throughout the creation process and in subsequent touring throughout New York, Chicago, Munich, Düsseldorf, and several other cities in the US, the UK, and Germany over the last two years.



photo © Sven Hagolani

Jess Curtis and Claire Cunningham, *The Way You Look (at me) Tonight*, Berlin, 2016.

Jess Curtis: It has been amazing over the last several years to experience the incredible infrastructure that surrounds the work of self-identified disabled artists in the UK, which I witnessed in my work for Blue-Eyed Soul Dance Company and Croi Glan Integrated Dance, and in my collaboration with Claire on her piece *Mobile*. In a country that has only about half again the population of the state of California, there is an extremely rich diversity of work by artists who identify as disabled. In addition to a whole range of individual artists making dance, performance, and live art of all kinds, there are many professional touring companies, like Candoco, Graeae Theater Company, Extant Theater, Marc Brew Company, Birds of Paradise Theatre, and StopGap. Having enjoyed the physically diverse work of Bay Area dance and performance pioneers Neil Marcus, Frank Moore, AXIS Dance Company, Sins Invalid, and Dandelion Dance Theater for many years, as well as the work of Bill Shannon, Emery Blackwell, Alice Sheppard, and the late Lisa Bufano, this sense of a much larger scene and a much more developed cultural landscape for physically diverse artists in the UK really excited me.

Luke Pell: It's probably important for us to note that the strength of this work in the UK rests—in part—upon the radical disability rights movement of the past thirty years. The introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act in 1995 employed the Social Model of Disability to address reasonable adjustments that ensure that disabled people can fully participate in society. “The social model”—unlike the medical model of disability—doesn't locate disability in the individual but in the physical and attitudinal barriers found in the world.

Claire Cunningham: While I understand that the strength of the UK scene is due to many of the reasons outlined above, I also know that one of the defining differences in the UK is...money. Money has been invested in disability arts/art by disabled artists, pure and simple. I would be both an ignorant and a privileged fool to pretend that my position or my career were not the result of genuine investment, financially as well as creatively, in an artist.

My specific degree of “success” as an independent artist and disabled artist¹ is directly related not just to being in the UK but to being in Scotland, as in recent years the Scottish government chose to invest in culture

as something nationally important and, significantly, as an “export.” Our national arts body/funder, Creative Scotland, chose to go beyond legislation—i.e., basic equality and diversity requirements with regard to disability. It chose to invest in disabled artists as an area of specific artistic focus and development. It supported the development of artists like myself to research and make work, to pursue training (because institutional training was and still is not particularly suited to supporting disabled dance artists), and to platform that work at home and abroad.

No matter where I perform in my career, nothing will be as vital as my performance in 2008 at DaDaFest in Liverpool—the UK's longest-running disability arts festival. For the first time, I knew I was playing to a room of my peers—to other disabled people, many of whom were quite politically active, indeed militant, regarding disability. I knew I would genuinely be told the truth about my work, and I would be told if it reflected badly on disabled people. There is a weight to the sense of responsibility that comes with being identified with any oppressed group. You are seen as representing everyone. Every work I make,

“I think it has been useful to reorient the gaze of the programmers to see that dance, of all the art forms, has the most to gain from engaging with, as opposed to appropriating from, disabled people.” —Claire Cunningham

every public image, every tweet, every document, etc., I have to check, to vet that it is not reinforcing any negative stereotypes of disability, not taking backwards steps, and that can be exhausting. And then of course I am also a female choreographer on top of that—but that is a whole other article!

For me, it is vital that my work exists in two “worlds”—in the disability arts realm (in festivals created specifically by and for disabled people) and, for want of a better term, in “mainstream” contexts. Until “mainstream” festivals become accessible to diverse groups of people—that is, from my distinct perspective, visually

¹ Living in Scotland, I work under the concept of the social model of disability as defined in the UK; therefore, in this article I am using the term “disabled artist/people” as opposed to “people with disabilities,” as is more often practiced in the US. I personally refer to myself as a “self-identifying disabled artist.”

impaired, D/deaf, or hard of hearing individuals; those with physical or learning impairments; or neurodiverse individuals—disability arts festivals provide a vital and safe environment. In addition to being welcoming, they offer a space of shared experience and an understanding of people's needs, which includes recognition that those needs are valid and not a hassle, not additional, and not a burden—they're just different. At present, not many venues or festivals make disabled people feel welcome.



Claire Cunningham in *The Way You Look (at me) Tonight*, Tanzfabrik, Berlin, 2015.

Luke: In 2011, the Live Art Development Agency hosted Restock, Reflect, Rethink 2: Live Art and Disability in London. This was the first time that I had been part of what seemed to be a genuine convergence between peers and colleagues practicing in live/performance art, disability arts, contemporary dance, and choreography in a proactive and provocative way. The symposium spoke not only to physical diversity but to a spectrum of diverse aesthetics, ideologies, and embodied experiences.

We have begun to see a proliferation of permutations, rather than assimilation into what has gone before. Alongside the aforementioned touring repertory companies, a number of independent UK artists—including Mat Fraser, Liz Carr, Caroline Parker, Janice Parker, Tony Heaton, and the Disabled Avant Garde—have led the way as artists and activists. They all create highly politicized work across differing artistic disciplines—dance, theatre, cabaret, comedy, visual and live art—challenging norms in terms of form, aesthetics, access, and equality. Artists such as Rita Marcalo, Catherine Long, Caroline Bowditch, Dan Daw, and Jo Bannon have drawn upon their unique lived experiences—the particularity of their non-normative movement patterns, morphologies, and sensorial differences to further expand understandings of who can dance; what dance and the choreographic can be; what it might look, feel, sound like; and what other kinds of spaces and structures this work might manifest in, in addition to mainstage repertory companies.

Jess: In Germany, on the other hand, the state of physically diverse work, and the awareness of it, is much younger. When my company, Gravity, made our first piece that included professional disabled performers and addressed issues of physical diversity in 2007, titled *Under the Radar*, we had a hard time finding venues in

Berlin that had an awareness of these issues at all. Two notable exceptions in Germany were the CI-based work of Contact 17 (Sandra von Döhren and Stina K. Bollmann) in Hamburg and the work of DIN A13 in Cologne. Led by disabled choreographer Gerda König, DIN A13 has tackled a variety of issues, travels internationally, and firmly aligns itself in the category of professional art-makers. Lately there has been a dramatic shift, particularly with the leadership of the dramaturge/curator Anna Mülter of Sophiensaele and the Tanzhaus NRW in Düsseldorf, who is spearheading a new initiative called Making a Difference, which has received major funding from the federal government in Germany to develop pathways for disabled people to receive professional-level training and cultivate the professionalization and presentation of disabled artists in general.

Claire: What has been interesting is how the work I make is programmed for different reasons in different contexts. Sometimes my work is programmed because I am a disabled artist and programmers are trying to instigate social change and encourage the development of art for/by disabled people in their own countries. At times I feel it is my responsibility to try to support this. However, I know that often my work is programmed because it presents something new to programmers, and this is when we get closer to this question of being “mainstreamed.” For those festivals/venues, my work is asking questions around aesthetics, bodies, what dance is, and who should dance. For many European programmers, that is the way in—the art, not the “social cause.” And in this regard, the long-term development of art by disabled artists in the UK has finally taken the work to a level where the quality and artistic value is recognized and indeed can't be questioned.

I think it has been useful to reorient the gaze of the programmers to see that dance, of all the art forms, has the most to gain from engaging with, as opposed to *appropriating* from, disabled people. The lived experience of disability is a state of perpetual re/negotiation with the world around us—how our bodies move in space and time, and acquiring different relationships to these factors—which is surely also a possible definition of choreography. This concept of perception as an active process affected by each of our unique physicalities has become an important focus that shapes much of my work. It is what led me into this recent (re)collaboration with Jess, and ties directly into the theories of “enactive perception” proposed by our collaborator, philosopher Alva Noë.

Luke: Jess and Claire’s project exists in that liminal territory between dance and live art; between philosophy and choreography; between access and assimilation, equality and difference, mainstream and margins—a queer, open space of possibility, interrupting and disrupting the mainstream—offering different volumes of information for different embodied experiences, making space for more imagination.

Jess: Since my piece *Under the Radar* in 2007, discourses around disability have continued to evolve in the US. Recent advancements include Dance/NYC’s task force, which published a report—co-shaped by our colleague Alice Sheppard—titled *Disability. Dance. Artistry*. Early this year, AXIS Dance Company hosted the first ever National Convening on the Future of Physically Integrated Dance in Washington, D.C. In conjunction with our presentations as part of the 2018 American Realness Festival in New York, Claire and I convened a symposium on performance, perception, and diversity called Making Sense of Each Other, hosted by Gibney Dance, Movement Research, Dance/NYC, and American Realness.

As a result of our research on access-accommodations for this project, my company Gravity has initiated an Access Services Program, through which we are beginning to provide audio description and other access-accommodation consulting for artists and organizations. The arts are

leading the way on these issues; we recently got a call from a major computer manufacturer to provide audio description for its 2018 product launch in Silicon Valley.

One of the things that has excited us most about working on this project as a team of international collaborators is the coming together of differing cultures, contexts, and sensibilities—not just in terms of disability politics and the very particular lineage of those movements in each country but in terms of the lineages of differing cultural politics, people politics, aesthetic sensibilities, ethical practices, economies, and ecologies. These very different lived experiences and realities intersect, come from different margins, collaborate, wrestle, listen, touch, and dance together to make something greater than the sum of their parts. This is only possible by really being open to difference, rather than trying to make difference disappear. ♦



Claire Cunningham [left] and Jess Curtis, *The Way You Look (at me) Tonight*, Berlin, 2016.

A version of this article previously appeared in *In Dance*, October 2016.

The Way You Look (at me) Tonight (TWYL) is a co-production of Claire Cunningham Projects and Jess Curtis/Gravity and, as of this writing, continues to tour internationally. For more information and to see excerpts of the work, go to: <https://www.jesscurtisgravity.org/twyl> and <http://www.clairecunningham.co.uk/production/the-way-you-look-at-me-tonight>.

[Turn the page to read excerpts from the *TWYL Accessibility Handbook*]

Excerpts from

Accessibility Handbook for *The Way You Look (at me) Tonight (TWYL)*

The following excerpts are from a booklet created for presenters of Claire Cunningham and Jess Curtis's work *The Way You Look (at me) Tonight (TWYL)*. This guide has two aims: to specify the minimum-access requirements of the work and to offer a brief introduction to access, supported by marketing materials and examples of best practices from the UK.

Access in the Project/A Note from Our Team

Accessibility is fundamental to our project, both conceptually and politically. When we speak of access, we mean not just barrier-free architectural access but also the use of practices that provide access to patrons with differing sensory experiences and abilities.

In addition to overt practices such as sign language interpretation and audio description, we are working with a concept coined by Chloe Phillips called “stealth access,” in which audible or tactile information from the stage is available through the performance itself and is not immediately noticeable as a secondary add-on access practice.

A fundamental dramaturgical concept in the show is Alva Noë's proposition that each of us has our own unique style and habits of gaining sensory access to the world, and that attention to those modes of access is an important social responsibility.

It is central to our project to model and share best practices of access in each venue where we play, and to continue to improve and develop our approaches together.

As we've been touring this work, we have found that much of this information is new to people, and we have been asked to share this handbook beyond the confines of our own project. We are happy to make our entire 12-page handbook available if you are interested. We hope it may be useful to you and can help make your work more accessible.

TWYL Access Vocabulary/Provision Summary

Sign Language Interpretation

- At least one night of the show (in each city we play) must be interpreted for D/deaf audience members by a certified sign language interpreter (SLI) in the appropriate sign language of the country.
- On these nights, the SLI is integrated into the show, making the interpreter part of the action on stage. This requires prep work by the SLI and one rehearsal/run-through, ideally at the dress/general rehearsal the night before the opening. This may affect the SLI's standard fee.
- We have complete SLI preparation materials available.

Audio Description (AD)

- AD is a live or prerecorded audio track provided to visually impaired (VI) patrons through a wireless headset system and is available at every performance.
- We travel with a prerecorded AD track and a system with 12 headsets, which should be pre-reserved and are distributed in the lobby before the show.

Touch Tours for Visually Impaired Patrons

A live pre-show tour through the stage—guided by Claire and Jess and supported by our technicians—offers visually impaired patrons the chance to experience the space, performers, and objects tactilely and spatially.

Captioning

- Recorded audio texts are captioned in English and projected onto three screens around the performance area (sides and back).
- Projections are part of every show and make sections with recorded audio text accessible to D/deaf audiences.

Accessible (Non-Segregated) Seating

- Primary seating for *TWYL* is on the stage and is either on chairs or on cushions on the floor, facing in different directions, usually with at least one “outside” row of chairs on the perimeter.
- Level rolling access to the stage area is required, as the stage must be accessible to wheelchair users and others with mobility impairments.
- Seating is unreserved but is arranged quite specifically. Wheelchair users may choose any location where a chair or cushion is placed. We will remove the existing seat for them.
- Some directional concerns make certain areas of the stage more functional for sign language users, but they may also choose to sit in any available seat.

Community-Specific Marketing and Outreach

- If your theater does not have a regular practice of providing accessible shows, it will be necessary to do some proactive outreach, particularly in the D/deaf, disabled, and blind/VI communities to let them know you are presenting work that is accessible and/or relevant to them.
- Hire D/deaf, disabled, or blind/VI consultant(s) to discuss community media outlets, give feedback on your marketing materials, and help you get the word out. Community service institutions like Lighthouse for the Blind often have staff available to offer this kind of support.



Claire Cunningham [top] and Jess Curtis [floor] in *The Way You Look (at me) Tonight*, Tanzfabrik, Berlin, 2015.

- Add D/deaf, disabled, and blind/VI outlets to your press lists.
- Buy advertising space in D/deaf, disabled, and blind/VI community media.
- Organize a “teaser” performance, a lecture demonstration, or an accessible workshop at a community center, program, or school rooted in any of these communities. People who have never experienced your theater may not take the risk to attend solely on the basis of advertising. Claire and Jess are very willing to discuss and schedule these off-site visits in relation to performances at your theater.

Additional Access Topics addressed in the handbook:

- Venue Access
- Box Office and Front of House
- At the Show
- In the Lobby, Entering the Theater, During the Show, After the Show
- Marketing & Communication



To request a copy of the Handbook,
email us at: info@jesscurtisgravity.org

Many people on the TWYL team worked hard to produce this handbook including Jak Soroka, Catherine King, Emma Jayne McHenry, Vicky Wilson, Sheena Khanna, Nadja Dias, Luke Pell, Alley Wilde, Chris Copland, Claire Cunningham, and Jess Curtis. We've drawn on resources from Unlimited, Accessibletheatre.org, and Disabilityartsinternational.uk and would like to acknowledge their important work in this field.

To contact the authors: www.clairecunningham.co.uk;
www.jesscurtisgravity.org; www.lukepell.org

Links to other artists and resources:

accessibletheatre.org.uk
unlimitedimpact.org.uk
unlimitedimpact.org.uk/the-importance-of-being-described-earnestly
disabilityartsinternational.org
creativecase.org.uk/guide-Access
vimeo.com/channels/artistsondisability
thisisliveart.co.uk/publishing/access-all-areas-live-art-and-disability
graeae.org/about-us/access
extant.org.uk



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Four Legs Good ...

Claire Cunningham & Dee Heddon

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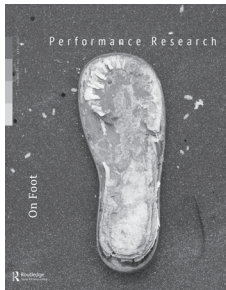
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Four Legs Good ...

CLAIRE CUNNINGHAM & DEE HEDDON

Where does it start? Muscles tense. One leg a pillar, holding the body upright between the earth and sky. The other a pendulum, swinging from behind.
Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A history of walking* (2014: 3)

I have realised that for me walking is a form of reaching, because I'm reaching forwards always with the crutches. There is a reaching in the step for me all the time. It has a curiosity. There's something very active in that term 'reaching'.
Claire Cunningham, interview with Dee Heddon (2017)

Dee has been thinking about walking and diversity and diverse walking practices for some time now. She has been thinking about how much writing on walking, including her own, is ableist. In its references to rhythms, and reveries, and relationships between footsteps and heartbeats, it presumes and represents a certain type of body undertaking a certain type of walking (Heddon and Porter, 2017). Dee has been thinking that she

needs to use the resources to which she has access to open this space and extend the conversation and representations.

Responding to 'On Foot', she invites the Glasgow-based performer and choreographer Claire Cunningham to join her on a walk (2017). Claire self-identifies as a disabled artist who sees her use of crutches as being formative both in her identity and in shaping her artistic practice. Dee proposes to Claire that they walk along the canal that runs through the west of the city. Claire messages her a reply:

Errr ... can I ask could there be another option than canal tho? Somewhere with slightly more interesting terrain? 😊 don't mean it needs to be up a mountain or anything v dramatic, I just realise that a canal path I think of as flat and tarmac and v unchallenging to me which means I feel a bit unmotivated to walk ... No reflection on the company as motivation to walk!

I guess this knowledge in itself is a conversation ...



On 28 December 2017, Claire and Dee set off to walk to Burncrooks Reservoir, near Strathblane, on the outskirts of Glasgow, Scotland. The sunshine is bright and the sky blue. It has snowed heavily during the night and the temperature in the shade does not rise above freezing. Claire and Dee are dressed for the weather. Claire also wears a clip-on microphone. They walk and talk.¹

Dee: You're scanning the ground all the time. What are you looking for?

Claire: I'm looking for ice on the ground. I'm looking for where the ice narrows.

D: You're going to be walking where the sun's been most. There's a partnership between you and the sun as you walk.

C: I really move into four-legged style, so everything moves individually. Right foot, left crutch, right crutch, left foot. Nothing moves without me having checked where it's going first.

D: So, you have to have something on the ground, and tested it, before taking a step forward?

C: And everything has to be quite stable. I'm on the bits sticking out of the ice. Like stepping stones in the ice.

D: It's bloody cold in the shadows. I am noticing that, as we're walking slower, I'm not getting as hot as I would normally. I'm going to have to put my scarf and gloves on now.

C: If you were using crutches, you'd be warmer.

D: Are you warm?

C: I'm not cold.

D: Right, we've got over the ice now.

C: I can actually look up.

D: Is that the first time you've looked up?

C: Everything just becomes ground. When I stop to rest, that's the moment I look up and around. Walking on the road is less interesting to me, but also less safe, because it's slippery. If I was alone I'd probably walk up that bank. Because I'm not walking along looking at the scenery, this bank is more interesting to look at. The verge of the road, the ditch, it's uneven, where the snow

starts, the mix between gravel, grass and snow. It's interesting to me because it's uneven, whereas a road and a path is really uninteresting.

D: The road itself is not interesting for me to walk on either. It's just very stable walking ground. Which is why I like it. I don't have to think. I can just look around. This road allows me to be in the environment without thinking about walking.

C: The act of going somewhere for a walk doesn't interest me so much, so I want to be interested in the act of moving. I need it to make me want to walk. Walking isn't something that allows me to switch off. It's not this effortless activity.

D: What does it mean to you, then, going for a walk?

C: I think in my head I'm like, 'What's the point of that? Why would I do that?' I would like to get to those places that walking allows me to get to, but the actual act of the walking is not pleasurable or effortless enough.

D: Now, Claire, what do we see in front of us?

C: That's exciting. I guess it's where the stream is running across the road.

D: We've basically got a sheet of ice.

C: With bits of gravel poking through, and mud.

D: Do you think you read terrain really quickly, quicker than most people?

C: I think so. I often think of *Terminator* movies, where you see through his eyes, he's kind of scanning. I feel like that's what I'm doing.

D: What's going to determine the best way across this? What are you looking for?

C: Rough patches, where the crutches are really going to have traction. The more uneven it is, the safer it is to brace the crutches against, so if you've got bigger stones, or where there's places where I could step across or I could do little jumps across. I can actually jump across quite big areas with the crutches as long as I can find places to brace them. If this was running water, it would be four or five feet wide, and I could just put my crutches in the middle of the water. Like a vault.

D: The sun is already going down. A walk to you doesn't mean going out and having a relaxing time then?

¹ The transcribed interview uses chronological extracts taken from the recording.



C: Not really. It's not a relaxing thing for me. It requires a lot of energy. If I'm walking I'm pretty much just concentrating on the ground. I think that's one of the advantages, though. Because I spend a lot of time looking down, I then really make an effort to look up. I really treasure the choice of looking up. So, the fact that I need to stop and rest more, that becomes the point at which I stop and look around.

D: I am noticing as I'm walking with you that I am looking at the ground more.

C: There's something about the snow: it looks purple. Here, because it's started to go up hill a little bit, I want to move onto the verge because it's rougher. I get nervous that the road might be too smooth under the ice.

D: Is this your normal pace?

C: Probably a bit slower than in the street. But then you get moments like this, where there's a little puddle, and I quite like this shift into another time frame of almost slowing down and moving into this super careful mode.

D: I like to just walk. To go. I can't even read a map.

C: What does 'going for a walk' mean to you then?

D: It does mean getting out. It is something about the movement. That's one of the reasons I don't like hill walking, because I've got to stop after about twenty paces to breathe. So, for me, it is about the body getting into a rhythm, a momentum, I guess. It does relax me. I like to feel the momentum. I just want to walk. Which is why I like paths. I like long-distance walking because you just get on the path and walk. And it isn't intellectual at all.

C: So how does this feel for you then? Because you can't get into a rhythm.

D: It's more convivial. I like that.

C: I've carried this thing about not really going on a walk with anyone because I didn't want to spoil their walk. There's a whole element of guilt around disability that manifests in lots of ways but that's not really talked about. That's a big part of it for me. The people I know that go walking, they walk because they want to go for a walk; they want to walk for escapism; or for energy, or to get to the top of something. Potentially, I can't do that with them. I would think, 'Why would you want to go with me?', because I'd spoil their walk. When I walked up the hill, the Whangie, with my friend Cormac, he said he didn't care if we only got 50 feet from the car park and turned back. He didn't care. But I needed someone to say that to me. And then realizing that we could then make a deal and negotiate something that was really interesting for both of us.

D: I think the negotiation is a really important part of it. Anytime I go out for a walk I'm negotiating where it is and how long it is.

C: This is the thing that I sometimes do when I teach workshops. I started just sending people out at the start of the workshop: 'Go for a walk with someone you don't know. Go for a walk for 15 minutes.' When they return I say to them, 'According to my definition, that's choreography, because you spent 15 minutes negotiating time and space with somebody. How do you read those negotiations? Some of them are physical, where somebody slightly turns towards a direction – "Oh, we are going up here are we? OK" – or you have to have a conversation, where some things

have to be talked out – “I want to go here; you want to go there” – and what are you learning?”

D: So that for you is choreography, then?

C: Yes, bodies in time and space. And how you are doing that. You are doing it in a hundred different ways every second, like us altering our pace to find a pace that works for each other. When do we need to stop? How are we negotiating stopping? Are we saying it? Is somebody just doing it? When do you just need to ask somebody using spoken language? – Oh, I just saw the loch.

D: Yes, and just 20 minutes away from Glasgow. It’s part of the long-distance path, the John Muir Way, which runs from Helensburgh on the West Coast to Dunbar – Muir’s birthplace – on the East.

C: I’ve been in the John Muir Woods, just outside of San Francisco. Wow, it’s so beautiful. Why don’t I do this more often? It’s just amazing.

D: I know you’ve got this ongoing project, ‘Four Legs Good’. When did you become interested in exploring walking?

C: In part it was out of a desire to think about how to get outside more, how to connect with nature. *Can I connect with nature? Actually, do I have any connection to it, as somebody that feels like they never go out in to nature? Walking feels like this thing that doesn’t make sense for me, but I still have a desire to have tried it or gone somewhere beautiful or gone out into these beautiful places.* I guess it started with Cormac being really open to that idea of going for a walk.

As part of my practice I’ve noticed how the lived experience of disability is made manifest, how I behave in the world and how I notice the world. I began to wonder what other people noticed. I became aware that I really notice the ground; my spatial awareness is really heightened, my coordination is really quite good in certain ways. But there’s certain things about my body, for example, my visual focus is correlated to my feet, so I’m always looking at where the crutches go, particularly the crutches and the feet; it’s very hard to move them independently. Especially if I know I am somewhere that has any degree of risk, that’s uneven, slippery or trip hazards. Then my eyes and my crutches move together. I began to get interested in what it was to go on journeys

with other disabled people and see what they were noticing. And what do I notice, even when I walk through a town, that’s maybe specific to using crutches or to feeling a little bit fragile? I don’t want somebody to trip over my crutches or bump into me. What are the things I notice and what are the paths I choose, not just in a city, but in a room, or at a party? Where do I put myself? Where do I feel safer? Also, as a way to try and connect with a local place and a local person more when I go on tour, so I see more than just the theatre. I invited people – so far they have mostly identified as disabled – to go on little walks or journeys with me.

D: You call them journeys?

C: I started by calling them ‘walks’, but then decided on ‘journeys’, to get away from the bipedal. I started to try and think more in terms of journey, maybe also acknowledging that walking might not be the way people travel. If someone wants to take me on a taxi ride to take me through their favourite journey, or by boat or by bike, then I try and be open to that.

D: What have you learnt from journeying with other people who are physically disabled?

C: I think there is quite often, particularly with physical impairment, a very specific sort of relationship with the ground; people develop an awareness of the ground. I’m always interested in where our attention goes. Maybe we pay a lot more attention to our environment perhaps than bipedal, normative-bodied, people? Or notice things in our environment that other people don’t notice so much, whether that is the ground, or the camber of a road? There’s a subtlety of terrain that we notice, I think, that’s missed on foot, that you don’t feel. You don’t feel that this bit of ground is that much lower, or the angle, and the shifts, and the way that the ground can move. Shoes shield you so much from that feeling and connection. Also, things about energy. There have been a lot of conversations about understanding how to ration energy. My friend Dan, to walk with me, has to slow down. If he walks slower, though, he feels like he’s perpetually falling. In order to keep his balance, he has to move at a certain pace, to keep upright, to feel more stable upright. And brilliant moments like with my friend, the



scholar Julia Watts Belser. We were in a park in Manchester at one point, and we got to a little hill. We had to negotiate the fact that she needed to push on, shoot up the hill ahead of me, and leave me behind because for her to go slowly up the hill in a wheelchair was just exhausting. She needed to just power up it and get to the top and wait for me. We develop a whole way of negotiating the world where we read what each other needs really quickly.

D: Do the people you journey with have the same feelings about going for a walk as you?

C: Not all of them, though the first couple of people I spoke to, we thought we might start calling it 'The Reluctant Walkers Club'. But Julia uses a chair, and she will say, 'I love going for a walk.' She'll use that language. For her it does give her an escape, and an energy.


D: I'm much colder than I would normally be. Are you cold?

C: I'm not actually. This is quite warm and energizing for me.

D: There's an enormous amount taken for granted about what walking is and how it's done. Can you describe how you walk?

C: At the moment, this is secure ground we are on. The snow gives it a little bit of friction and

that friction means I can walk mostly by planting two crutches and then move my two feet. I am more walking on my feet and the crutches are a little bit stabilizing, taking a little bit of weight as I step through. But when things get more icy and treacherous everything shifts far more into the arms, and I trust the arms, rather than my feet. Everything shifts because that's the strongest part and occasionally I do little suspensions to get over tiny little points. I think there's a whole process that goes on very fast: planting the crutch, almost a little grind of the crutch point into the ground to dig it in, there – it's hit gravel, it slides and there it grips, and once I feel it's really secure I'll lift my body weight up and into them and suspend. It's that thing that happens, that need to be very vertical that people have to do when they walk on ice; they change where their weight goes. With me, my centre really shifts up and down. If I move along with my crutches just touching the ground, but not really taking any weight, then my centre is really down in my pelvis, like most bipedal people. As soon as I start planting my crutches, I become a little more diagonal, my pelvis goes back a little more, and my centre shifts up to my chest, so this becomes the point around which everything is moving. The crutches come in much tighter at certain points to the body. I am really aware that my elbows are much tighter in on this terrain,



rather than being out and low and my elbows out wide. My elbows are holding quite tight to my body to brace, but also they keep me a bit more vertical above the crutches so the weight is pouring more straight down because the more I'm at an angle on the crutches the more chances something will slip. When it gets more precarious, I go more four legged. The crutches and rib cage become more like a frame that everything is hanging off. Almost like a trapeze frame, an aerial frame.

D: That sun is nice. So, your walking research, where is it going to go?

C: I don't entirely know yet. I am working on a bigger project which I'm calling 'Hermit Crip', which is a series of residencies I'm undertaking, choosing to spend an intensive period with another disabled person – so far mainly artists – looking at how the lived experience of disability manifests for us both, and where overlaps might be but also what is created and inspired by that time and the 'exclusivity' of a disability lens or aesthetic, with the potential for influencing both our fields of work and maybe future collaborations as well. Another project, 'Crip Wilderness', is an idea that grew from one of these 'Hermit Crip' residencies, spent with Julia Watts Belser at Cove Park – an artist residency space in Scotland.² 'Crip Wilderness' is more specifically interested in a Crip politic and body relationship to environment – particularly places that might be deemed 'wild' and questioning that. It continues an ongoing interest in the relationship between the disabled body and nature. Working with Julia, we hope to bring artists and scholars together to think about the knowledges that these different bodies have which could open up, for Julia, her interest in climate change and the knowledge that disabled people have. Disabled people really understand living with change – the fact that disabled people are very aware of the fallacy of independence, and the need to know how to communicate with people and how to facilitate support. If you're dealing with any of these sports where people are out climbing or anything that has any degree of risk, you need to know how to communicate and to know when to say when something is enough or when you need help or even what helps is.

Like that thing of knowing when to step in for somebody, that they don't even need to ask because you know how it all works. That was what was so interesting being out with Cormac on the hill, the realization that these skills being used in these extreme worlds are all the same skills that I recognize in disabled people's everyday lives: navigating, rationing energy, negotiating with people, risk.

D: Perfect timing, Claire. The sun is just about to go down and the moon is up. I am very cold. We have walked for one hour and 49 minutes.

C: That's amazing. If you'd said we'd walk for two hours I'd be like, 'I can't walk for that long.'

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² Julia Watts Belser is Associate Professor of Jewish studies at Georgetown University.