

Luke Pell, presentation Ignite

Slide – begin anywhere/begin with what you know

When preparing for today I fell back on a favoured John Cage aphorism – Begin Anywhere - I find that liberating and sometimes daunting, so when I facilitate workshops I often say ‘Begin with what you know’

Slide – C-Type photograph Luke Pell - ode

What do I know? I am an artist. I make performance – whether that’s in the form of devising, photographing, facilitating, thinking, producing or curating.

Slide – collaborators images – Liz Atkin, Marc Brew, Rachel Gomme, Athina Vahla

I am concerned with *other* ways of being in the world and I collaborate with outliers, individuals and organisations across artforms to make work that in some way pokes at what we are *unprepared* for.

In a Western world often occupied with *normalising*, what we are unprepared for might be difference in gender, sexuality, ethnicity. It might be ageing, trauma, death or disability. It might be about how we go about relationships or making meaning.

I was recently *unprepared* for losing the person I’ve come to realise the most influential person in my lifetime, up to now.

Slide – image of Nana year before she died (2009)

Influence at this time seems an important thing to consider – as across the arts sector we come to know our landscape in another way. Over the next few years we may see those influences we have grown up with or indeed nurtured from young, transform or disappear. A pertinent time for reflection, while we grapple with change.

Slide - Candoco Turning 20 image

My work with the now mainstream dance company Candoco, as Head of Learning & Development, is very much about influence and preparation – about who is being prepared for what and influencing the mainstream. Mainstream understandings of disability differ depending on context.

- In Film it might be Avatar
- On TV it might be Eastenders or Cast Offs or GLEE, depending on continent, channel, time slot
- In opera it might be ENO’s most recent production of Britten’s *Peter Grimes*

- In visual art it might be Alison Lapper

For mid-scale dance touring it might be Candoco

We might challenge and question these representations or misrepresentations but I think it's important to acknowledge they are where many people are at – people make meaning from the information available to them, the preparations they are afforded. To make change we need to begin there. Begin with what they know.

The mainstream offers a place from which to begin, in the same or opposite direction. This year Candoco turns 20, at this juncture in the company's life we reflect on where it has come from, how it is known and perceived. What does it need to be, to remain relevant in a different time and shifting context? We have two decades of oral and embodied history to learn from, to articulate more clearly. With this comes a responsibility to disseminate our learning in the most useful and appropriate ways possible. In getting better at talking about what it is we have done, what we do and what we don't our process and values should become more visible.

After 9 months of research towards organisational development Candoco is very clear it cannot be all things to all people. Candoco is a company of disabled and non-disabled dancers, currently in its 7th generation of dancers and second phase of leadership. The company operates in the professional mainstream touring dance sector, the nature of which comes with its own particular requirements and considerations. In the same breath the sector continues to evolve, artists change, as does the work and where it is presented. We recently co-curated our first cabaret with Greenwich Dance, showcasing a range of disabled artists working in performance with very different aesthetics and mediums, this was an important first for Candoco in celebrating our relatedness.

Slide – Unlimited artists images

At 20 it feels that there is a sea change upon us. Not just for the company, for a sector often described as dance and disability. Disability arts and contemporary dance in the UK are now maturing art forms/movements. For 2012 Unlimited makes a significant investment in the work of some disabled artists. New work to be seen by new audiences and hopefully many, young disabled people and emergent artists. A significant body of work has been produced. An expertise that can be distilled, shared, offered up to inform, advise, signpost – to support emerging generations in choosing where to start – as well as being an excellent pool for those maturing artists to reflect on, draw from, move on from.

Slide – CType photograph husking branches

Personally I've noted a far more collaborative spirit in the dance sector. That whilst being distinct and individual there is recognition that we each feed one another. Speaking specifically about dance, many of us know there simply hasn't been equal opportunity for the development of disabled dance makers and performers as there has been for their non-disabled peers. We know there are significant barriers:

- Economically with regards to resources and support
- Environmentally in terms of physical access
- Socially in terms of thinking, teaching, guidance and inspiration

Slide - Slide – CType photograph LP thick deep water

Despite cuts to the arts, education and benefits we (as a sector) are now armed with decades of evidence and information to address the changes that need to be made with rigor. To do these things properly takes time so whilst we make visible provocations, we also have work to do deep below the waterline. Candoco for example are embarking on research within the specificity of our context, with Trinity Laban to address progression routes into professional training.

Although there are inequalities in the level and amount of development opportunity available to disabled artists, the need for any artist to continue to work at one's practice is the same. An artists practice evolves through training (formal, informal, self led) through presentation, through time, medium, collaboration, challenge – the more one works on their practice they know what it is or isn't.

Slide – CType photograph LP web-lace

Equipped with this knowing an artist should be empowered to make choices as to where they think is the right place to present their work, to discover who the people to surround themselves with, to talk to, to share, exchange, to disagree with are. In the current climate it is useful (as we are today) to look at our relatedness more closely, who does what – who wants what – who hasn't got what –where are there commonalities, links, overlaps, intersections. These are the kinds of conversations artists and companies can have and are having already with promoters, producers, festivals and vice versa. In a landscape where the opportunities and places for presenting working are changing what does this mean for the work and artists.

Where are there significant differences and where are the gaps? The inclusive dance sector is a rich and vibrant community, in acknowledging and celebrating the many, many differences in work rather than limiting everyone with one descriptor I hope we can move towards carving out the most appropriate pathways for every artist – relevant to their way of being in the world.