TALK: ON CRIP ART PRACTICES: ‘A RELUCTANT VANGUARD’
AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Part 1

Natasha Hoare

We're starting with a reading from Abi Palmer, who will also speak as a respondent at the end of the sessions before we open to questions from the audience. So, Abi is an artist and writer. She uses sculpture, text, film, and sensory intervention to explore sick bodies, viscous textures, and ecological landscapes. As part of that, we’re showing 2 gigantic slugs by Abi. A chic slug, which is upstairs by a reception desk hanging from the ceiling. and Arian Ato, the black slug ready entrance of the basement gallery just through here, leaving the party. These artworks were made for their solo exhibitions, Sly Mother of Chapter in Cardiff, and then Sight in Sheffield. She's the author of *Slugs: A Manifesto* and *Sanatorium*, from which she will be reading today. So I'll hand it over to you, Abi. Thank you very much, everyone.

Abi Palmer

Hi, everyone. Welcome to the very boomy microphone. How are you doing? Are you feeling well? Are you feeling slimy? Yeah? Yes. Okay. So what I'm going to do to set us off is I'm going to start by reading a wet, slimy passage from the beginning of *Slugs: A Manifesto*, which I think is quite important for thinking about like solidarity and care and why spaces like this are important. And then I'm going to read a little bit from *Sanatorium*, which I haven't read for ages. So, I'll start with *Slugs: A Manifesto*. Things you've got to know, a pneumostome is the big hole in the side of a slug's body. It's their breathing hole. They only have one on one side of their body because they only have one hole, so they only need one hole to breathe through, isn't that cool? I used to be really horrified by slugs. If you're horrified by slugs, that's okay. Yeah, let's start.

We huddle together under a fallen leaf. It is cool and dark. We breathe from the fat, wet numerous stones on the right side of our necks. In and out and in again. Our damp skin breathes too, steam rising in barely visible wasps. Our pores expand to absorb one another. A shared wetness, a holy water making us whole, flattening the wrinkles in my prune back. And the ground is so rich it is blessing us. I can feel it in the flap of my belly, my gelatinous foot. I expand, release and swell in all directions. I want to feel all of it. The earth is breathing too, ground opening foils and dirt and moisture rising to mingle with the steam from our skin, our breath. The humid air aligns with the cool and glossy underside of the leaf. Soon the leaf is drenched with tiny little beads of sweat. As the breath deepens, the beads get larger until one by one they fall onto our naked skin. I pledge this to you. Whoever chooses to rest with us under this humble leaf will not go thirsty.

Thank you. So yeah, a fun fact about slugs. They evolved from snails to become more terrifying, like more disgusting. They have less predators as a result. But also, a really cool thing that they do is in heat, in periods of heat, when they're trying to protect themselves, they will climb on the leaves and share the space and circulate their own moisture so that everything that's under that leaf benefits. So, like if there's a little beetle or if there's a snail, they'll benefit from that too. So, they're a solidarity animal. And I think that's pretty cool.

This is *Sanatorium*. It's a book I wrote before the pandemic. It came out during the pandemic. I launched it from my bathtub on Instagram live during that period. It wasn't a normal bathtub. A lot of this book is about me complaining that I didn't at that point have a real bathtub. I just had an inflatable bathtub from China. But this bit is exploring, one part of the book is a lot about out-of-body experience and the experience of when I get extremely hot or if I have not slept, my body goes into like a paralysis state and I climb out a bit, which I think is also relevant to the amount we are dissolving today. So this is a bit about that.

I lifted a medicine ball because I believed in medicine. Believed at least that the problem could be cured by increasing gravity's pull on my putty limbs. I lifted the ball and knew instantly I was wrong. But I held on tight. I moved with the ball. I told myself it would help me. I lifted it waist high, already knowing my mistake. But medicine. I rotated it three times clockwise, three times back. I spent the rest of the day in that heady mix of euphoria and the twitch of muscles that do not like to be woken. At night, I took my medicine, but the ball was stronger. I kept on twitching. Slumber was cold and dead. Pictures did not come in to me. All night I thought of medicine, how the morning after I might creep towards the pool to cure this error and exercise judgment, dragging my shoulders just below the surface and turning me three times clockwise, three times back.

At 6 or 7am, my beloved awoke. I rolled head first onto his pillow. I buried my face in his shoulder and breathed his breath, hoping to borrow his stillness. Medicine. Nothing settled. I allowed my lungs to resume their own pace. My limbs were coiled and revolting. And then, between wake and asleep, I am the shape of my sleep. When St. Teresa arrived at St. Paul's crying, a split line, a floating hallway. If that's what heaven's like, none sat on my chest and shrieking, I've felt it. Years of not knowing, timelessly in the half light and where my lips end, I am frictionless and if you were seeking proof we were undesigned for such gravity, falling back on our faith, I've felt it. Limbless and twined and in multiples, sunbeams have split, they're pulsing apart, a marionette in tangles, wetting the bed. is over, fingers picking between my teeth where they shouldn't be. I felt it. A light plug factory, garbage trucks, statues carved with electric breath, crying milk in darkness, yawning into rust.

NH

Thank you, Abi. So, now I'd like to invite the other speakers up to the stage. I'm delighted to welcome Yates Norton, who is curator, writer, strategic advisor, currently working as curatorial and strategic advisor to Knotenpunkt, and also guiding the new Arts Foundation, Just the Moment of Stand, launching Autumn 2026. Previously he was curator at Roberts Institute of Art, where he worked across the residency programme, commissioned new performances, *Hey, Maudie* by Rachel Jones and the Turner Prize-nominated performance *The Ruin* by Simeon Barclay, and developed a wide range of interdisciplinary programs, spanning exhibitions, music, and writing. He is committed to disability justice, collaborating closely with David Ruebain, and presenting his work at institutions including the Institute of Contemporary Arts and the Serpentine.

Mariana Lemos

Leah Clements is an artist from and based in London, whose practice spans film, photography, performance, writing, and other media to find moments of transcendence. Her work is concerned with the relationship between psychological, emotional, and physical states, often with personal accounts of unusual or hard to articulate experiences. Her practice also focuses on sickness/cripness/disability in art, and how real and imaginary realms can operate as radical spaces to address collective experiences. She is the first Artist-in-Residence at Greenwich Park, London, which just finished, I think. And her solo show, *Apophenia*, was also very recently at Peer, and it's closed and travelled to Sheffield to Arts Catalyst, and it's open now. So if you're around there, go see it.

NH

Jameisha Prescod is an artist, filmmaker and writer from South London. With work grounded in a research-based practice, Jameisha explores how culture, identity, black history, and colonialism influence the way illnesses are experienced. Their work reimagines how disabled stories and history can be archived in the most experimental ways. Jameisha and Leah have been in conversation recently in Leah's Peer exhibition, talking about water and their practice. The recording is online.

ML

David Ruebain is Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Free Speech Officer and Professor of Culture, Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Sussex and Chair of Panel of the Premier League's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Standard (PLEDIS). David is a past winner of RADAR's People of the Year Award for Achievement in the Furtherance of Human Rights of Disabled People in the UK. He has also been nominated as one of the 25 Most Influential Disabled People in the UK by Disability Now! Magazine. In 2023, with Yates Norton, he co-curated the online exhibition *Beholding Relations: An Exploration of Disability, Oppression and Liberation* for Unit London Gallery.

Yates Norton

Thank you. Thank you, Mariana. Thank you, Natasha. And also, this is such a superb exhibition. I spent a lot of time here, especially also with your work, which I found incredibly moving. So, none of you are experiencing it right now, but please do come back and lie on the bean bag and experience this very, very, very special piece. I also have to reflect on the fact that this conversation here has come out of very strong relationships and very strong friendships. Leah, I first met when we were in Lithuania years ago, And David and I have been very close friends for over 10 years, unfortunately for you. It's been a difficult time. And we've just met, so we have many conversations ahead, I'm sure.

And the reason why I'm just reflecting a little bit on relations, relationships, is that I think that's certainly something that's going to come out in the discussion today, because the idea of cripping, but also just what the disability justice movements have shown us, is that none of us are autonomous, independent, separated individuals. We are constituted in and through relationships with others and the world around us. A world in which we are, after all, inextricably apart.

So, there's a great set of questions around the ethics of relating to one another, also around ecology. It's interesting, Abi, just hearing your reading now, and I didn't know that about slugs, but now I will be more careful when I walk past them. And I think there is something profoundly important in so much that disabled people, disability justice movements have shown us in terms of how we can relate to each other and specifically how we can move beyond these ideologies that are very strong in late capitalist neoliberal societies of individualism, the idea that we have to consistently and continually self-optimise, that we have to be autonomous.

And I think what all your practices have done have been to show us the values and the importance of dependence, interdependence, care, which is an awfully overused word in the art world, especially by institutions which are some of the least caring institutions, but still a very important one and which has had a very rich history of the ethics of care, and most importantly I think, relations.

I just wanted to say a brief word about Knotenpunkt, which is the initiative, we've been very careful not to call it an institution, but an initiative who supported Leah's commission and this symposium set up by Isabelle Nowak. And many of the things that we are going to discuss today around attention, relations, imagination are things that are at the core of what we're trying to do in our programme. So please do look up the various conversations and the future events that we're going to and exhibitions that we're going to do.

Right. I'm not going to assume that everyone knows the terminology here. And maybe all of you do, maybe some of you don't. This word crip is a very complex and kind of

interesting word to dissect. But I think we should also just reel back a little bit to think about the terminology that is used in the UK, at least in terms of disabled people as opposed to people with disabilities and why that is an important distinction to make. The question of impairment and what does that mean specifically in terms of the social model of disability, which again I don't think, maybe you don't know what that is, but I think here we have a chance to explore it. David, I'm going to start with you because you have the most experience here in terms of...

David Ruebain

I'm the oldest.

YN

You're the oldest. That was a really like diplomatic way of saying you're the oldest. And you've had this extraordinary career that has mixed together activism. So you've been on the ground as I understand it. But you've also been head of legal policy for the Human Rights Commission. And so you've had a macro view of the structural conditions that militate against connection, that create the barriers that disable people. But also, central to your work, are relationships and individual relationships. You take the feminist dictum of the personal is political right into the heart of what you do. Since you've got this sort of overview and you were one of the key figures in the disability justice movement in the UK, Can you give us an overview of that movement? Talk a little bit about the social model of disability and how you relate to the identities in terms of disabled and crip. Right, there you go.

DR

Well, first of all, thank you for that wonderful introduction. I really do think I'm the oldest person in the room. I don't want to take up too much time because there's lots to say and my colleagues have got lots to say. But it's probably relevant to say that I was as a child in what's now called, well, what then was called a special school. That was at a time when if you were disabled, you almost automatically went to special school. It is a little bit different now. But when I was a child it was a kind of, it was the default. And actually the school that I went to shortly before I arrived had changed its name and it had changed its name from being called a crippleage and then it became a school. So crip and cripple, cripple has been around forever and it's always been largely pejorative, indicative of pitifulness, failure, uselessness, sexlessness, genderlessness, hopelessness.

And even then, at that school in the 1970s, we would call each other crips. And in the way that many words have been reclaimed, like queer and as a kind of a defiance, as a form of defiance. But I don't think it had the salience that it does now in public life. At that time it was very much a language that was used between disabled people only, and

not all disabled people at all. And lots of people didn't, would shrink from using it because of its connotations.

And I think with the kind of rise of what became the Rights Now campaign, which was the coalition of civil society organisations campaigning for anti-discrimination legislation in the late 1980s and then into the early 1990s, I think that whole zeitgeist, that whole movement, brought disabled people together in a way which was very, very different for disabled people because it was very powerful and I think so the social model is essentially a framing of the experience of disabled people, people with impairments, people with medical or quasi-medical conditions, which focuses the problem on exclusionary structures rather than on the body. So rather than saying my problem is I have cerebral palsy or chronic illness. My problem is that you don't want me, you won't employ me, I can't get in, you mistreat me, those things. And in that kind of reframing, it was a liberatory, it is a liberatory concept, but more importantly, it allowed us, as disabled people, to re-relate to each other in a different way.

So rather than victim to victim, it was, superhero to superhero if you like or not quite that because there's a whole other narrative about super crips which is problematic in itself. But it changed things and I will stop because I'm keen to hear other thoughts but I think in many ways now that has been embedded. That has been embedded even in our laws as I mean Critical legal theory is very interesting around all this, but it's been embedded in our laws. Whether it works or not is a different question, but there is an explicit recognition that disability is a rights issue, it's not just a private medical tragedy sort of thing.

But what you were mentioning, Yates, about the kind of impact of neoliberalism, I think, is a real problem for us because what I see now is that we have rightly owned a liberation narrative, but somehow we often feel like we have to out-crip each other or out-something each other. Not always, and I know probably I'm exaggerating for effect. So there's something interesting there, but I think the last thing I'll say is that crip I now hear much more, certainly in my university where I work, the disabled students use it frequently in relation to each other and other people in a way that never was before. And I think that's amazing in many ways. I mean, it isn't something that I, because I'm old, I don't, I never have called myself a crip but sometimes I find myself thinking in that way. So it's probably not true to say that it's not for my generation, but it's evolving.

YN

Interesting. So for you both, maybe we'll start with you, Leah. So just how you relate to the term, how you understand it, but perhaps more interestingly, what has it enabled in your practice, but also for your life in general?

Leah Clements

The main thing it's enabled is for me to find my friends, I think. By the way, everyone, I am blocked today. I do not feel that well. So forgive me for like losing my train of thought mid-sentence or suddenly leaving. Anyway, now that's out the way. Being able to do that, yeah. That's a framework to be able to, yeah, exactly, to put that out there and recognise that, and put my trust in the idea that the majority of people in this room will either understand or at least give grace to that. But yeah, I mean, that's one thing. I mean, it also comes a little bit with diagnosis, which me and Jameisha talked quite at length about, is that when you get given a word, it can do a lot of harm, depending on whose hands it's held in and what power. But it also can act as a sort of like secret identity hub that you can maybe use for yourself in order to find other people with that word where you have a common experience and a shared, you know, maybe shared physical experiences or experiences of being in the world. And it doesn't mean that you have to have all exactly the same everything, but just there are certain connections.

Like once I, years ago, I messaged Alice Hattrick who wrote a book called *Ill Feelings*, which everyone should read if you can. And they were working on it at the time and I messaged them and said, do you ever have that feeling like you just think, oh, tomorrow will be better, tomorrow will be better. And then they sent me a clip from, like an extract from their book that said exactly that. And it's just like, yes, thank you. And just those sorts of moments.

But I guess in a more technical sense, I do use the words disability and disabled very frequently as well, as well as sick, as well as ill. But crip defines for me something that is, it's necessarily political in a way that disability isn't, and it's necessarily intersectional in a way that disability isn't. So I think once you can have that as a shared common understanding, then it's just like, I'm fucking tired, I don't have time to be like sorting shit out, like sorting through stuff, sorting through people. Do you know what I mean? Any more than I have to. So being able to like use that as a shortcut to find your people and to like work out where you are for me has been quite important.

YN

Beautiful. And Jameisha, because that's what you were saying about finding friends and people. Jameisha, in your own work, and particularly online, I'm so struck and moved by you, you're so generous. You share so many resources, ideas, thoughts. You acknowledge people. So it seems that this is also an opportunity to build relation with other people. But interesting to hear your approach to this word, crip, in particular.

Jameisha Prescod

Well, thank you. That's very kind of you to say. I would like to say that I think at first I was quite intimidated to even say the word crip because while I am a disabled person, I acknowledge that, historically, my type of disability perhaps wasn't necessarily referred to in that way, and therefore I wanted to hold space for the different experiences of

different types of disabled people. So it kind of at first felt like a term I wasn't necessarily able to reclaim because I acknowledged that someone with like lupus and arthritis, perhaps historically, I wasn't necessarily, or people likely weren't necessarily labelled with that term, especially if it's invisible. Maybe I wouldn't be able to walk around and say, oh, I have arthritis, but not necessarily be called that term pejoratively.

So at first I was like, maybe I shouldn't be saying it, but maybe that's something that's not mine to reclaim. However, upon reading theory like crip theory, crip time and these things, it gave a language of understanding myself outside of the way that the term perhaps was historically used against different types of disabled people. So crip time made sense. It gave me a language to understand the way that I work, the way that I live, and therefore allowed me to have grace for myself and others and patience for others. Now, I mean, if we're talking about relationships, we may be communicating with voice notes, same with Abi, same with many other disabled artists and friends. And even the gaps in sometimes those voice notes are two weeks, three months, six months apart.

It took the language of things like crip theory and crip time to be able to make sense of why that makes sense and to be able to enjoy that. And then also to explain this special feeling that only really exists when I'm with disabled people. That when we're in the same room, it's like electric, but I wasn't understanding why. And so upon reading these terms and understanding and learning more, it sort of explained what I was feeling.

Still to this day though, I still think about perhaps if I should be using that term or not. I'll be honest, like I'll be transparent about it just because I always like to acknowledge that I acquired my disability, or at least understood that I was disabled, later in life. I wasn't necessarily born understanding, and those experiences should be acknowledged that they are different and that those perhaps with visible disabilities, well I argue that invisible disability is not necessarily a thing, you kind of look harder and realise it's not actually visible, but those perhaps where it's more visible, will live a very different life. And so sometimes I'm wary of what terms I use because I think it's important to be able to acknowledge that our experiences are different and have different levels, different ways that we need to advocate for each other. But at the same time, the language, as you were saying, just provided understanding, I think. And then it's transformed the way that I live, walk, make work, speak, and all of those things. So it's been quite transformative in that way.

YN

Do you think, so crip maybe just to give a kind of really basic definition to a term that isn't basic. I mean, in some ways, crip to disabled is a little bit what queer is to gay, in a reductive comparison. And my understanding of it, it's also a continually evolving word, in that it's really about a mode of relation, a way of being in the world. So it's kind of verbal.in the sense that it's about verbs, so relating, attending, waiting, being sick, being

slow, or taking time, all these, a number of different kind of ways of relating that are, at least in its early formulations, are specifically set against, so as you were saying, it's a political project of dissent and resistance to what is called compulsory able-bodiedness.

So the idea that the assumed norm of a human is to be productive, efficient, speedy, autonomous, independent, all the things that we talked about earlier. But of course, that's an ideal that absolutely no one, “ideal” in inverted commas, but that absolutely no one ever, every single human on this planet, because a necessary condition of being human is being vulnerable and going through changing states. So, it's got a political project. It is set against the backdrop of what you were saying, David, this neoliberal agenda, which forces down our throats these values of competition productivity, efficiency and speed. There's nothing inherently wrong with productivity, efficiency and speed. But the way that they become the dominant values means that it devalues other forms and ways of relating. So for all three of you, I have two questions. The first is, do you think you have to be disabled to crip or to even identify in complex ways with that term. Maybe we'll just start with that. Where should we start?

LC

I just want to say something first as well. As Jameisha was talking, I was like, oh no, did what I just say about not having time for people, I mean, but Jameisha was thinking, oh, I knew you didn't have time for me. That's not what I mean. So, I'm clumsy today. Yeah, okay, so I don't, do you know what, Yates, I don't know. So, some of you will know that a very famous, in our world, book was written by an academic called Robert or Roger McCreer, I can never remember.

YN

I think Robert.

LC

Robert, I hope so-called *Crip Theory*, and when you learn about crip theory, that's the book you check out at the library because it's called *Crip Theory*. And it does offer a foundational introduction to it. And it is brilliant in many ways. But the fact that he is not disabled has always sat a bit uncomfortably with me. Not in a way that I'm like, he definitely cannot speak about these things. I don't find it clear cut at all, actually. But I don't find it, I don't know, I can't get at ease with it either. And I think he does identify as crip when he's not disabled, if I'm correct, or at least did at the time of writing that book. To crip, you used as a verb. No, I don't think you have to be disabled in order to do it. I think we need a lot of abled people to do it, actually, if anything. But identifying with it. Yeah, I don't know.

Do you know what? It makes me think a bit of Eli Clare's book, *Brilliant Imperfections*. But he intentionally brings up a chapter towards the end that he finds really hard to sit with in the disability world. I won't go into the specifics of that because the point is just that he's like intentionally trying to trouble himself with it. And I hope we kind of have space for that. Yeah. What are your thoughts?

JP

I don't know. I think it's quite a difficult question. I think it's similar to you. I think in ways of using it as a verb, I try to do that with all my relationships in the ways that I work in transforming the way that we interact. And so with non-disabled friends, you know, I model how I interact with my disabled companions similarly because I can feel levels of this need to perform that productivity that you were talking about with my non-disabled friends that they do not have to do with me and yet they still do. So in communicating sometimes what I've learned from being disabled and through my disabled friends that they're able to learn and able to maybe necessarily unlearn like ways of being, even though they're not disabled. Although the question would be what is disabled, which is relative as well, because I've got friends that perhaps experience ableism but don't identify as disabled. I respect that right to say that, but would still benefit from perhaps cripping their way of working, communicating with me, walking around in life and allowing themselves to take space or to have, I don't know, like just not forcing themselves to perform and then therefore disadvantaging themselves in the process.

DR

Thanks. I really recognise both of what you say. So if I'm thinking of something that I can add to that to complement it really. I think of identities, any identities, as relational rather than essential. So in that way they're fluid. So I'm noticeably disabled, but my identity as a disabled person changes from moment to moment, depending on what I'm doing, who I'm in relation to. Sometimes I'm not at all disabled. You know, I have economic independence in relation to other people who don't, and then it makes no sense to think of me as disabled in relation to that person.

So these things are very fluid, and that's probably the way that I most recognise the verb to crip because I can see that could apply to almost anybody, really. I mean, I notice that lots of people identify as queer, nowadays, almost regardless of the nature of their personal relationships, whether they're in same-sex relationships or whatever relationships really, and that's interesting to me. So I can see, definitely see the points that you're both making and I see that too. The only, the one thing I'd say is, and this is probably a bit contradictory because this whole thing is messy, there are places where we need to be able to say, this is me, which is a bit different from who you are, sort of thing. And I think we all need that in different ways.

YN

I think one of the key things is probably the question of what privileges one has. It's a bit like a guy can be, a man can be, a cis man, can be a feminist and be very committed to feminism. But if they didn't acknowledge the privilege that they get from being a cis man, then that's very different, I think. And I think what you were saying about identity is, I mean, the issue with how identities have developed today in this particular era is that it becomes, they increasingly become another kind of outpost of this neoliberal agenda where we're all in competition with one another and that we are all ultimately separated. So our specific identities become almost like brands which are opposed to one another rather than, I thought it was very powerful what both of you were saying that an identity can be something through which you cohere a community. It can be extraordinarily powerful.

I mean all movements often start with an identity, but it is also the means of being oppressed and it is also the means of being separated. But it's interesting that all of you have, I think, quite rightly spent some time with the messiness of it and the fact that these things are messy because being human is being a bloody mess. That's the kind of fundamental aspect of being alive. And it also perhaps involves these identifications and disidentifications kind of continually, which is probably a nightmare for certain places which want to label and categorise people, but is best in terms of a kind of ongoing conversation and ways of relating that you can have with one another.

I think this question of, because I was going to ask, but maybe we'll do this in the second section on fluidity because that's something that I know you two can talk a lot about. But before we get there, let's just stay a little bit on this term crip. And maybe given that we've thought about it in terms of its refusals of, we're using this word neoliberalism, which I'm aware in the art world is so overused, often by people who purport to kind of want to dismantle it, but then do everything to kind of keep it up. So if we're just using this term as a broad understanding of the kind of society we're in, which it's essentially in terms of, for the purposes of us, it promotes ideas of individualism and competition. But so crip and crip theory has emerged out of that, the kind of project of being in opposition to that. Do you think crip can be positively defined, so not defined in terms of what it's trying to negate or just dissent from, but what it's trying to, as a, in and of itself, something that that can be kind of defined by experiences and people. I'm thinking, Leah, with you in terms of joy, pleasure, but actually also in fact all your work, so that's why we're all here.

LC

Yeah, sorry, give me 5 more seconds to think about that. I'm just having a lot of thoughts, that's fine. I guess the word disability is necessarily defined by, if we take the social model as the basis, what you cannot access because the world has disabled you. So it's hard to just linguistically separate it from that. Yeah, I do think cripness has

a potential for that, or to at least hold, I don't know, yeah, I don't know if it can only be defined by anything positive or as positive because we do live in this world.

But yeah, crip joy is definitely a thing. It's like why I'm saying with you guys. And yeah, that thing that we were talking about earlier of recognising your own experience in somebody else's words or face, like expression, feeling. It's hard to kind of put your finger on really, you know, and like, yeah, you might have it in group chats for those of us who find it hard to meet together physically. Or on rare occasions when you can are just like, they feel so special. I just want us all to be in a huge bed together, watching a film on the ceiling. That's my idea of crip joy.

JP

I think similarly, maybe I can't answer the question just so eloquently necessarily, but maybe I'll answer it through just experiences that perhaps yes, and those moments are perhaps if we speak on art, maybe the art that gets created because of, not just in spite of, but because of the way in which we navigate the world. Some of the experiences that we have that you wouldn't, you just cannot get because there are not two disabled people in the space or more than.

So, I think of like a friend of mine, I stayed with her in the Netherlands. She's disabled as well. She's a wheelchair user or a power chair user. And she lives in the Netherlands and I visited her and she's also autistic. And I don't know why I am not diagnosed, I'll say that. But when I got there, she was like, I'm going to go in my room now. You can stay here. We don't need to speak even though we haven't seen each other. I was like, that's exactly what I need. But the fact that I didn't have to, I would have maybe masked that if that was somewhere else because I would have had to perform. And so that was already communicated through her because we were both disabled people that felt comfortable to do so.

That bit of joy was amazing. And also being able to ride on the back of her scooter was great. When would that joy exist? I guess if we were not the two of us in that room, like I guess like that to me are the sort of things that I find quite special. So whether or not we're defining the term just simply, I guess, what we're pushing back against or what is positive, I don't know. But all I can say is that some of those experiences I just don't get with anybody else and I treasure them a lot.

DR

I'll just say briefly, because I imagine we need to break. Does anybody remember the bar scene from Star Wars? The bar scene. In Star Wars, yeah, but it's interplanetary bar scene with... creatures of, with eight heads and, for this and that or whatever, and grunting and snorting and whatever. When, what I remember, the best thing about the

non-violent direct action movement when it was really active, was when we were all together, we looked like the bar scene. And the thing is, it's so deconstructing.

I mean, I do think neoliberalism is a good way of describing some of the big challenges we face, the individualism and the self-regardedness. And in fact, it infects all of us, I think. But there was something which is so contradictory to that, which, and if that's, if you can call that cripping, which I might, I think it's wonderful. So maybe for me, if it's used not so much as a sword, but as a, as a way of reimagining the world in the way that you describe with your friend or, you know, on WhatsApp groups, then I just, I think, well, first of all, I think we should all do it, so therefore not disabled people can crip, but also it's got something really important to offer.

YN

Oh, David, that's a very beautiful segue into the second part, because we're going to talk about imagination and also I think how ableism affects everyone. Thank you.

Part 2

YN

We will get started again. We have probably about half an hour, but we can also see how everyone feels. And obviously, we want to open it up to the audience. But don't worry, we're not going to go anywhere beyond 9pm. So, like, we'll be wrapped up certainly before then. Right, so in the first session, we ended, well, you ended, David, with a nice, some few words about the power of reimagining other ways of being in the world and being in relation. Something that Isabella and I talk about a lot is how impoverished our imaginations seem to become in our society. And I'm actually really struck by the sort of mean-spiritedness of imagination also in arts institutions, which purport to be sort of supporting and to be custodians of the imagination.

So, imagination, I think, has a very strong political and ethical element to it. And I think it's at the heart of a lot of crip practices, and it's also one of the driving forces behind the disability justice movement because it refused to accept the way in which relations and the way in which we inhabit the world as the only and the quote unquote natural way in which it should be done. And so, I think maybe we'll start with you because of your piece, which how many of you have seen this just to get a sense of... Okay, so not so many. Can you start just by describing it?

LC

Okay. So, if you are sighted, you can see above you there is a huge circular transparent tarpaulin. I'll try and describe it for anyone who's not sighted as well. So it's got a pool of water at the centre, kind of like a jewel, and it's hanging down at that point. And it's

being held in the centre of the room by some metal cables. And then as we're sitting on the stage, behind us is a large circular screen, which is painted white. And so, when the piece is running, there are some seats to the sides, some different kinds of seats for different bodies. There's some space as well, and there's bean bags on the floor. And when you come in, there are words projected on that screen, and it'll be darker than it is right now, and the words are subtitling the voice of somebody you can hear playing, and there are captions as well to describe the other sounds.

And this voice is somebody called Rene Aurora who had a near-death experience. And It's specifically an NDE, which stands for near-death experience, but that sort of defines the kind where you leave your body and where you, know, some people describe it as seeing a light at the end of the tunnel, which she doesn't, but it's that kind of like going somewhere else, transcendent state of being. And as she's talking, a voice starts to come in that's kind of singing in an ethereal way that's not, it's a human voice, but it's warped in a way that a human couldn't exactly produce, like holding a breath for like an inordinate amount of time. And so as it progresses, the person speaking, Rene, describes leaving her body and having this experience of utter bliss.

And that's where the title *Pure Joy* comes from. She's about pure joy. And then she talks a little bit about wanting to go back there and looking forward to crossing over to the other side when she does go. And at the point where it kind of peaks, the singing becomes like totally euphoric and a light shines through this body of water. And it's very simple, but kind of referential to, those like paintings where there's like the heavens open up and there's a shard of light that kind of comes diagonally down. And it's a very kind of sort of holy transcendental, yeah, experience. Or there might be BSL instead of text sometimes, depending on when you come. Yeah, I think that describes it, does it?

YN

Yeah, really, really, really well. And one of the things that the narrator says is this experience. was a feeling of absolute interconnectedness and love. And it's kind of hard to even say it without it sounding like a hallmark card. But it does seem that, correct me if I'm wrong there, but that's a, that is a sort of feature of these experiences.

LC

Yes, it can be. Sometimes it can become quite scary for people. Not everyone has a good experience, but the majority of people who report back it is, yeah.

YN

And is there that feeling of love and interconnection? Is that the...

LC

Yeah, like total ego, death, disillusion, mind, body and soul into like beautiful ether.

YN

I mean, it's funny that we have to almost die to realise this, this fundamental thing that we are all interdependent, that there is no such thing. I mean, we've been saying this from the beginning, that there is no such thing as this isolated individual. What drew you to this particular experience and why did you want to sort of present it in this context here?

LC

Oh, it actually has a bit of a long story, but I'll try and not go on too much as I want to hear everyone else. But do you know what? I don't remember where I began with it, but I've always been interested in these sort of transcendent experiences, and that's kind of what my work centres around. There's always some kind of leaving this world or leaving a body. But actually, as I was making the work, which originally I interviewed Rene years ago, and as I was kind of doing that, somebody very close to me died and I found it really comforting that perhaps she had this nice time leaving. And I hadn't had a, I hadn't had a near-death experience at the time.

And I still haven't had an ND in that kind of blissful way, but I have nearly died. I've been very close to dying a couple of years ago. There was just nothing. I'm really disappointed. So I wonder if I picked it back up because it felt like a remedying thing. Like, I didn't get to have that. So I'll just create it here, you know? And I mean, this space lends itself so well. I've had a crush on this space since I saw it and it's really nice to put some in.

YN

That's, I think, so this idea of being in an in-between space is also something that you're, I think, exploring just throughout your... I haven't read a text that you've written, but if I understand it, I would obviously like to read it, but it's written in... in a kind of response to or in companionship with Virginia Woolf's *On Being Ill*. Is that correct?

JP

It depends which text.

YN

I'm trying to find it now. I should have gotten it.

JP

There is one I've done recently that's slightly less about in-betweenness, and then there's one about water. It's about in-betweenness. But it sort of is a common thread, so it depends on which work is.

YN

Well, maybe just... Specificities aside, like, what is it that has drawn you to that particular quality and state of being.

JP

I don't exactly know concretely, but there's been, anytime I make work, there's always, it always feels like the meaning is in the middle. Like it's never one thing or the other. There's always like this space that is often in between things that maybe we can't see nor do we speak about very often. And that could be in many things. So, in an essay that I wrote about water and colonialism, that water is an in-between space. It's in between, vertically between the sky and the ground, earth, but it also was used as an in-between space for colonial nations in between the country they were coming from and the ones they were going to colonise. And so what can happen in that in-between I think can be inspiring about what can we imagine that can exist in that space.

Interestingly enough, it's not out yet, but the most recent piece I'm doing also explores the in-betweenness of sleeping and wakefulness and illness as an in-between of life and death and what can happen in that space. And if you're ill a lot, you're often visiting the space between sleeping and wakefulness very often, especially if you're like in a flare-up and you're sleeping a lot. And what I found at one point in an essay that I wrote, which is in one of those anthologies, but it's a different one, I had a cousin that passed and I saw him in that in-between. It was a brief moment though, so just waking up and I just forgot he died. And it made me realise that I'm almost like feeling that anything can happen there. So what can be imagined in that space can be quite fascinating. What can be imagined for disabled bodies in that in-between, in any in-between I think I find quite exciting to sort of like just explore. So I've sort of then accepted what sort of tends to be a starting point now when I make work. Like I always try to find the middle and then what can be imagined then I guess.

YN

That's really beautifully put about what is possible because I think especially when in an ableist world one is greeted so much with impossibility or access just becomes a problem to which there is a logistical solution, everything is treated as a kind of problem rather than as a creative departure point for imagining new worlds. To go back on what you just said in the last session, what kinds of worlds do you think crip can imagine and make possible?

DR

No, I just, I love your description of your piece. In my mind I'm calling it, “Where are the fucking angels?” What a great question. So I keep coming back to, I think the thing, you know, I don't want to be reductive about the experience of disabled people, people with impairments, but if there are common features of our lives which are positive features,

there's something, it is about this idea of, for me, of, it's a real stand against this idea of siloed living and having, you know, it being down to each of us individually to make our lives for ourselves.

And in fact in that extreme model our relationships are only really there in so far as they meet our needs sort of thing. And I think disability, impairment and solidarity leads you to have a completely different mode of thinking. So, you know, it is joy. It can be joyous. I mean, maybe you were talking about crip joy, I think. And I know that, and there's obviously disability pride. There is something very unique. It is kind of unique. It's not exceptional, and there are many other communities who have similarities, but there is something very particular about failing in the eyes of the world. Because there's no doubt that the disability, disabled people in the disability community are predominantly still seen as being defective. There's no doubt about that and there's something tremendously powerful about community in the face of defectiveness. So, I'm not sure if I'm answering your question but there's something really exhilarating actually.

YN

And artistically for both of you and in writing, how are there certain forms or forms of expression that you are drawn to, especially when it comes to picturing these things that are in between states, very incredibly hard to articulate? I mean, the piece that you have here is describing surely one of the most undescribable experiences that you can possibly have. And there's also added layers of the audio description, which itself is a kind of another interpretive lens of the sounds and everything. But yeah, but because in your work, fluids, movement, installation is often a kind of key part.

LC

Yeah, and a lot of films are, also kind of like everything. I've actually been thinking about that a lot lately, and I haven't come to any conclusions, but I, a lot of my disabled friends and peers will like change the way they work often to adapt to their body, and there is often an immediacy... Immediacy, is that a word? Okay, here we go. Three people's approval... To the making of it that feels like some of my favourite artists and close friends are making these... I know, I just said some of my closest friends. That sounds like it's going to be ridiculous... Are making work in which their body is visible in the process. And it can be a really DIY aesthetic.

And, you know, Bella's beautiful sculptures upstairs that are drawn in, I think, charcoal on the DWP letters, which for anyone who hasn't seen it, if you can please do. As an example, like the materials that are close to hand and you can do it quickly and you can, and I don't do that. I in fact make things so hard for myself by removing them almost as far as possible from myself and from my body. I could not make this work in bed. I had to have other people help me make it and make a lot of it for me, which is a disabled thing anyway, but it also had to be in this space, it had to be commissioned.

Like I couldn't, I couldn't just do it in that sort of like... making it happen around myself way. And I keep doing that.

And I just, the film of mine that's in an exhibition in Sheffield at the moment, it's like, I worked with a film crew and we went to different locations and it took so much coordination. There's no way I could have done any of it from my home in that way. And I'm just working out why. Why do I do that?

And it kind of brought me back to when I was studying here at Goldsmiths, actually, a tutor of mine, my coach, said, why do you keep trying to make yourself disappear? And this is because I was doing work in dark rooms and I made myself somebody's imaginary friend and nobody else is allowed to acknowledge I existed.

Yeah, Mariana is laughing because she knows that was my ex.

Yeah, anyway. But then, like, I'm still doing it and I'm asking myself why. And I think some of it has to do with being in chronic pain, not really wanting to be in my body, wanting to create something that's outside of my body and not have too much relation to it because I want to escape from it.

I also spent a very long time not wanting to be alive and there's something about disappearing and not, you know, like enacting that through artwork instead of this fact against myself. And then the rest of it, I don't know, of course, that there's still some missing pieces there, but I guess it's that interest in transcendence. And I'm just trying to think, I used to paint and I've been missing it for a very, very long time and I think I may just start out with some little experiments again soon, like that immediately of being able to like have a canvas in front of you, have your paint. You don't need anyone else to do it with you. Well, I personally wouldn't, some people would. But I really want to be able to do that again. Yeah. Does that make sense?

YN

Yeah, really, very, really interesting. And for you, Jamisha... what's the question? Yes. It's, well, actually, maybe I'll just expand a little bit on... Because what I've noticed in this exhibition, there's a lot of description. So Jamila Prowse, who actually, I wrote this down from the piece over there, talks about the undefined passage of sick time, which sort of reminds me of what you were saying. But there is, there's this sort of descriptive mode of looking at the world, which comes from chronic illness, being different forms of disability or pain or whatever it might be. And it sort of really attunes one's attention to what we might ordinarily overlook. And I'm struck how there's so much in here, which is about the very banal things about everyday life, the sheets, leftover food. And this descriptive mode to me at least, seems very different from narrative, which is so dominant in our, sorry, I haven't been talking to this, which is so dominant in our

culture. And specifically in an ableist world, you get these narratives of cure or decline. It's either heroism or tragedy.

But this sort of sitting with, as you've both been saying, these kind of strange middle spaces where nothing is really potentially happening seems to be a kind of quality, without essentialising the words, but it seems to be a kind of quality that runs throughout. I'm also reminded of, so to go back to Virginia Woolf's *On Being Ill*, she talks particularly about this, how when you're ill, like she says, I've wrote it down, that you can stare and look at the sky. And she's so incredibly moved by this incredible drama that's going on up in the sky that none of us have the attention to look at. Anyway, in your work, I think there is this very meditative and quiet quality. where you're also spending time with something. So how do you, and also you write, obviously… So how do you, how does this kind of experience of crip, cripness, inform the forms that you engage in? And is description something that you're kind of interested in?

JP

I think cripness informs the format because it informs the process. That the process is partly designed with being disabled in mind. So slightly a bit of my backstory is that I've studied film at uni and then two days in got diagnosed with Lupus. And the film industry is not accessible. I would say it's not even accessible for non-disabled people. It needs to change. It's A disabling industry. It makes people ill. It kills people even, you know, because of the long hours and the tiredness of the crew. Many of my friends have to sleep in their car and then go to the next day.

I obviously could not do that. And then I moved to documentary, which I thought would be really much more open because of the subject matter, and actually it's not, and it's quite quick and requires you to make decisions very fast. And I learned that that's not how I make work. And so how I make work now is with my disability in mind, with rest, with space. And really, I think that gets translated into how the work presents in the format. So in the last piece I made, it was very slow. It took two years to make. The process was designed with gaps in mind. Whether the people I make the work with are disabled or not, it's often with rest, food, conversation and comfort and ethics and all of those things in mind.

And that comes from simply because I learned I'm a slow maker. So weirdly, I think maybe because the process often is informed by that, sometimes the result allows space for slowness and for space to think and to ponder, which is something I didn't find was something I could do when I was trying to fit myself into the way the film industry is when I was originally trying to just be like a, I don't know, make something on Netflix or something. Yeah. So I don't know if that answered that question, but the slowness is where, I guess, the idea is formed. And while most of my work is visual, it's often informed by a sound first. I tend to hear the work before I see it, even though it

tends to take a visual form. And now, interestingly, with you where you're saying you wanted to paint more, I am also now liking a slow process of maybe making something that I can touch. So textiles now, it takes whatever, and it takes longer for me because I've got arthritis. But there's something also to learn on the slowness of that making. So I don't know when that piece is going to come out. It might be two years as well. But I think that informs, I guess, its presentation, I think, which I like, actually, the commissioners might not always like it because they have deadlines, but I like it.

YN

Yeah, I think, and I also think you get that sense in the act of looking at it. You, and it's the same in both of your work, you have to inhabit a much slower pace of reflecting what they're experiencing. David, for you, you have two very high octane jobs. How has this as a sort of understanding of crip time as something which, how have you worked within that, especially within organisations which probably make very little space for that.

DR

I think I'm a very bad crip because I'm sure that part of my coping strategy when I was young, when I was a student and when I became a lawyer and before I moved into academia was, I was so determined that I wasn't going to be limited by people's expectations of me, that I became super crip basically to some extent. And it is that kind of trope really that that's what happens. So I'm genuinely not proud of this, but I find myself relishing impossible things to do so that I can prove something even though I don't need to anymore. But probably never did.

But I do think that there's something paradoxical about that, which is that, the importance of, I don't know, slow time or slowness and space and time is, you could say, it's a bit trite, but you could say it is a revolutionary act as well. But I also, but at the same time, I think some of this, you know, there is some times where we can do things even within the mode of operating that people think is the right mode of operating, and you do it as a disabled person as well as, or better than somebody else, and there's a bit of a “fuck you” about that sort of thing. And I think both they might seem contradictory, but they are both different ways of doing the same thing. So I would love to do more of the kind of slowness, but I'm just not very good at it. I'd love to do that.

YN

I'll hold you to that, David.

I think we can open up to the audience. Yes, go, Abi. Go.

AP

Yeah, I really enjoyed hearing, I mean, I just wanted to say, I guess one of the things that's really interesting listening to you talk about like two of the current things and like, the opposite of rest is like, you're talking about being older. There wasn't time for rest, I think. I guess this is an observation, but I wonder if your sense of how disability politics has changed has changed that perspective.

I feel like it's like entering into the wrong profession, that they're having to get things done and make those changes. I don't think there would have been space for the visibility of chronically ill people who couldn't get things done in that speed. And I wonder how that feels now sitting on this panel talking at this point.

DR

I mean, yes, you're right, and I fear the law profession has not changed very much at all in that area. I mean, notionally it has, and because there are some laws, but a lot of disabled people I know who became lawyers are practising as lawyers, but in related areas rather than in the kind of... intense high-pressure environments, like say a law firm or litigation, that sort of thing. There are some, it's true. Yeah, I wouldn't give the law profession as an example of excellent practice in this.

YN

Any other questions? Or thoughts as well.

Audience member 1

Thank you very much everyone. I really enjoyed the conversation. I'm doing research at the moment into like people with disabilities, so beyond the social and the medical models. And I think there's, I'm not sure if these are valid per se, but I think there's the creative and cultural as well. But I don't, yeah, I don't know if they're actually valid. I think they were coined by token speakers in the naughties about the status of disability, but I wondered if you guys know anything about those models of disability, and if you do, if they give you service in your work. Thank you.

LC

Oh, if I'm honest, I feel like I've read them and then forgotten them. I think I probably was like, yes, I really agree with this, and then was tired and my brain deleted it. I guess disability justice, it doesn't have the word model in it, but that's kind of the term that I probably use myself in and a lot of my peers would because it is more intersectional, although I have trouble with the term and the concept of justice because I don't trust our justice system. I trust you, David, sorry. And it has that, those connotations embedded in it for me. I don't know, have I really heard of those models?

DR

Could you say it again? I missed, I didn't quite hear what you said.

LC

The cultural model and the...

YN

Artistic model.

Audience member 1

Creative.

DR

Creative. OK. And these are models of related to understanding disability. I don't know that I've come across them.

YN

I haven't either, so that's thank you for... Yeah.

Audience member 1

Sorry, just to a standpoint, my background is, to say, I'm looking into kind of the, I'm looking into the... So it's generative... But the generative aspects of disability are, not even harder with the disability essentially. And yeah, basically I've just found this bit of my research, but I haven't found anything else better. So I'm just wondering if anyone did essentially. But I think the answer is maybe it's not that developed and maybe there's space for development, I suppose.

YN

It's a really, I think it's really important, well, clearly a practice that you're doing, but I mean, I'm on the board of an organisation called Dis/Ordinary Architecture, which is precisely geared around that, but in the design and architecture industry, which is to use, for example, in terms of access, to think of it as a creative starting point for design. Because so many architects just sort of go, oh god, I've got to put in a ramp or a lift or something. But why not use certain accessibility requirements as something that can be really generative, as you've just said.

And I think from what you've both said in terms of how you make work from your experiences, that informs the form, the format, and also the experience. So it sounds like a very important, and certainly I think in the art world, definitely needs to be addressed more because the art world, I think, is one of the most ableist industries I know, even though it purports to be very kind of inclusive and open. It's still very much predicated on ideas of health and efficiency. I mean, if you just look at the gallery system, for example. So yeah, no, I mean, thank you for opening that up.

I think because everyone is clearly extremely hot. Should we just go for one more?

Audience member 2

I just thought that would…Be interesting, picking up on what you just said, with the art world conceptually being very open and having these different exhibitions and events. I work in the arts and it's like sometimes the back of the house is not accessible.

YN

Yes, exactly.

Audience member 2

Sometimes the deadlines are really tight. Sometimes the things you're working on are not very flexible, and so I was just wondering if any of you had kind of advice or experiences in the art world of how to kind of make it accessible and open it up, and even with non-profit kind of organisations, I mean, there's been some sort of, yeah, I don't know, they're super ethical in some ways, but not completely open on me, accessibility-wise.

YN

I mean, you've done incredible, both of you have done incredible work on this with the access doc for artists and also your…

LC

Yeah, so “Access Docs for Artists” is an online resource that I made with Lizzie Rose whose work is in that gallery, and Alice Hattrick who we were talking about earlier, which just helps disabled art workers make and share access documents. So, that lists your access needs and you can have it written into your contract, which has some legal element.

Maybe David can talk about the legal side of things.

I think that's quite important, actually, in this context that you're talking about. It doesn't fix everything, unfortunately. Making one and sharing it and then having it followed through on different things. But I personally and a lot of people I know have found it is really useful. First step, even initially to begin to define what your access needs are and see that other people have demanded these things. Yeah, but in terms of like, you said you're wondering about advice, but I wonder what position you're navigating the world from. You said you're working in an organisation, so not from a position of an artist.

Audience member 2

I've done curation and quite different museums and like archiving and libraries and other programs, but I had a little bit of a difficult time finding my niche.

LC

What is the advice? I don't know. I mean, it's a bit fucked isn't it? It's really hard because like I want to tell you to like push for things, but that can screw you over if you say that in the wrong context. Do you know, I really think that Arts Council should come with audience access needs as well as staff access needs being met as part of their, like why they would fund a project, like you have to meet certain criteria because a lot of it does come down to the will, but a lot of it comes down to funding as well. And if they could include that, then I think that would at least make a initial change, but yeah, I'm not telling you to go and like rewrite Arts Council.

YN

I think on that note, we should end. So the note that we're fucked, no, that there is hope. And I think also building community is the most important thing. Thank you guys for everything.