

I'm excited to be here with you all in our private little studio.

And... I'm really excited to talk with you all about
how does your artistic work reflect your other identities?

Tools and approaches that are transferable.

I think a really great place to start is if we just go around our circle
and introduce ourselves.

Where we're coming from, and maybe one sentence
about our artistic practice.

Because it sounds like we don't need to do a full intro.

Hi, my name is Pelenakeke Brown.

I am an artist from Aotearoa or New Zealand.

I am Samoan and Pakeha

and I'm a disabled artist that's looking at...

disability and indigenous cultural concepts
across performance, writing, movement and technology.

I'm really excited to be here with you all.

My name's Maria Oshodi and I'm from the UK.

I am a middle-aged, mixed heritage, African-British woman.

She, her.

I'm brown skinned with brown curly hair

and a black jumper and wearing a pair of terracotta dungarees, today.

And some sunglasses.

I'm visually impaired.

And I have worked in the arts all my life.

I currently run an arts organization,
but I'm also an independent practicing artist.

My name is Katarzyna Żeglicka and I come from Poland.

I'm an activist and an artist.

A queer feminist activist and artist.

My artistic practice comes from my...

activist background and I'm mostly into preparing and performing pieces
that take up the theme of violence and discrimination

against persons with disabilities,
mainly women with disabilities and queer people.

My name is Edu O.

I am an artist.

I work with dance, literature, visual arts,
and I'm also a professor of dance
at the Federal University of Bahia.

My work attempts to investigate the work of artists with disability,
understanding the monolithical approach of the white north.

As this white, archaic approach of artists with disability and...

working as an artist with a disability

and creating an approach, which is inclusive and open.

Thank you.

I think what I'm hearing is that a lot of us are in between,
and I would love to explore with us all...

It seems like we are wrestling between two identities or more.

It might be queerness and disability or race and disability
or gender and disability.

So I'd love to, first of all, look at the intersections
and what are those that you are wrestling with
and how does that inform your work.

I believe that the idea of identities needs to be a discussion that is open
and problematised.

Because the multiplicity of identities is what's constructing us
in the terms of my own work.

I am an artist, I'm gay, cisgender, man with disability
from the countryside in Brazil.

And all those identities inform my work.

Because when we talk about identities, all those identities are totems,
but they can be broken and explored in a multiplicity
of shapes and looks,
and that also informs our identity and our practice.

That's really interesting, because...

I think that I remember once doing an exercise in a theatre,
a sort of workshop,
and it was around status and one of the things they said was...
"Status is given".

So, if you are in a room on your own, you are in relation to no one.
And so your status is ill-defined or undefined,
unless you carry some internal dialogue with you that...
imposes this, in your body or something.

But usually status is in relationship with whoever you happen to be with.
And what you said there about this multiplicity of identities,
I really relate to.

Because I'm mixed heritage and I'm a working class...

There's all these different things,
but they're all defined by society.

I'm just a human being. You talk about the spaces in between...
that's the space in between, where I'm just a breathing body
that's alive, you know.

And then, you are afterwards sort of defined by everything
that gets thrown at you.

And your response is... It's kind of...
measured or controlled by that.

And that's the filter that you then have to move through this world.

So, yeah, that's all I wanted to say.

I feel like I always have more questions than answers.

Sometimes I perceive identity as a cage that I'm kind of trapped in,
and sometimes I feel myself liberated from all this.

I feel like more often than not, my identities...

kind of contradict one another,

because at least in my context, for example...

Myself identifying as queer kind of excludes me from the community
of people with disabilities.

This is especially true in the Polish context,
where the right wing party together with the Catholic church
have the dominating force.

And hence, it is easy to feel like...

my multiple identities are mutually exclusive.

They kind of cannot coexist.

I feel like the approach to disability in Poland,

from the word excludes any other identities possible,

as if we get reduced to a single identity as people with disabilities

However, I've been lately thinking about broadening the concept of identity

In my thinking about...

identity and disability,

I feel like I need to broaden the way I think about it.

One of the greatest sources of inspiration is the way we think about animals.

And plants.

I also feel like maybe

I don't need to perceive myself as a human being, but just a being...

that shares this world with a host of other beings

that should be equally respected, even though...

they are currently not.

It's really interesting how everyone approached the question differently.

Like listening to Kasia, I feel like...

You gave us a really important cultural context

of where you are coming from,

but then also there's this resistance to all the labels,

like Edu, you are all these things, but also you are more than them

or less than them, and it's more complicated.

When I think about the cultural context that I come from...

I come from Aotearoa, but my parents are both immigrants.

And...

then I traveled to a place and decided that I also was an immigrant.

I'm also interested around language.

Normally people who identify as immigrants are normally brown
and if you identify as... What do they call it?

An expat, you're normally white.

So I'm also really interested in what labels you do choose to identify
and the ones that you refuse.

Because I think often the people who get to refuse them...
maybe have privilege.

Even with visual description...

I notice a lot of white people don't say "white".

If you are brown and you forget to say "brown",
everyone always corrects you,
which again is a form of...

privilege or who has the normative color?

But I guess I want to go deeper into your identities,
into your cultural context, and how is it reflected in your work?

I think that would be really important for people to hear
and something I just want to know more about.

We've talked about identities and cultural context
and I want to know how that's reflected in your work.

I want to talk about your art practice now.

And how that relates or doesn't relate.

It doesn't have to connect at all.

You tell us.

Go on.

What was my own question?

Harder...

You said really cool things earlier, just repeat that.

So my work...

I definitely love this in between space that I think we are all drawn to.

So...

my work is kind of...

embedded in this practice of the "Va", which means in between space

or space and time.

And it needs to be activated by relationships.

So you can't just have space over there, you need to have two people who are relating across time and space, and culturally...

in this Samoan culture... that can be between...

brother and sister, between your parents.

Culturally, we do a lot of service and the...

You can see the relationships by the way that we are with each other, or who we serve or who we look after, all those kinds of things.

Time and space is really interesting.

I spent a long time running an arts company, which has taken all of my energy.

And... Though it's been...

a worthy cause...

I've been creating the time and the space for other visually impaired artists to do their thing...

and getting something out of it myself, like I get a regular salary, which is great.

I haven't had much time for my own practice, but I've made some recently...

I say "recently" because my work is really slow.

It's interesting to think about crip time and...

I know you're talking about it in terms of relationship, but also...

something about allowing yourself to be slow...

and for things to take their own time as well.

I've created a project recently where...

I started it in 2014...

and I just finished the R&D last year.

And that was connecting myself with another...

another blind theatre director...

who's African American and...

And he lived in Los Angeles and I live in London...

And I was looking at his space...

or inviting him to look at his space and me looking at mine,
through the lens of us being...

I know I'm using a very visual language here,
but through the lens of us being blind and moving...
through our cities.

What that means in terms of memory...

visual memory, and... our kind of psycho-geography.

And so...

That's a project that's still under way.

Unfortunately, my collaborator has died in the process,
but I haven't let that stop me.

I don't think death should get in the way of a good project,

And in some ways adds to it,

even though, obviously, the loss of a dear friend in the corporeal sense
is acute.

But... You know...

I guess I'm just always intrigued by the the thing of just exploring
this...

this kind of dynamic space of experience in the world,

the way that I do in this current body and how that relates to others.

So...

yeah, that's me really.

It's also important because my main work at the moment is working with audiences
from the early childhood I use to compose that work,

my own memories of my early childhood and how I relate to that

and how my work is informed by how I was as an early child

and still being a person with a disability,

a person that existed, a "being" like Kasia was saying earlier,

and how that informs my work.

And it's very important for me as well in my work,

the idea of breaking the barriers between spaces,
to not box things up into the tiny spaces where people are.
Especially the idea of hierarchical spaces to be informed.
So it's not me just sitting and observing someone perform,
or me performing for someone to be watching what I'm doing.
It's about collaboration and how they inform and build our work
in an influx of creativity.

How can the children be working with us and being able to touch,
to understand space, understand the proximity of others,
understand how they can relate on stage to each other.

Very recently worked in a solo called "Judite wants to cry, but can't"
that is exactly about creating this interwoven net of relationships,
of interconnectivity between different people
and different stages of life,
and how that relationship informs us
as practitioners and as audiences as well.

So just to conclude,
what I meant by breaking those boxes and spaces of identities is exactly that.
With my work, what I try to do is to get out of this idea
of having to box ourselves up into one single identity
as a gay person, as a man, or a woman as a person with a disability.
And see that I can do so much on stage
and how can I move, how can I interact with things on stage?
Allowing the children that are watching and participating in the process
to also see themselves as participants in that
and how they can influence and interact
with those breakages of boxes.

Because whatever is white, able or male goes unnoticed.
I mean, it's kind of default.
And the things that I do will immediately be more visible.
So I feel, in a way, it's cost efficient
that I don't struggle against these things all the time,

like every day in the street,
but I transfer them into my artistic practice
and I try to relate to this somehow, or react to this or counteract this
in my artistic practice, like this immediate boxing...

I also want to add that all of this is very much related to the opposition
or tension between the way I identify myself and the way others perceive me
and does also identify me as something,
because this is more often than not so completely different.

Speaking of the Brazilian context, it's important to take notice
that I'm speaking from a place of privilege.
I'm speaking of a place of an artist that managed to do all that we spoke of.
But also an artist that is here, able to share their practice with everybody
in a different context.

For me, it's also a very lonely task
at all that is going on because...

I am one of those people working with children
also to keep doing my own practice, my own work
and to break those boxes.

So what I'm trying to do is not to just be the one artist,
but to walk together to start creating those links
and finding those places where we can actually create a network,
a group of people that are sharing their work,
sharing their experiences, and building a network
where you can feel less lonely doing this.

In Aotearoa, it's similar to Poland about...
you know, disability is seen in this charity way...

Yes, you did art therapy.

And so I come from, again, a place of privilege
because I moved to New York...

When I went to New York...

I noticed that no one really looked at me. Whereas in New Zealand I feel like,
everyone's always looked at me.

And I feel like in New York, it doesn't matter what you look like, how you walk. Nothing because we've got no time. We need to get where we are. Everyone looks different.

That kind of anonymity opened a real experience of possibility for me, whereas in Aotearoa I felt very like very mixed race, very disabled, not very disabled, but everyone's looking at you because you are all those intersections.

Whereas when I was at New York, all those intersections don't necessarily mean someone is going to look at you. But I do think...

That's a really important place to go.

How can we work together?

How can we not be the only exceptional artist?

I think that's really important.

And during the pandemic, because I moved back to Aotearoa, I really missed this community of disabled artists that I had met in New York.

And so... As a group, I feel like you have experience as teachers, as facilitators, or people who've founded organisations. I would love to learn more about your experience of how we can build collectively together.

Or what does that legacy look like for you?

Or what is your experience...

As a teacher, community organiser, or founder.

I have to tell you that my experience is pretty much negative because I run an organisation for the rights of women with disabilities back in Poland with a number of colleagues.

And actually we did a lot of work.

We did a lot of advocacy and a lot of education, but we hardly did anything for ourselves.

And I feel like what we need actually is to focus the energy to within and not without,

and with the awareness that it's not about shutting ourselves up
in another get dough,
but I feel we need to focus on ourselves, on our resources,
and to create the energy that we could later use.
To do outreach work.
In my experience as a teacher,
be there in the classroom relating to makers and to students and dance.
What I really want to explore is this idea of spatiality,
of how people relate to each other on the space
and how that relationship allows them to build their own language on the space.
I feel that I explore spaces so much exactly to break the hierarchical idea
of people that need to be looking down on someone,
or that people have to be stationary in spaces.
So I want to break the concepts of where you should be.
So, if a body like mine looked like it shouldn't be going up the stairs,
I want to go up the stairs.
And if another body should be going up the stairs,
maybe it should be crawling on the floor.
And how does that difference happen?
Between what we perceive as what should be done
to what it could be done.
And what can be created of that.
It's a change of perspective to break this hegemonic thinking.
Well thank you so much for joining me today.
It's been really rich to kind of think with you all,
and I love that we've dived into this idea of space
and relationships,
time and space, memory, and whether we want to be labeled or not,
if we wanna be in or out and how we can break...
the labels that are given to us.
I think that's an interesting prompt for another panel about
how you perceive yourself and then how others perceive you as...

an interesting question...

but I'd just like to thank you for your time...

Thank you.

Thank you.