

I'm a crip artist.

I have 23 years...

of practising...

I can't see this very well.

Of practise as a professional dancer.

So, I worked for the repertory company
and then moved into making my own work.

As Tanja commented,

my PhD was around dance disability
and leadership.

Which sounds incredibly dry

and in some ways it was.

But actually, perhaps more interestingly,

caused me to really rethink

how we understand leadership.

I have an ongoing Practice-Research,

as a Research Fellow, at C-DoRE,

the centre for dance research
at Coventry University.

And artistic Networks.

I don't know what that means.

I'm Networked, to so you'll know.

Just a few comments on...

Abid mentioned
the Change Makers programme.

And this is perhaps the most useful aspect
I can talk about.

Just for information, there's an image
on the slide currently

of six dancers, I think, improvising
in a very nicely lit space.

So, the Change Makers programme
was founded...

was a programme founded
by the Arts Council

to bring together disabled individuals
and organisations

to become leaders

or to think about making change
and developing leadership.

This is for me the most interesting thing
I can share with you around this.

I worked on the Change Makers project
with an arts organisation called Metal

in the UK.

And Metal is a fairly...

It's an organisation that focuses its work
on social inclusion

in many different ways
of thinking about that.

And Metal approached me and said:

"Would you like to do this?

It's about becoming a leader."

And I said: "No."

And I said "no" because at that point,

I'd been thinking a lot about leadership
in my research

and I knew I didn't want
to become a leader

in the way that leadership was perceived
in the arts at that moment.

As a "job"

or working within an institution
or organisation.

So, and this is credit
to the Arts Council

I did put an application with Metal

and it was fairly explicit

that I wanted any leadership development

to come from the artists
I was working with.

I wanted to focus on collective
or collaborative leadership

with the artists I knew
I could bring together

over the eighteen months working
with Metal.

So, that's what we did.

I worked with 21 artists exploring

notions of "Otherness,"
what it means to be "Other"

and now kind of have questions
around this term.

But at the time,
that was the term we used.

And that was because my thinking
at that point was...

questioning the space
in between disabled and non-disabled,

this... not middle ground

but this slightly slippery field of...

I just was finding the idea

of disabled and non-disabled
in inclusive dance

more and more difficult.

And I wanted to make space to include
different experiences

and different understandings.

We hosted three labs with the 21 artists.

We commissioned work through residency

so each artist was given some money

to commission something.

That may be a performance work,
a lecture, a workshop.

We showcased at South Bank Centre...

literally in the basement.

I don't know if anybody is aware
of the South Bank Centre,

it's a big venue in London.

It's where the Unlimited Festival happens.

The Unlimited Festival happens upstairs
and we were put in the cellar...

which actually turned out
to be the best place for us

because we were able to be
slightly under the radar

and yeah...

and I realise now
that's quite how I like to work.

We then took the whole programme
to Berlin to the No Limits Festival

and we extended
our commissioning and collaboration

with a group of Berlin based artists.

A couple of these images again.

Images of dancers improvising in a space.

And one of my favourite images,
the really wonderful Julie Cleves,

who I think lots of you may know,

'cause Julie has worked in Sweden a lot,

is making notes on top of a box of beer,

which sums up Julie and the project,
I think.

There's more images of dancers posing
for a portrait,

and also dancing in a garden.

So, uh, this is really small.

So, this is about Impact.

I'm going to turn around
and do it like that.

This is something we've been talking
about a lot already.

The spaces for disabled artists
are currently marginal.

The Change Makers programme proposed
a continuation of work

that will bring about radical change
for artists who are made absent

by existing funding programming
and support structures.

We created space, capacity
and development opportunities

for disabled and marginalised artists

to own and use
on their own self-directed terms.

I may skip some of this heavy stuff.

So, this point of owning space
is really central

to much of the practice that I undertake

and the conversations
I'm interested in having.

When I started working
in the so-called "inclusive" dance sector,

20 years ago,

we existed in a space of:

"this is dance"

and "how do we address this problem
of getting these disabled people

into this thing that we understand
as dance?"

And what I'm very interested in now,

I want to radically change
and push towards,

is actually subverting that

to "what is the knowledge,

what is the rich unique
knowledge and experience

that exists

in these crip or disabled artists

that can change this environment."

We need to...

This needs to change radically.

So when not being allowed
into a little corner,

and historically that has happened.

The inclusion can be tokenistic.

That inclusion can mean being invited in
via a side door into a small space

in an existing studio.

So, more and more,
and I mean this in practical terms,

more and more I'm asking where are
the spaces that crip owned,

that prioritise crip practice,

and crip research.

So we're not borrowing a space

that may feel inaccessible,

that may feel that we're not
fully allowed in or welcomed there.

I think I've spoken to most of this.

Yeah.

I kind of feel like I want to talk
a bit more.

Yes, so, what we aim to do,

what the project resulted in,

was a sustained CPD,

Continuous Professional Development,
that's a corporate term for us all,

and creative opportunities
for disabled or crip artists.

So, really, in basic terms,

what that actually means,

is not doing a one of,

just allowing the conversation,
the practice to grow,

allowing people to make mistakes,

to take a certain pathway
into their practise

and then turn
and take a different pathway.

Which is for me a essential part
of any artistic enquiry

and it's one
that isn't actually often afforded

to disabled and crip makers and artists,

to get things wrong
and try again and try again.

We created new networks,
new collaborations,

I've said this already.

The project was largely
around valuing the knowledge

that exists in the artists
that we were working with

through peer learning,

without the pressure to feed
that knowledge back into...

non-disabled spaces.

So, we won't say "Tell us something
so we can then teach organisations

about disability."

It was about making space
for artistic enquiry.

We've talked already...

It's been discussed already this notion
of profile and visibility to artists.

Which, again, I kind of nodded to this.

I really want us all to remember this idea
of visibility, or visible leadership,

I absolutely support,

but I think we also need to identify
the complexity of that.

If I'm here as a visible leader,

what space am I taking up?

What is my responsibility,
if any, around that?

And what is the labour for me
of being a role model

or being visible?

How can I move in and out of that...

that position?

Some of the light is a bit in my eyes.

Okay, "Leading by example."

So, actually

I want to slightly rephrase that.

To say that for me,

my biggest learning
in the Change Makers programme,

and I should say,

as much as you maybe picking up
some cynicism from me,

again, because I'm in my mid-forties...

If you are picking up cynicism,
this is...

It was a really transformative project
for me.

And it was transformative
because I was given the space

to make mistakes,
to work autonomously

and actually Abid, are you here?
I can't see. I don't know if he's here.

And this is a very important point
I don't say very often.

The money really helped.

It was really well funded
and we shouldn't forget that we need money

and having enough money
to think about access,

enough money to support artists

made a really big difference

in that project.

So, the...

This idea of leading by example became
more about how can I rethink leadership

as a collective process.

As leadership happening in the art

so, making a piece of work as leaderful,

and having conversations

with other artists

and stepping or moving in and out of...

We talk again about this notion of "voice"

which is kind of interesting to me

how do we pass that around,

how do we share this idea of...

Yeah, I mean, I want

to ask these two in a moment,

well, after the presentations
but I think...

In brief, the Change Makers programme
and my prior research

really highlighted for me
that we, all of us,

as a sector and as a society

need to radically rethink and re-imagine
and commit to action

around this, what leadership is.

That actually...

And I think we can talk
about problems and barriers

in education and training,

we can talk about why
there is a lack of representation

by crip and disabled people
in policy making

or in senior or leadership positions.

Until we rethink leadership
there will always be discrepancy

between the lived experience,
the lived crip or disable experience,

and trying to fit into these spaces,

where for me personally
that discrepancy is too much.

It's so far away from my experience
as a disabled woman

to step into these spaces.

So, what I see over and over again,

is crip artists, crip people

disabled people in the arts,

coming into leadership positions

and ultimately having to leave,
through this effort and energy

of a lack of fit,

of trying to squeeze one's body,
one's experience,

one's knowledge
into a normative structure.

And that, I think,
needs to be radically rethought.