



Emma Frankland: The Making of *HEARTY* (2018-2020)

For this Lend Me Your Ears Laboratory, Emma Frankland talks us through the conceptual and practical process of making the fifth and final solo show in her *None of Us is Yet a Robot* cycle – a series of works about her gender transition and about the politics surrounding trans identity, from which she has also published a book: *None of Us is Yet a Robot: Five Performances on Gender Identity and the Politics of Transition* (London: Oberon, 2019).

Frankland is an award-winning maker, writer and performer whose work exists in what she herself defines as a ‘messy, intense and celebratory’ DIY aesthetic. She has performed across the world as a British Council Showcase artist and with other collectives and festivals, and indeed it is consistently the specificity of experience – be that specificity tied to culture, gender, class, race, language – that is investigated, analysed, and cherished in her performance work, to the point of showing up all specificity as ultimately a collective condition.

In this generous and insightful documentary, Frankland talks us through how she researched, devised and staged *Hearty* from fieldwork to sketchbook to rehearsal room, from Indonesia to Brazil to Brighton. The story of the show is organised under five quotes: in choosing to use, hold and make resonate the words of others, Frankland lets us into much wider political and ethical considerations regarding generosity, radical collective authorship, the circulation of knowledge, the making of community, advocacy, voicing and the fact of giving voice, and even and importantly the fact of transcending language. She describes her very particular use of verbatim in *Hearty* as ‘telling other people’s stories, but with the permission and the blessing of those people – hoping to flesh out a more rounded sense of a trans experience’.

[00:00:23 to 00:01:10] Trailer for *Hearty* (2016)

[00:01:12] ‘WE MUST BURY OUR KNOWLEDGE UNTIL THE APOCALYPSE PASSES’

Emma Frankland: Hi. Thank you for tuning in. And thank you for the invitation to talk about the production of *Hearty*. My name’s Emma Frankland and I’m an artist from the UK, I’m based down near Brighton.

Hearty is a production that was created, I guess, between 2016 through till – well, the last performances were at the start of 2020, and it really evolved over that time. I think it’s really important for me to say that, although I’m here talking about it and I was the writer of the piece and the performer of the piece, that it was made in collaboration with many, many other people at many times throughout the history of – throughout the process. So I’ll shout those people out as we go, but particularly it was made in collaboration with Myriddin Pharo, who was the lead designer and my collaborator on it, with Keir Cooper, who composed the original music, and with Rachael Clerke who also came in and did the dramaturgy. I think it’s really important to me to situate my work in the context of community and collaboration because *Hearty* was the fifth and final performance in a series of work called *None of Us Is Yet a Robot*.

None of Us Is Yet a Robot is five shows that were all made in response to my gender transition. And even though those performances were all about my changing body essentially, and my experience of the world, something that’s really striking about that was how much care there was around

and how much it’s a community. *Hearty* came towards the end of the project though, and I’m going to break it down into five stages – like I’ve been asked to. It was a really interesting provocation to think about *Hearty* from the perspective of verbatim theatre and the language that we use because although it’s my words, most of the stages that the production went through were inspired by statements or conversations with other people. That was really important, especially after four pieces



of work that really were focused on my experience, I got to *Hearty* and it just didn't feel like the world needed to hear more about me and my body.

So it was trying to find a way to have a solo performance but to bring in other voices. Going way back, at the start of the process, I really felt that *Hearty* was going to be about sisterhood and about building bridges, that something that is a problem for trans people at the moment all around the world, particularly in the UK with the way that we're presented in the media is this division that has arisen between trans women particularly and cis women...

[00:04:43] 'WE ARE A HEARTY SISTERHOOD'

At the start of the project, my aim was to make something that was going to build bridges.

I'm going to just dip into the account that I wrote about the project here [reads]:

I was fascinated by the fact that *Rituals for Change* [which was the performance that I made before that] had resonated significantly with older menopausal cis women – the same demographic of second-wave feminists who were loudly attacking trans women and positioning themselves as 'trans-exclusionary'. It felt like our shared use of the same bio-technologies (estrogen pills or patches or gel) formed a strange connection between us. I first envisioned *Hearty* as a bridge towards mutual healing and understanding.

[Frankland 2019: 154]

So I want to give you as the first phrase that I took into *Hearty*, the phrase 'We are a hearty sisterhood'. I had a period of making it at the Battersea Arts Centre, actually in collaboration in part with my mother, who came into the room and we had a few days together. I was working with a researcher from King's College, whose specialism was exploring menopause and we talked a lot about what menopause represents, what a menopause can represent for a trans woman who, you know, we share the same HRT technologies but it's something that doesn't get spoken about very much, a taboo in both worlds. And it felt like this was something that could bring us together.

It's where the title of the piece came from *Hearty* – H-R-T – 'Hearty', like it was a bad pun, and then it stuck. At the start of that process, as well, I was joining my local roller derby team Brighton Rockers – and it was around the time I started there, I had a childcare clash and it was the first training session. I didn't know what to do and I had my kid and I emailed, and one of the skaters emailed back and said: 'Bring your child along. There's always someone to look out for them – we are a hearty sisterhood.' And it felt like an absolute sign that I got this through. So I went into this show and I thought: 'I'm going to make something that's going to be about building up those bridges, it's going to honour the sense of "We are a hearty sisterhood".' And when I was in those rehearsals at Battersea Arts Centre, I found myself painting these big slogans up on huge boards, and one of the slogans that I painted up was this: 'We are a hearty sisterhood.'

And then...!

There was an 'incident' with my local theatre, with a local theatre down in Brighton where Germaine Greer had been booked to speak. Germaine Greer is known for her outspoken anti-trans views and I got caught up in this debate and the fact that I realised how little support there was out there for us and realised that actually here I was trying to make something that was going to build bridges, when in actual fact this demographic of people were not trying to build were not interested in building bridges with my community. I realised that I felt angry and I felt powerful, and *Hearty* began to shift towards being something else, something that had a different tone that wasn't so much about, again, representing my experience and relating that to a menopausal cis gender woman, when that is the demographic that is harming my community. I feel like something shifted and the whole piece became a little bit spikier.

Around about the same time, I was in Brazil performing *Rituals for Change*, the previous piece, and the second quote that I was given came from being out there. I was at a debate, a kind of panel discussion, and we were discussing the word 'queer' and what it meant, what it meant to us, coming from the UK, and what it meant for people in Brazil. At the end of the conversation, I got chatting to a



trans person who was in the audience, and they were telling me about their experience of being trans in Brazil, and they said in their words that there is a genocide happening against trans people in Brazil, particularly against trans women, against the 'travesti' community there.

They said: 'There is a genocide happening, and all we can do is bury our knowledge until the apocalypse passes.' I was really struck by this image of 'We must bury our knowledge until the apocalypse passes', and they said: 'And we hope that in the future, someone will uncover it.' I was really struck by this idea of a community needing to bury what it knew about itself and hope that it would be found in the future. It's very much something that I was feeling, and do feel at the moment in 2020 as a trans person where we are framed in this mock debate of do we exist, or are we something that's made up? We're framed as something that's very new, whereas in actual fact trans people have always existed throughout history, we're very, very ancient.

And so here in Brazil is this person telling me: 'We must bury our knowledge', and I began to think, well, what has been buried in the past that is there for us to uncover? And what should we be burying for people to uncover in the future? So with this and with the 'We are a hearty sisterhood', I went into a process of making for the show. And departing from how the other pieces in *None of Us Is Yet a Robot* had been, which are all very autobiographical but very realistic – it's me talking to you about my body, it's 2020, we're acknowledging that we're all here live in a space – Mydd (Myriddin) and I were interested in pursuing the metaphor of the apocalypse and how that would look. I'm going to try and show you some things from that.

[Shows front page from a spiral-bound sketchbook.]

This is notes from that period. Okay – [shows a hand-written slogan in a sketchbook] 'We are a HEARTY sisterhood.'

[Leafing through sketchbook.]

So we were interested in this idea of the apocalypse, and something that kept coming back, something that kept coming around was images of fire, and images of wings, images of these great big slogans with words literally forming the set around us. I sat down on the first day with Mydd and we went through all of these notes. And I was like: 'I don't think I've got anything here.' We talked for hours, and at the end of the hours, I said to Mydd: 'I don't think we've got anything', and Mydd was like: 'I think we've got enough for about five different shows!' We went away that night, and particularly Mydd went away with an image that we're coming to...

I was very inspired by – there's an artist called Margaret Kilgallen whose work...

[Shows images of Kilgallen's works by leafing through a book.]

Margaret Kilgallen is an American artist from around 2000, I guess, and her work was always these big slogans that would come up on the walls. She was very present for me when I was making the performance – and at this time I think that kind of crept into the design of it ultimately.

[Leaves through the book.]

Yes, she has these huge walls with words painted there. In fact, this tattoo [points out a tattoo on her own hand] is also a Margaret Kilgallen drawing. [Laughter.] We were looking at taking the words and making them into the dramaturgy of the piece. I had this, like, sense of a person with wings and this power and this ancient kind of sense of transness, and what that was – wings and fire and flames and blood, and it began to feel very visceral, visceral in a way that perhaps some of the other pieces had not been.

[Leafing through the sketchbook.]

This is the process by which I always make things, like, there's a lot of doodling and drawing involved. This is an oestrogen sachet here. [Points out a sachet stuck to one of the pages in the sketchbook.] So this is a page infused with estrogen gel.

[Leaves through the pages of the sketchbook.]

Yes, this image kept coming up for me, this image of a person with wings and with a tail.



[Shows a sketch of a winged creature with a tail crouching on top of a hill in a foetal position facing the inscription of HEARTY written in red across the horizon.]

This sense of body modification that so puts off the trans exclusionary radical feminists who seek to deny the existence of trans people. Also these slogans. We have this strong word 'Hearty' that was evoked from this statement of sisterhood that I had from my roller derby team. All of that was in the mix. So Mydd went away overnight and came back with the suggestion that we would have a really bold costume, and that the wings would be wings but they will be made of knives, and that there would be a tail but the tail would be really realistic. We discussed what the tail ought to be, that it should have power but be kind of ugly as well. And we settled on a rat's tail, a giant rat's tail, and we decided to put the slogan 'We are a hearty sisterhood' across the back of the set.

I guess the third phrase that I'm going to refer to:

[00:15:46] 'LOP THE DICK OFF'

Which was to take an expression that Germaine Greer had said, something that was particularly offensive to trans people and to re-purpose it, to reclaim it. Which relates to that original conversation that I was having in Brazil about the word queer and about how queer has become a very positive statement that's been reclaimed by the community. The statement was made by Greer on a TV show. She said [*reads from* None of Us is Yet a Robot]:

Just because you lop your dick off and wear a dress doesn't make you a fucking woman.' Late one night, I painted 'LOP YOUR DICK OFF' in large black and red letters on old piece of board. As with *Language*, one of the previous pieces, I felt that the system was trying to define me by my anatomy and I wanted to reclaim the statement as a position of power and positivity. I wanted to say, 'Yes! LOP YOUR DICK OFF!', and let the dick be both a metaphor and reality; let us take 'dick' to mean privilege and white supremacist patriarchal power, and let's all lop *that* off and dispose of it in an act of civil disobedience, that would change everything. [*Ibid.*: 155]

And so that became a kind of reclaimed slogan that we turned into merch and sold the shirt after the show. And the proceeds from the T-shirts that we sell have gone directly to supporting the work that we're doing with trans people all around the world – and, in the last 12 months, has gone directly towards supporting my own gender transition, which just felt like a very direct and empowering thing to do: to take a slogan aimed against us and to turn those words into something that can actually support the transition of many trans people.

So the piece was evolving, and what'd started out as, like: 'Okay, it's going to be looking at menopause and how we can all be friends and building bridges' had become this thing that was a lot angrier. And I guess it comes towards the next phrase that I wanted to talk about, which – it was something from the text of the show where I say: 'We've been asleep for seven generations and it's time to wake up.' That was something that was sent to me by a two-spirit artist that I was working with in Turtle Island the year before last.

I'd already performed *Hearty* by this point, and it was working all right. We had our preview, or premiere, at The Yard as part of their NOW festival [in 2018] and they'd supported the making of it, and we'd got that far. But it was running short – in terms of the timing of it, it felt like a short piece, it felt like it wasn't quite there. Although it was there aesthetically, we had the wings and the tail and the slogan and the energy and it was this apocalypse and I was coming in with this box to bury. We connected with a lot of those ideas. We had this sense of the statement from Brazil. But at the time, I think the piece was arriving before we were ready to understand what it was actually saying.

[00:19:15] 'WE HAVE BEEN ASLEEP FOR SEVEN GENERATIONS, IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP'

So the year after I opened that piece, performed it at The Yard, I did a lot of international travelling, a lot of performing with *Rituals for Change* and I took work to Canada, to Turtle Island – which is the Indigenous name for North America – Turtle Island. I went to Indonesia and I went back to Brazil. And I actually began to feel that, like I said, I was coming to the end of this project that was going to be



about my body, and I also began to really feel that as an English person, as a white person, as a person with ancestors who were settlers in North America, that it wasn't really the voice that I wanted to hear from, it wasn't my story that I wanted to be told.

And that as white Western trans people we're desperate for a connection with our ancestry because it's been so long erased. Trans people, of course, existed in England, in Celtic times, in Roman times, we have glimpses, but we're very disconnected from any kind of cultural presence. So then there's a temptation to reach out into other cultures and to appropriate some of their understandings of gender. I was lucky enough to have these three experiences of travelling to very different countries and spending time with trans women and trans feminine people in each of those countries, and I knew that had to come into the piece because the piece was talking about this kind of connection to an ancient something, but I also knew that the thing that was going to be hard to tread was to not be another white English person going out into the world and bringing back stories and exhibiting them.

So there were these three occasions – and I'll speak a little bit about each one and I'll show you a little video and then we'll talk about it. I think the key to the shift in the performance was understanding this. The ethics of it were that all of the stories that I tell in the piece, I tell with the blessing of the people that told them to me. So the stories of the two-spirit Indigenous people who met the settlers when the settlers arrived in Turtle Island, this is something that I speak about in *Hearty* now and that was told to me by a two-spirit elder who I went to and asked permission to come and share that story – and permission was enthusiastically given.

So there's the story from Turtle Island. There's the story from Brazil about the genocide that's happening there. And there's a story from Indonesia, which was...

[00:22:53 to 00:25:05] Emma Frankland's video recording of a trip in Indonesia

[Speaks over the footage.]

I was in Indonesia with Forest Fringe, and while I was out in Jakarta, people kept saying to me: 'Oh, you must go to Sulawesi, you must go to Sulawesi, there's people out there, the bissu, who recognise five genders.' I'd heard of this because it gets talked about a lot by trans people in the West, it gets thrown up in articles – like, always when we're trying to prove our existence: 'Oh there's this place in the world where they have five genders' – and I managed to get an invitation to go back the year after and I connected with a trans artist out in Indonesia called Tamara [Pertamina], and we went and we met with bissu shamans in Sulawesi. You can see my kid is in there in some points because he came along as well. And it really was...

[Referring to people in the video] This is Tamara – this is Tamara on the left, and this is the bissu from the Yellow House here...

It was really extraordinary – an extraordinary thing was being in a place where trans people had a role to play in the day-to-day running of the community. And not only did they have a role, but they had a role that came with status as well. It was remarkable to see. Right after this happened, the bit that we're looking at now, someone came in from the village and had an emergency. So everything stopped and that emergency was dealt with, and it became really clear the functional position that the bissu was still playing.

So it was incredible to be in this place, having been in Brazil where the story was very bleak, having been in Turtle Island where the story was very bleak, having come from the UK where the story is very bleak about trans people's rights, where our rights are being, where we're in a less good position now, I would say, than we were five years ago in some respects, certainly in terms of public perception. To then be in a place where it was tempting to see that trans people were respected and part of that community. It's not quite as straightforward as that, of course, there have been terrible moments in the history of the bissu. The last massacre of bissu took place in the '80s and before that in the '60s. So it's not like it's an idyll.

But it was really remarkable to be there and to meet them. And so I went to bring all of these different perspectives into *Hearty* and to be able to speak about that. And I guess that's what I was thinking of in terms of this question of what is the verbatim of this, of *Hearty*, is that I was telling other people's



stories. I was telling stories from other cultures, sometimes using their words and sometimes retelling in my own words, but with the permission and the blessing of the people. And hoping to flesh out a more rounded sense of a trans experience, that is, you know, not only... We often run the risk of centring the contemporary white trans experience at the risk of ignoring the diversity of trans people around the world in 2020 – the diversity of experiences, but also the diversity of the experience of trans people throughout history.

So all this was coming into the show as we carried on with the development of it. And it was really exciting to return to it last year. I remounted the production and we took it to the Edinburgh Festival [Fringe] [in 2019]. *Hearty* runs in cycles, so the action of the piece repeats itself and repeats itself and repeats itself five times. So the previous time when I performed it at The Yard, there were only four cycles.

We took the production to the Edinburgh festival with now five cycles, and it felt like that was now completing the performance. I had a further discovery with the costume that I was wearing. I think it's interesting in terms of the order that things arrive that I think it's tempting to think that everything is linear, that there's an idea and then that gets enacted and made. Really, I'd had this amazing costume with these wings and this tail, and I'd had this costume for like several years at this point, knowing that it made sense but not quite perhaps being able to own it entirely.

[Shows production stills on her desktop.]

I had this costume with these incredible wings with sharp knives that, when I perform the show, cut me regularly. So as well as the fire and other things on the stage, there was always a good deal of blood as well. And I had this tail. Retrospectively I began to build a narrative over what these things represented for me – that the wings represent a transness, represent being part of that ancient sisterhood, that hearty sisterhood that stretches around the world and in all directions through time, but that also I have a heritage that is my settler ancestry and that is rooted in white supremacy – and that for me is the tail.

It was important to have both of those things existing at the same time, not to get seduced by the beauty and the power of the wings and to feel like I can tap out of the other things because I have now accepted this one part of myself, but also to acknowledge the tail which is weighty and ugly but also powerful and strong and useful. So having those two things existing at the same time feels very important to the piece and feels like it roots me when I'm talking about these other experiences.

[00:29:17] 'SHE REFUSES TO ENDURE. SHE HAS ENDURED FOR LONG ENOUGH. SHE REFUSES TO ENDURE'

So then the fifth piece of verbatim that I wanted to talk about...

I'm going to recap, because this has perhaps not been super linear. It's a very curious experience speaking to my laptop at my kitchen table. We've had 'Bury our knowledge until the apocalypse passes', which gave us really the dramaturgy and the urgency of the piece of how we are a *Hearty* sisterhood, which was a sort of bridge that enabled me to situate my womanhood in a broader sisterhood that includes cis women but also includes other trans women. We've had 'Lop your dick off' which is about reclaiming that anti-trans sentiment that is so urgent at the moment. We've had 'We have been asleep for seven generations and it's time to wake up', which was wisdom given to me by a two-spirit elder in Turtle Island.

The final piece of verbatim that has crept into the text of the piece are the final words of the show. The show ends with a song, and that was something that I knew I wanted quite early on. So one of the key collaborators was Vicky Abbott, who's a brilliant songwriter who I've worked with before, who comes from Cornwall which is where I'm from. I wanted a song because the first time I'd been in Indonesia, I'd been with these other trans women and we'd been sharing so much but sharing a lot without language. I really felt a desire to have something that would be able to be exchanged in a way that transcended language, understanding language. I had this idea that if I had a song then the next time I was with trans people that I couldn't speak to, then I could sing the song and that would



be a way of connecting. So we created this song to be as much a ritual as anything else. At the end of the performance – the performance is centred around this box which is either being dug up or buried depending on your perspective, the box, which contains some kind of trans-ancestry or connection to that more ancient transness and that other transness around the world. And at the end of the performance I do open the box, I open the box and I set alight a fire that burns. The stage directions read:

She sets the box on fire. It becomes a magic fire – something where potions will be created – [...] a fire of creation. She settles herself behind it and her features change. The ancestors appear on the walls and the air tastes different. [Ibid.: 208]

So at the end of the performance there was fire, there was this song that was sung. And the song became important because we composed it as part of the making of this show, but when I was in Indonesia meeting with the bissu and I did find myself in a situation where a ritual was happening and a gift needed to be given, I was able to access this song and sing it in exchange, as part of this ritual. That felt really appropriate, and then that is something that roots me every time I perform the show. There are a few points in the show that connect me to specific memories and specific stories that I've been told in quite emotive and visceral ways. I think that sharing that song in Indonesia has made it a very powerful moment in the show to re-perform.

At the end of the song, which I'm not going to sing right now [*laughing*], I say:

She fires shots into the air until the ceiling collapses and she will fight with the strength that she has. And she is complicated and strong and she relies on the strength of others, and she will behave in a way that makes her feel real. She refuses to endure. [Which is our final quote.] She has endured for long enough. She refuses to endure. [Ibid.: 209]

That was given to me by Selina Thompson, who's an artist from the UK. I opened up at one point in the making of the performance to other women, trans women, cis women, trans-femmes questions around our bodies, around change. I got sent a lot of responses and Selina sent me a response that said: 'She refuses to endure, she has endured for long enough.' In fact, I think it was first person: 'I refuse to endure. I have endured for long enough.' And that became the closing of the show.

So in closing, *Hearty* was a piece that feels like the process was really... It's always impossible to take the process out of the final performance, really.

When you're devising work the way that I work, I don't work from a position of writing a text always, it often comes from more physical actions. And in this case, this performance really grew over the time, and what it came down to is a collage really of different things that have been said to me, and these different words and different statements and these different elements, which were the fire, the blood and also piss – which was present as a bottle of horse urine which I drink from during the performance. [*Laughter*.] Which sounds out of context kind of crazy, but it definitely was important in terms of the – I'm saying the word visceral a lot – but the visceral elements that were present in the performance. It felt important that it came at some cost, it felt important that there was some sacrifice, there is some sacrifice in the performing of it.

I wanted to read the acknowledgement from the show notes because in this I won't forget to name the people who worked on the performance, and that was Myriddin Pharo, who I've already mentioned, Keir Cooper and Joshua Pharo, who created the scenography in terms of the lights and the projections in the show, Vicky Abbott, who composed the song, Rachael Clerke and Ivor McAskill, who both gave dramaturgical support, Anthea Clarke, who curated a playlist – the music that plays in the show was curated by Anthea – and, importantly, the queer, trans and two-spirit people around the world who shared with me their knowledge and wisdom; Pri Bertucci and people at SSEX BBOX festival in Sao Paulo, Cole Alvis, Gein Wong and Warren Greene from Turtle Island, Tamara, Bissu Eka, Bissu Matang, Bissu Sanronisa, Puang Matoa Nani, Puang Matoa Sesunrio, Angkuru Wajo, Puang Matoa Soppeng, who we met in Indonesia. And the people from the UK: Travis Alabanza, Selina Thompson, Morgan M. Page and Angela Clerkin.



[00:37:27] Q&A

Emma Frankland: So yeah – do you have any questions, or can I elaborate on any of the things that I've spoken about, Duška? Because I feel like I've gone around and around in circles.

Duška Radosavljević: Going in circles is appropriate for the structure of the piece. So the circles was okay! Maybe I do have a couple of questions. I'll try and fold it into one that you might be able to answer.

It's mostly because of how I'm thinking about this project in terms of how we've talked to others in a lot of the other interviews. We had a lot of interviews with artists where we trace ways in which they have arrived at a particular way of working, and we haven't had very many of these Laboratories yet. But in your case, I was just having questions in my head, even though I know what your journey had been – because I've shared part of the journey as well with you during your drama degree at Hull – and then training as an actor at Central. I was just wondering, because what's really striking about this piece is the stage language that you deploy in putting across this particular story of experiences and that you've collated, if you like, through your research process.

So in thinking about how this moves away from conventional – if we can say that – verbatim theatre practices, I think what's quite important in that journey and in that story is the way in which you tell those stories through the stage language that you have developed, presumably through the whole body of work that preceded this piece. So is there anything that might be useful for us to know in relation to how that stage language has evolved over the years, from, I don't know, your days in Hull to the present day?

EF: I think it's really important to talk about that journey. I think quite often we see something that I've said before, but quite often when we talk about trans people we talk about transition and also when we talk about performance careers we tend to jump in at the point where it all becomes acceptable and cool and legitimate, and we don't look at how we got there. I think that is actually quite unhelpful for people coming into either beginning to see themselves as artists or equally people who are approaching transition.

So I was formed, I guess, as an artist through years and years of amateur dramatics down in Cornwall as I grew up, and I just have always been a performer always. That was all I ever wanted to do. So I've had a very kind of direct path towards performance. But as you allude to, we met when I was an undergraduate at Hull University studying Drama, and that degree was very conventional but it wasn't conventional actor training. I think a lot of people arrived at that degree thinking they're going to be actors, and then very quickly you were introduced to the concept of creating a show, right?

So it was that kind of old school '60s mentality of you're going to be doing everything from making the set to writing, performing to directing to everything. You learnt the whole craft, which I was very grateful for. I left Hull thinking that I was going to become a designer, and I think that's something that, you know, it's not an accident that in *None of Us Is Yet a Robot* that the strongest – not the strongest but one of the deepest collaborations has been with Mydd Pharo, who's a designer, because I think a lot of the time I do come from a place of visual language first.

So I left thinking I was going to be a designer, but then after a few years of working as a carpenter building sets, working a bit as an actor, I felt that I needed to get some more actor training and I went and studied a Classical [Acting] MA at Central School of Speech and Drama, which is obviously where you work now. Which was great because it felt like it gave me a legitimacy. I don't think you need it to be legitimate but it gave me legitimacy.

I spent a year studying Shakespeare, learning very classical, very traditional performance, but with quite a progressive mindset. Then I came out of that degree and have done zero classical performing since. So I guess I bring it up because the work then exists in two places: there's the design language but then there's also this rooting in a love of language and love of words.

Often my work is quite dense verbally and does have a lot of text in it, as well as these strong images, and I aspire to take up as much space with my words as those Shakespearean plays and those Shakespearean monologues do, because I think that's something that we shy away from,



particularly that I see people from marginalised communities and queer artists not feeling necessarily that they can claim that space in the same way. So I think my training as a classical actor gave me some permissions to feel that I could do that. And then, almost like in conjunction with my transition, the queerer and more marginalised my identity has become – as perceived by other people, of course, I've always been trans – but as I've come out and as my identity has changed for other people, the work has become less and less traditional, less and less mainstream, I guess. You know, I wear less clothes, I set fire to more things.

I think that there is a direct relation to those two things that, as politically I have situated myself but also been situated by society and by the times that we find ourselves in, the work has also become bolder and has felt less constrained by rules. I'm a huge fan of a risk assessment because it allows you to do pretty much whatever you want on stage, but I'm also just a big fan of starting from 'Okay, fire...!' We knew with *Hearty* that there was going to be fire involved. And so then it becomes like... [*Sets fire to flash paper inserted in book of the series.*] We know that we can do it. It's just going to become where's it going to fit into the performance?

So I think not being afraid to play with dangerous elements has been really fun and, yeah, bringing blood and the piss and the fire into that performance.

DR: That's great. Thank you. Flora, do you have any questions?

Flora Pitrolo: I'm just very struck by how you took this invitation to speak of your work as verbatim work by using these five quotes and telling us about where they came from.

So really, because verbatim theatre is often – I guess there's a lot of discussion about the efficacy of verbatim theatre in this idea of it fighting a certain cause and I was quite struck by the way you did it, which also seemed to me there was also very much of a return in using those quotes and wanting to reciprocate somehow the generosity of something that's been given to you, and not only a question of fighting the corner of whatever you're fighting the corner of.

And by using these words that – and there's not so much about enacting the words that you've been given but almost taking them as a baton and as acknowledging the responsibility of the words you've been given. Also, you've done this presentation crediting those words and just in that sort of classic feminist text way of, you know: 'Thanks to the baker for making the bread, thanks to...', like where you thank everybody in the community. I was just really struck by how you took this invitation also as an opportunity to acknowledge and thank those who have informed this journey. I don't know if that's question.

EF: Yes, I think it's a really good observation. I think that there's two directions with the quotes. There's honouring the quotes that were given to me – and they're fragments really, all of them, you know. It's not verbatim – I didn't set out to make verbatim. So it's not sitting down and making a recording. In some respects, they're all flawed because they've gone through my filter.

So, you know, the: 'There is a genocide, we must bury our knowledge until the apocalypse passes', I think I said that about ten different ways since it was said to me, but it was such a striking thing that stayed with me and became so memorable that creating that as the heart of the performance felt like honouring that statement in a way that was very strong.

Similarly, with the stories that I was sharing, it's essential, I think, to be sharing that with permission. That was a really interesting part of the process of having recognised that and then going about doing it and being like, okay, so actually, that seven generations quote was told to me by a more contemporary two-spirit artist from Turtle Island, and then when I was like: 'Can I say that in the show?', they were like: 'Well, it's not mine to give you, so we need to go back to the person who told that to me, and go and ask them if that's okay.' And then that involved a further trip to Toronto and then to make an appointment to meet someone who is kind of hard to pin down, and it became an adventure in and of itself that led to also a lot more deeper knowledge.

It's interesting kind of – it's really painful when things, I think, around trans issues are rooted in feminist history because I think so much of what we do, and especially as a trans woman, is of course part of that line, but the violence that trans exclusionary radical feminists inflict on trans



people is to deny us being part of that. But there's something in the history of feminist art where we don't share everything because if we share everything, then what do you have for yourself? And so, sharing some of the things and then hoping that that is giving people something to be uncovered.

So I was really mindful of what was for a general audience and what is knowledge that was given to me and then what is knowledge to pass on to other trans people. And then you know the 'We are a *Hearty* sisterhood', which was such a celebration and that becoming the entire back wall. So there was that, there was real celebration.

And then there was also the taking of it!

[*Stands to indicate her T-shirt emblazoned with 'Lop the dick off'.*]

With the shirt that I'm wearing in the show – which comes from the statement which says: 'Lop YOUR dick off' – with the last iteration that we did last year, we realised no it's not 'Lop your dick off', it's 'Lop THE dick off.'

And that's what reclaiming it is about, and we want to say: 'Let's make this a real positive thing. Yes, lop the fucking dick off! And actually why are we all not lopping the dick off? Everyone should lop the dick off!' And it's not about what genitals does a trans person have in their underwear, because that's irrelevant. It's irrelevant.

I mean, it's powerful because of the way that trans people can and always have been able to change our bodies and find peace with our bodies and all those things. There's power in those surgeries, there's importance to it. But not for everyone, and not essential, and certainly not a defining feature in the way that at the moment, in the UK, in 2020, it's being made to be.

But there is a power in it, and there is definitely a power in saying: 'Yes, it's not about that. You think it's about that because that's all you're focused on.' But what we're going to say is, we're going to make it a real feminist slogan in fact. And the people who bought these T-shirts, it's always a real joy – they are still for sale and you can buy them from my Etsy page – but the people who have bought them after the show, everyone always seems so stoked to get one. And I've sold them to trans people, to cis people, cis men have bought them and everyone is like: 'I'm going to wear this to – this is the occasion that I want to buy it for', and that's been really exciting. Yeah, that's been really fun.

DR: There is another interesting phrase throughout the piece which marks the cycles, which is: 'We have been here before.' Did I read somewhere in the introduction that it's also a quote, or is it just something that...?

EF: It becomes a quote because I say it so many times. This loop, which I think just kind of came from the... [*Searches book.*] Here, I can read the bit here – it was that:

Dramaturgically I was interested in the concept of a cycle informing the structure of the production. The emergence of my own cycle have been welcome and significant. After four years on oestrogen and antiandrogens, I could now feel the ebb and flow of my hormone cycle instead of the even flow I used to produce, especially in the week before an injection.

What became apparent after some research was that trans and queer people have experienced throughout history a cycle of violence, acceptance and massacre. It's not hysterical to feel we must be prepared. It is foolish to suppose that we know better or are more protected than the two-spirit Indigenous people of Turtle Island in the 1600s or the queer and gender non-conforming people of Spain in the 1930s, or the bissu in Indonesia in the 1960s and again in the 1980s, or many communities [around] the world today. [*Ibid.*: 156]

So yes, I think that 'We've been here before, we've been here before', that urgency just speaks to the complacency. I think that's about the trans community in the UK, feeling complacent. I think it's about queer people in general. And I think increasingly it's about all of us feeling complacent as we see categorically a rise of fascism around the world, and we have been here before, we are no better than the people who have lived through this already. And I think that *Hearty* which started out as it was going to be a nice way of building bridges, really did become instead an attempt at a warning – at some kind of warning cry.



DR: Great, thank you so much, Emma. That's so generous of you actually what you've given us in this hour, what you shared with us. Thank you.

Transcription by Nick Awde

Clips Summary

[00:00:23 to 00:01:10] Trailer for *Hearty* (2016)

[00:22:53 to 00:25:05] Emma Frankland's video recording of a trip in Indonesia

Works Cited

Frankland, Emma (2019) *None of Us is Yet a Robot*, London: Oberon Books.

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Audio available at www.auralia.space/laboratory2-emmafrankland/.

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