
Interview between Carla Lever and Gavin Krastin: Edited Transcript

Script edited in line with interviewee redactions.

CL:

So I guess my first question, as you know, is about working with intimacy and discomfort of liveness. And I'd like to ask you about your experience of trying to bring big ideas across in that kind of way and in that space.

GK:

I mean, yeah, of course it can be quite difficult and there's always that very difficult gap between intention and reception. And as much as you're trying to communicate a message, a sign, a semiotic, a feeling or whatever, you're also trying to make the participants or audience or your collaborators literate in that message as well. So there's quite a lot of work happening at the same time. I suppose you can't always take total responsibility for how things land or how things are interpreted. But I do think there is of course an onus for trying to situate yourself and an awareness of how...you know, the social codes of any given time or space so that what you are doing is perhaps communicated with its intention. But I think trying to communicate these large ideas, or risky ideas, or perhaps ideas that are not so palatable...I can only speak from my experience and it is balancing that very delicate double-edged blade of enticing a curiosity but perhaps it's also alienating. And so how do you...because you *want* a sense of alienation, because that's where one can also harness a sense of curiosity, that's where the audience can perhaps also lean in. But I find it's often through the kind of small gestures, the minor gestures...sometimes it's almost in the concealment, or complexity that the audience is forced to lean in, forced to listen with multiple ears *because* it's so complex. I find perhaps if I think of very practical or strategic things that I've used or go back to...I think performing in the nude—or being naked rather which we'll probably get to later—I think that can offer or bring to the table a sense of vulnerability or how it goes, and the audience so far touch wood has kind of met me half way with that vulnerability. So the more I kind of release and bring the good, the bad and the ugly, the more the audience feels a tense of safety to kind of almost lean forward in their leaning back. They're kind of leaning back in safety but leaning forward in curiosity. They kind of meet my nakedness and vulnerability with their own nakedness and vulnerability. Dim lights, intimate space, minor gestures...ja I have found that the audience then tends to have an acute focus with how the light is working, really lean into the small gestures, listen and really take into account for the haptic situation that's happening around. I do find that sometimes that gets lost in some site specific work because you can't control the environment as much. You can't crop out sounds or images or light and bring attention using sound or... in site work often the audience is enspaced in quite a larger way.

I think the intention and integrity has been quite important. Being quite honest like why are you naked, why are you nude?

The advertising industry is premised on the fact that there's always something wrong with you and your body and it's full of desire that can never be completed because it's so fucked up and dysfunctional. And I try not to bring any of that baggage or that stuff into the space. So I hope the audience can feel that energy and that this is just an honest body in its fucked upery just trying to meet someone else in their fucked upery and trying to go forward with that, whether we're crawling or limping or running. Sorry I'm babbling a bit now. But I do think it has to do with being quite honest with the intimacy and the discomfort. And acknowledging that your audience is there. That it's not about establishing this fourth wall. It's about maintaining eye contact, about responding to their energy with your energy, to acknowledging those gestures with your micro gestures. And really welcoming - a sense of welcoming, a brief sense of maybe homeliness, for a brief time. Ja, I think that's maybe a way to go about it.

CL:

Gavin that's really fascinating; you've hit on so many really interesting things there. And personally I'm so delighted and glad and relieved that you've had those experiences. Certainly it's been mine in your performances of deep vulnerability and sharing both ways. Sort of a ...everyone has been exposed in this new space.

But I wonder, you've brought up the idea of how important the idea of light, affect, sound is. And then you said maybe in site specific work that's lost. Now of course that's really interesting to me, because I'm think about the spectrum of p/Performance and if nudity is used as a tactic in protest, it's responded to often—even if it's just as authentic and honest and meaningful—it's responded to as more of a threat. And I wonder about that ...that you're able to control. I know this isn't on our list, but which site specific performances have you used nudity in? I don't know of any off the top of my head.

GK:

Ja so there was...In Canada I did a performance called *Epoxy* once where I performed in a gallery space but it was approaching the gallery site specifically. And that was quite visually intense because there's all stuff on the walls and in the space. So that was quite difficult. We did, we actually used light a lot where we had to black out the windows and focus light quite specifically. However, saying that, I do...even though I find myself working in theatre spaces, they're often not *conventional* theatre spaces. They're not these like grand auditoriums, with the balconies and the proscenium arch and...you know. With your like gilded whatever and the red velvet and whatever comes to mind... They're often, like, ...halls that have been converted. They're often approaching spaces site specifically to turn this multi functional space into this viewing space...not necessarily a theatre space but a performance space.

I think sometimes working naked in a space is also a way to perhaps dwell in a space or potentially *wear* the space. It's a way to connect with the space. That you're all kind of together. But as much as some aspects may be lost in site specific work, just because it's a lot more grand and multi-sensorial, I think it's not necessarily what's being lost or being amplified, because it's not like you've lost these senses. Often in theatre you're engaging with your main senses. You're not really engaging with gravity, proprioception, or temperature or pain or magnetism or...kinaesthetic energy. And I think those things really come into play in site specific work. Where you can actually legitimately feel the light on your skin and the music through your bones and the pressure of people touching and groping that you wouldn't in a way if you were sitting in the auditorium. That's not to say that other are not activated, of course. UI just think it's a...you're dealing with this total rhizome and you're dealing with the way this spark is travelling through this rhizome.

So ja, I think theatre and performance spaces are specifically geared in such a way that you can manipulate them and you can attune the affect, the lighting, the sound and the kind of "main senses," so to speak. So when you're nude or working with micro gesture or minor gestures or nudity I think that can be controlled a lot... I don't want to say easier, but perhaps with more control. Ja, it can just be controlled a lot more. But then of course then your audience bring in that aspect of risk. ...I look at like *Omnomnom*, or *Yet to Be Determined* or even *Rough Music*, you're working in that controlled environment, but the audience then bring in that sense of risk, because you never quite know what they're going to do.

CL:

Yip. Yeah, I think we have some questions about risk later on. In fact I think there are going to be elements of what you've already spoken about in all your questions! I'm sorry, but... So I guess the second question is around shock as a radical code of engagement. Why are acts that confront people important, and what can shocking people open up?

GK:

I don't know if this is a bit of a reach but I think that a lot of acts of shock often have to deal with acts of transgression or acts of abjection. And I think it's often in the act of being shocked like that you're actually confronted with your own death. In a way. And I think that's very scary. I think it's almost like for a brief second there's been a glitch. ..there's been a glitch in your life and you can see the thing. Is it Phelan who talks about how we kind of go about the word on like two passports. Is it Phelan? I'll research and let you know. Sorry, I'll have a look. But you know, we have these kind of two passports. We have the passport of the living where we're all happy and healthy and rich and we're locomoting and we're loving and we're producing. But we also have the passport of the unhealthy, of the joblessness, of the static, of the sedentary, of grief, of loss. And we have to travel on both of those passports. They get stamped. And I think it's in those moments of shock that there's that glitch, that the one passport turns into the other one quite briefly. And you're confronted with your own abjection, your own death, the complete shadow side of the moon of your life, you know, the complete darkness of your life. The biggest what if nightmares of your life coming through in that microsecond for a very simulated moment. And I think people use that to kind of shock people, kind of 'wake up before it's too late!' You know, you've had a premonition. I'm wanting to shake you a bit. For me that's certainly when I'm shocked it's literally like someone has gone into the deep recesses of my mind and I've put all of the things that I never want to think about, all the worst possible what ifs in the world, from the micro to the macro and they've kind surfaced it in kind of an unconsensual way, right?

And I think that's what kind of drives us mad, in that as much as we happen to life, life also happens to us. And in those moments that life happens to us, that we are being forcefully transgressed, that our passport is being swapped out for this other passport that we have to travel on, the glitch on the matrix, the sound and the image of our tv screen goes away...we...I think it's really quite shocking, it's almost like those near death experiences and I think we really do try and use that as kind of a last resort. It's almost like an act of love sometimes. It's that way to shake people up. To throw cold water on the face, to just like jolt something. And it's a way...

I think it comes out of deep frustration and anger a lot of the time. You know, I don't think people go there very quickly. You bring something to someone's attention very gently. And then they ignore it. Then you push a bit harder and you increase the volume. Then they ignore it. So you increase the volume a bit more and try a multi-pronged approach till eventually, you know, you're this barking god that just goes FUUUUUCK! And I think that's quite natural, really I mean it's almost biological in these moments of fight or flight. And there we have these social and conceptual and artistic notions of flight or fight, which I think can be quite shocking.

But yeah, we've transgressed from one passport to another with or without our consent. And in the moment when we're confronted by the very worst, by death, by loss, by everything falling apart. In the hopes to shit paradigms, to shift behaviour, or to just maybe consider another way of being, Maybe a way to open the multiverse that we don't always have to live one one lane.

That we can shift the furniture in our life. That's certainly what it's kind of done for me. And it's reflecting these moments of shock that you almost become a barometer of scruples at times. You know, what does shock you and what doesn't shock you? I grew up loving The Addams Family. And there's that lovely saying of Morticia Addams "what's chaos for the fly is normal for the spider." You know, so these acts of shock can also be something of a barometer: your cultural barometer, your value barometer, scruple barometer.

What is normal for you and what isn't normal. And I think we're often confronted with that when we travel. And we're suddenly confronted with other cultural, societal, spatial border zones that we're having to navigate or transgress. And suddenly what is normal, what is taboo, what have we taken for granted on our own life that we now need to become more aware of... and I think performance is a way of harnessing all of that and amplifying it.

I find it a bit of a love language. It's a bit like pain in the body. You don't like being in pain, but it's such valuable evolutionary, smart mechanism of foreshadowing, of forewarning, you know? Yeah. But of course there are a lot of politics and things.

To be honest, I've never gone into a performance going 'my aim is to shock.' There is a lot of conversation around shock jock art, which is situated in quite a white male discourse. And it's become so popularised that MTV even made a brand out of it - you know what I mean if you think of all the Jackasses...this kind of shock jock art and what people do. So I'm completely aware of that and it is quite a thing to navigate. And I think it goes back to my earlier intentions, sorry, earlier musings. And, like, what is your intention with this? Where is the capital going? Who are you connecting with? How has this been framed within the festival, or "the brand" or "the MTV", the museum, the gallery....so I think a lot of those questions go into that as well. So I've never gone into a work thinking "oh my god how can I shock people with my body? What is the most gross or shocking or abject or stupid thing that I can do?" You hold onto a concept, and sometimes the manifestation of that concept is really boring, sometimes it's really fun and silly, and sometimes it's gross or shocking. You come across really shocking things every day.

CL:

Such a great and comprehensive answer. You've really covered such important threads there. And I love it that you've spoken of it as a language of love, which I think distinguishes what you do from many other shock jocks or people who have similar...[interjection] no, it's very important to look at as you say the intention, and what you're doing with those things, and where they're going on. The idea of shock being actually a *loving* gesture as opposed to a violent one, which it is often experienced as.

But you also spoke of the privilege of white maleness, but also the privilege of art. Because obviously I'm comparing different forms of performance, and much protest is not seen as performative even though it's *incredibly* theatrical and dramatic. So I'm thinking through a little bit perhaps about what clothes the body, even if the body is naked, and what frames the performance space. And going back to the idea...Have you felt protected by being an artist as opposed to being an activist? Has that closed your mind, or...

GK:

Ja, yes, I think without a doubt there's a lot of privilege of...Because things are immediately framed, of course you're all framed your social constructs, race, gender, space, time, and genealogy.

And a lot of artists are working within institutions, whether that's museums, universities, galleries. So there is a lot of framing and I think a lot of artists have - specifically the well represented artists - have access to lawyers and such and such. So definitely, even when you're performing nude as an artist there is, ja, a huge amount of safety. We can talk about The Real as much as we want, we can talk about how the actions are real and the bodies are real, but that environment is still somewhat simulated. You know what I mean? We spoke about the performance architecture. About: there are lights to manipulate the space, there is literally health and safety people on board. Now in Covid, you know, apart from having healthy and safety and fire martials, you've got to have Covid martials.

I completely agree that all protest is performative, but is it a *Performance* in the same way that it is framed and held and monetised and popularised? You know what I mean?

I sit here with a certain...It's almost so privileged for me to say I sometimes use nudity as a means to dwell in space. I mean, how privileged is that when you look at how activists use nudity as a way to *annihilate* space! The space is so hostile. They don't want to wear the space; they hate the space! They don't want to inhabit or dwell in the space, they want to reject the space,

And I think 'this is not a performance'. These bodies are not using nudity to wear the space, to dwell in space, to connect with the space. They're doing it as a means to...Because they're so cognisant by the way

we're still so repelled by nudity. So by being nude I can repel the space, I can repel the people away from me, I can repel all the codings of the space away from the codings of my body. You know what I mean? So, so it is an incredibly complex thing and I think it is very layered. But then at the same time, we can go to completely other spaces where nudity is completely, you know, welcomed and celebrated and used as a way to dwell in space, used as a way to dwell in culture, to dwell in code. But I think the notion of consent is different, and the intention is different and the passport that you're travelling on is different. You know, I also think about how in times of war people literally take off their clothes so that the poison cannot adhere to them, that they cannot bring it into the homestead. Think about even in the beginning of Covid people were saying you know, you must change your clothes. Don't contaminate your clothing, don't bring it into the workplace.

So I really do think, going back to your question, that it goes to the intention. And we are sitting in this pluriversal exchange of nudity where time and space and culture and language and body I think denote the rules of how that nudity is engaged.

It's quite interesting that one of the first things we did as human beings is that we acknowledged the wetness and the nudity of our own skin, and therefore we took the skin of other things — whether that be fruit or trees or animals — and we hardened that, we dried it out, and we used it as an armour over our own skin to protect ourselves. And I think that sometimes we do the opposite as well: relinquish our flesh, relinquish our armour as a means of bonding with the space.

So I think we are like constantly going between these multiple isms of being. But it also makes sense. It's not always comfortable or viable to be nude. Because biologically these organs are very sensitive. You know? Ja, I don't really have a single answer, sorry.

CL:

As always you give me such incredible stuff to work with. I'm so glad you added the last point because it's beautiful, it's such a beautiful idea. We cover more than just our genitals, we also cover our arms or our chests and some areas that don't really need it but...What a beautiful reflection.

I was also thinking talking about Cardi B, that never forget that Janet Jackson's career was ended over a not-even-nipple.

GK:

And if I can remember correctly that was with Justin Timberlake, hey? And his career... he was celebrated for that moment and she was not. And then all these questions of privilege and the body and notions of consent. And ja, I mean bring in the whole MTV notion of shock so there's a lot there. No I remember that, I was always like yoh the world really treated the two of them very differently in that action and unsurprisingly...you know. Unfortunately.

CL:

It's amazing isn't it, that we now have *Wet Ass Pussy*, you know? Ok great, but what about Janet Jackson? Can we bring her back? But speaking of the softness of the body and the vulnerability of the body...you are always in a very vulnerable space and I want to ask in one question about how you consider your safety in multiple ways. You talk about officers there for you, but do you have specific things you consider, especially in relation to audience reaction?

GK:

Sometimes in performance mode I will try and erase a certain sense, whether it's sight or hearing, in order to heighten the kind of sense of the skin. Just the proprioception of the skin, and then try to be quite mindful or present in that. It's almost like how can you deep breath to accept the claustrophobia of, you know, a space.

Then there are people on watch. I think at times I've used the safe word with my production manager. Almost drawing...like they do in BDSM culture. We've got a green light, an orange light and a red light and that might be communicated around a look or a sound or an action or a cue. An old school theatre cue. I do put a lot of trust in the audience and kind of go, you know, I'm respecting your boundaries to a certain point so can you respect my boundaries to a certain point. But there have been...accidents do happen. But I find a lot of safety in surrender, if that makes any sense. As soon as you kind of surrender, all expectations have been lowered and so you can never kind of be disappointed. And you do sometimes expect the worst from people so that you can be pleasantly surprised. And I do find that, performance art - and this goes back to the other question about performance art nudity versus real activism nudity in hostile spaces - I think that Performance art, because of how it's framed, it is consumed in a particular way by a particular audience. So it's very seldom that there's a free radical in the audience who just wants to...

Yeah, let's be honest it's got a very niche market, performance art. And people who are drawn to this kind of work generally have researched the artist, the festival, the space...It's lovely when those who are interested and come off the street. Those are just wonderful surprises. And because they've just kind of stumbled upon this...Oh my god what's performance art, what is this festival, I've never experienced that! There's this sense of great, that you've been invited...that I'm a guest and I'll be on my best behaviour. You go into this spaces on your very best behaviour to respect and honour the invitation. So I find that even the audiences that stumble upon this are quite respectful.

Ja...And generally anything that has gone wrong has often been at my own doing. I've missed the mark or missed a cue. Often quite silly or technically things. Like the placement of my hands or my feet have resulted in a stumble or a missing that. Or...I once burned myself quite badly on the bum..and that was all my doing. Things like that have happened.

And, ja, certainly keeping the body, when it's nude and you're engaging with the audience, you need to be quite hygienic. So if anything it's been the odd...burning myself with alcohol disinfecting the body. Or like in *Omnomnom* you've got all this food on you so of course you want to ensure that you're totally shaved, and clean and everything's done... But it's almost like "cosmetology injuries" that end up happening, so to speak.

But I have had one incident where someone very deliberately tried — it was in *Omnomnom* — they very deliberately tried to see how far they could push the boundaries. And at one point really tried to...Because again, although I'm dealing with nudity, I do try and unmark it. So there's never a penis or a vagina, like, out there. It's always kind of tucked away like a drag queen would tuck it or it's... because I think as soon as we see that it's like penis-penis or vagina-vagina as opposed to a shapely form...And again, it's out of respect, you're being so close with an audience member, especially if you have food on you that you want them to eat off you, you obviously want to be respectful.

I remember this one audience member did try and untuck me and see how far he could expose my genitals or touch my genitals. And, you know, his mode of thought was 'oh you're putting your body out there'. And I was like yes I am but I'm not putting my genitals out there. Like, it's quite clear. I actually worked with a sushi artist who did a beautiful sculpture. They covered the genitals, and there was gold leaf.

So it was very clear that time and effort and aesthetics and thinking had gone into: where are the borders or boundary zones, right? Just like I didn't offer anyone food off my feet or hands or face.

At least there was someone who could control the hygiene of my chest and my legs and my forearms, right? And then there was a person who did deliberately try to untuck me and expose my genitals and I

suppose transgress where I had put the boundaries. So that was quite unpleasant. And in that moment I was immediately thinking back to some of Berger's notions of how sight or looking comes into the nude and nudity. And in that moment the only thing I could do - because I didn't want to stop the show - all I could do was look at him and really acknowledge that I see him doing this, that you are surveilled and I see you doing this to me, my body sees you, and I am allowing it. So I am shifting my borders so that you cannot transgress them. In a way. So all I could do was really to look at him and with really micro expressions on my face to kind of nod and go 'I see what you're doing and I will not budge.'

And then, and this is what's so lovely, you can always rely on your audience to also protect you. Because we do...that's our human nature. As horrible as the human race can be we are also very beautiful. If you're walking down the street and someone falls off their bike or has a car accident you're going to help that person, right? As much as you might stare at the car accident when you drive past, right, you're going to stare out of curiosity or morbid interest, but you're also going to phone the police, you're also act on this thing. There was a point where this guy was taking it too far and then you could see audience members got involved. They didn't necessarily stop the guy, but they were just suddenly trying to undo what he was doing. So as he was trying to uncover me, they would cover me. So they never took his hand and stopped him from his action - and we can ask questions around that - but they were very deliberately undoing the ramifications of that action. Which was quite interesting.

So I think we can also rely on our audience a lot more. And maybe this is a bit of a contraction to earlier things you know, ok maybe there's a sense of passivity, of somatic or physical passivity when you're sitting in a theatre but of course you're always like intellectually active, creatively active. And then when you're like now participating physically I think there's both a physical and somatic action as well as an intellectual action. So I think we really can approach our audiences as quite emancipated, full, thinking... we don't have to spoon feed them all the same. And I think that comes into the earlier conversation about being open to big ideas.

I think audiences are actually open to these big ideas. My question is like are the producers open to these big ideas. Is the theatre infrastructure or industry open to these ideas. Because I do think the audience are quite receptive, they are quite respectful. We want community, we want to community, we want to be those social evolved beings. We don't tolerate social isolation and disconnection. We naturally want patterns and togetherness and whatnot.

So as much as the audience brings a sense of danger or risk into the space, they actually manifest the complete opposite. And *there* is perhaps another indication of privilege. Because I would imagine that the 'audience' for lack of a better word, at a protest - ie the policeman or the fire brigade or the journalists - perhaps do not bring... You know, I mean, whether you're shooting them with a camera, shooting them with a gun. There's these actions. So then there's this other privilege because the space is encoded there is a certain audience encoded behaviour that you can rely on. Certainly if you are working in your lane. It becomes a different question when I tour overseas or parts of the world where there is completely different cultural values, or linguistic values, or spatial values. So generally the audience is very, very lovely and I do love them very much!

CL:

You hit on something so good there when you said people surprise you with their capacity to hold shifting boundaries. So despite putting yourself up for objectification they still find the human connection. But institutions - institutions like police, like producers...

GK:

...like universities!

CL:

Yes! So that's fascinating is when you engage and you have a space of privilege where you can hold an intimate interpersonal connection - even in protest beautiful things can happen - but institutionally there is a coldness and a lack of humanity that results in violation.

GK:

Yes absolutely. Sorry, could you give me one moment to just get my charger.

[...]

CL:

I'm doing a chapter on shit. And of course there's so much excrement in Capetonian protest, even in Mahkanda that's where it started. And the closest I could come in your back catalogue of work - ha back catalogue - was the flag moment in.. but I don't know maybe I'm missing something else. I wanted to ask you specifically about reactions to that because that does seem to breach a taboo in people maybe in ways that other things do not.

GK:

So it was underscored by a sense of humour because it was performed as quite a silly magic trick. So I kind of put on this clown character that performs this trick in which a flag disappears but then oh it reappears in me and I have to pull it out of me. This kind of funny notion of that game of capture the flag and all of that. And I think that's what's magic about performance in these controlled environments where you can shift the gears quite quickly and you can go from humour to complete taboo breaking just like that. And then you as an audience member are quite discombobulated in terms of your. Affect and emotion and where to position yourself. And I think that's potentially quite exciting as an audience watcher, as an audience maker, as a supporter, watcher of theatre and performance, as a maker of theatre and performance. But people were also quite...ja, I think they found it quite offensive. It really did have interesting... So people of colour found it the most offensive, but then gay men kind of understood where I was going, and then the gay men of colour were kind of in the middle. Because on the one hand they're going 'Oh, you know, we have this flag and it's not just a flag it's a symbol of so many things'. It's a symbol of our new South Africa. And I mean you can read the semiotics of the flag and what all the colours mean and the design and so on. And here you are, you're pulling this flag, this white man, doesn't matter that he's gay, he's white, he's educated... And also I think we were performing it in a church hall. This man is pulling this symbol of, you know, this new democratic South Africa, is pulling it out of his anus. And of course people immediately go 'well, oh, that's gross, that's full of shit' it's all of that. And I completely do respect that, I was expecting that dominate reading. Because it is there.

But I did also want to challenge things and maybe be a little more nuanced and go well I went through a lot of labour and sacrifice to ensure that flag was pristine. There was no shit or mess on that flag; it was not soiled. That was a very deliberate choice. That flag was not soiled. I could have soiled it, but I didn't.

The anus can also be a productive space, a space of pleasure, a space of engagement. I'm aware of the dominant reading which is gross or violent or this or that but I think we have to challenge that and collide it with other readings and go, well, if it's done like this by this what does it mean? If it's underscored by humour, what does it mean? The fact that it's raised quite proudly, what does it mean? But I am very cognisant that there is an optics that we can't get away from.

No-one has the luxury of representing themselves. We are represented by other people's eyes or hands or words or languages or rules or policies, right? So that's why it's called *collapsing into representation*. No matter how much I try to represent myself, for me this action is quite a

It will always collapse into that representation that goes Oh it's white privilege, it's a gay man, it's anus, it's shit, it's poo,

I do think the framing was quite specific in that it was very short pieces that were highly experimental. And I'll be honest I don't think that performance was very successful as a performance to be consumed, it had meaning for me as a research methodology as an artist, in that I've learned some things that I will or will not do again. So I cannot call it a failure because I do approach everything as a research, so even the failures are moments of learning. I am a teacher at heart and a researcher at heart. And I do use my art-work as a vehicle as a methodology to get to grips with this mad, crazy world.

So I was aware of how it was framed and where it would be framed and I don't know if I would do it again. But ja there was a concerted effort to not make the flag shitty.

Because of course that action of throwing shit at something is really profoundly beautiful I think. It is so rich...again I can't help but read into just the abject nature of it. Whether or not it's your shit or not, The fact is that shit sits in the inbetween space. Right? Because it's ...that shit is you, or someone, It is genetic biological material that has undergone a very specific process of transformation at your hands to result in what it is. So it is you, but it's also separate from you. So this shit is both subject and object at the same time. And I find it absolutely fascinating. Just like, you know, your menstrual blood or semen, it is you but it's also separate from you. And often it is a micro violent process of separation..of separation from your body. I would image that the biological processes of producing shit or urine or menstruation is quite tumultuous in the body to arrive at that medium. So for someone to actually throw shit at something is profoundly clear...in what it says. On the one hadn't it's going I am implicated in the system, I am it, I am of the space. But it's also going I want to separate myself from the space, I want to remove myself from this space, but I also want to be an additive on the space, I want to be a palimpsest. I want to layer my biological body on the space through my shit but I also want to separate myself from there place.

We inherently know this as as human beings, we know what our shit means as human being,. We know why our shit is that colour. We know why it smells like it does. We know the historical of the architecture, of the phenomenology of the bathroom, of the toilet. And so throwing our shit at something is this paradoxical process of loss and having at the same time and I think a deep, deep, deep, fundamental material questioning of things. I think it really is just making shit visible. I mean it's, ja, throwing shit at this imperialism that I don't want but that I am inherently part of and benefit from. So just like shit is, you don't want it but of course you benefit from shit.

Can you imagine not shitting or not producing shit? I mean, that would be...you would die. So I think it's such a contentious...I think it still remains one of the most contentious materials to work with.

But at the same time we know that we appreciate it so much and also it's its own love language because how many times do we turn to it for clues about our life. Are we constipated, do we have diarrhoea? Is it sort, is it hard, is it runny, did I get there in time?

Ja I do think that all these conversations regarding nudity, regarding shit, regarding vulnerability, regarding risk, regarding shock, regarding transgression, they're all kind of branches on the same tree and I think it's often a tree of death and decay. Of the opposite of the ego, I think. And that is why nudity, and shit, and shock does what it does. It tips our entire momentary life inspire down. And that's very scary because in that brief moment we have to actually acknowledge that our entire life is a bit of a lie. That we are not the apex predator that we are not the most important person on this earth. If you actually had to think about what you matter in terms the entire cosmos, in terms of the entire cosmological being, it's too much to comprehend so we just...do not.

I think it's that microcosm of the end that we just cannot deal with. Ja, it kind of blows our mind and so like Kristeva says we just have that automatic reaction to the sour milk, we just immediately repel it, throw it away, we lock it away. And our body is so good at locking things away. Mechanisms to make us forget, to

make us reinterpret, to make us forgive, you know what I mean, and that's why artists work with it. It's that brief moment in a very simulated, safe environment that we can touch on it, on death.

And I think that's why it is so different to when shit or nudity is used in protests because it's not simulated, you're not just touching on death because that death can remain. Where in a theatre or performance or gallery space you do have the privilege of leaving death and swapping that passport back for the other passport.

CL:

You are going to be popping up all over this book because you've given me so many of these beautiful quotes. It's basically going to be the Gavin Krastin book. I guess I'll just ask you one final question because I know I've taken up a lot of your time. [... cut back 1:08:47] I am cognisant of your time so I'll just end on the violence question. So often your performances, which subject your own body to violence, might be experienced as violent to other people who are just watching by choice. Maybe they can walk out. But what do you think about what a violent performance is. You spoke earlier of what we find violent is very telling. I just want to explore that notion.

GK:

When I see these artists doing these things on stage I am very cognisant that they have put themselves there and that they are monetising this in some way. Or finding a sense of capital.

It doesn't pull on my heartstrings. I don't sit there going 'oh these artists are being so violent. ' It's the same thought that I have when I watch any sort of dance. There's so much violence that happens in ballet. But it's really beautiful violence! You know what I mean"

Have you ever seen a ballet dancer's foot? It's no different to the violence that an opera singer experiences on their throat for their art form. And then I also go like but we come down so heavily on violence in art. Is that because it's not competitive? Because we then seem to celebrate the violence in rugby, and the violence in, like, cage fighting.

Is that because that violence is premised on a war-like feeling that we are representing our state at winning a competition and therefore that violence is deemed appropriate? There's this assumption that things surrounding things with sharp edges, or fire, or blood, or nudity or cutting but other things are not violent.

And I think that comes up a lot with trigger warnings. How we put trigger warnings on certain things, but then other certain things are not given trigger warnings. I can't help but think of Artaud's theatre of cruelty and his interpretation of violence which is more of a sensorial violence that perhaps stimulated a cacophony of thought that was violent on the middle class psyche as opposed to violence, violence, violence.

So I do think there is space for violence in the theatre but I do think that goes back to those very knotty, enfolded questions of whose violence, who's doing violence on who, who's monetising this, how much did you pay to watch this violence?

So I must be honest that I think a lot of this responsibility sits in the framing. So I think the live art festival does such a fantastic job of how they navigate violence because the audience is given so much autonomy. So first of all, you don't have to pay to watch performances, right? Firstly. So I don't think you're ever feeling out of pocket. And they often programme numerous performances so you can leave that performance but you're guaranteed to find another performance that your time will not be wasted. So I think those navigations are quite important. That you're not non consensually forcing violence down someone else's throat and someone's not having to "pay" for this violence in a particular way. And you can use what you pay with your time, your assets, your money, your privilege...

So I have found as an audience and a maker at certain festivals the people leave a show because of a violence act or taboo it's been quite a thing because they feel cheated, they feel quite violated as an audience

member. Whereas I've noticed at festivals that specifically frame certain artworks where you don't necessarily have to pay, where it's programmed in a de-hierarchical, multi pronged manner that the audience can have a choice in how and where they engage with violent acts that I think is quite important.

God, I can't say it's important because I'm not trying to overload the artist with every responsibility in the world, because that's also not fair and nor is it fair to overload the audience with every responsibility. But I do think it is these smaller questions of violence and nudity often speak to the larger ways in which So I think it is part of a much wider question as well. But I definitely think there is space for violence on stage...and it sounds terrible but I do think SA theatre and performance are very inventive with it because we know it's very necessary. We have to confront these violences because it's often our safe spaces to talk about these things. And we often use verbatim theatre and symbolism in quite an innovative, productive way in South Africa to represent violence without necessarily overtly showing it. And certainly I've noticed in the last decade a lot of effort has gone in the last decade to curating and theming.

So there definitely is a space for violence but we do have to be careful about how we go about it, because if we can't engage with violence how're we going to underpin it, undermine it, talk about it, heal it, reform it, reimagine it...If we can't talk about...and you know, if we can't talk about or engage with these tragedies then what do we do about it? I think it's so... Again I think violence sits on that same tree as nudity and shit. We have to go there and we have to confront it in these kind of safe spaces. I mean, theatre spaces are not always safe, I'm totally aware of that. But where there are these somewhat held or structured spaces that can hold these acts so to speak.

Some people view content as being violent, other people view form as violent, so it's quite tricky. But I do think it's important that the audience is always in a place of empowerment. They should always be able to leave a space, like, always, without any apology or regret. Whether that's a gallery, whether that's a Christmas lunch with your family, whether that's an artwork. You as the person should always I think be able to leave space. And I do think curators and producers and programmers need to ensure that the space is somewhat porous so that we can know that we can leave and disengage if we don't want to engage with that violent act. Because it is something that we very much have to consider.

CL:

You've once again answered it so beautifully and articulated some difficult things to think about. Because there aren't simple answers, there's just this very affective space we can create. And it's experienced differently for everyone's you pointed out. People come at it with different associations.

But who gets to be violent and where, before it's labelled that... You know, we don't think of CEOs as violent but they do fire people at will, perhaps. But we don't think of that as violent, we think of that as business. So...that's interesting.

GK:

And ja, I mean, if I'm correct I think the actual meaning of violent or violence just means to act with power or to have great affect, if I'm not mistaken. Nowhere does it actually speak to a form of bloodshed and disbandment. You know what I mean? I suppose in that way...

I've got very beautiful bromeliads. I don't know, they're big pink flowers. And it's recently flowered. So I walked out and it took my breath away. And I suppose in that moment I could say that was violently beautiful. Because if one looks at the meaning of the word, it really did have a very powerful affect on me and in the moment it was the most empowered because of its beauty. So violence becomes a thing.

Because in that regard, then don't we want all theatre and performance to be violent? Because if it's not violent, then it's maybe not serving its purpose. If it's not having an affect on us, if we're not being affected, if it's not a structure being over us at times for different reasons...I think we sometimes need violence.

And I think it's maybe just a continuous becoming that it's a question one constantly sits with. And I think that everyone sits with the question different depending on the type of body one has. I have a white, English, gay body. So those questions are going to mean different things to me, so those things are going to mean different things to me based on my codification in a multi-coded world.

CL:

Thank you so much. Thank you so much for those really careful thoughts.

GK:

I hope that helps! And I think we're always sitting in this, and we're always asking those questions, and we're always waking up to a new world, a new body, a new way. So I'm sure you're going to find lots of contradictions in there. And that's where we as artists sit. We sit in these contradictions. Trying to make sense of all these folds and knots. So I am aware of these contradictions and I am working through it...yeah. I think that's how I ward off death and decay. By constantly being curious and learning. No, just read and watch and engage. I think the minute one stops learning the abject has gotten hold of you.

CL:

And I don't think you were contradictory. I think there has been a huge coherence to your ideas across the talk. And I think they've melded together at different points. That's for drawing those slippery threads together.

GK:

Thank you for writing a book and trying to consolidate all of this and trying to learn from it.