

SPEAKERS

Kelly Lloyd, Cecilia Wee

[00:00:36] **KL:** You're listening to *This Thing We Call Art*, a podcast about how, "There's massive amounts of cognitive dissonance because people are just like, "No, that's not true. It's still happening. It's fine." And... everyone's in denial about the fact that it is just total collapse... because they've sunk so much energy into these things that they just can't get rid of the idea that it's not gonna work out for them."

I'm your host, Kelly Lloyd, a visual artist, essayist, and educator currently based in the U.K. I've been interviewing people in the arts about their livelihoods since 2017, and today you're going to hear a conversation I had on the 30th of November 2022 with Cecilia Wee.

Dr Cecilia Wee fRSA (she/they) is an independent curator, artist, educator, consultant, coach, and agitator working with arts, culture and community organisations, examining issues of equity and precarity in the workplace and beyond, to make strategies and infrastructures of learning and dreaming with underrepresented communities. Cecilia wrote her PhD on the documentation of Live Art, is Associate Lecturer in Visual Communication at the Royal College of Art, and founder of tdwm studio.

I met Cecilia at the Keep it Complex Conference in 2019, same one where I met Lou Macnamara, and then worked with them for *backend* London. I spoke with Cecilia at the R.S.A., or Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. The audio quality for this season is varied, so remember that the transcripts for all these conversations are available on the project's website thisthingwecallart.com.

Our conversation was 50 minutes-long, and while I wish I could share it with you in its entirety, today, you'll listen to excerpts from it.

I'm going to drop you 2 minutes in...

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[00:02:21] **KL:** It sounds like you've had a hectic morning. Um, so you haven't come from Margate.

[00:02:26] **CW:** No, I've just come from my mom's house actually in Streatham. (KL: okay) Yeah. Which is where I grew up and stuff. Um, and yeah, just like loads going on this week, so I've... um, I was running a workshop on Monday, um, with Grenfell Health and Wellbeing Service which is part of the N.H.S. (National Health Service) kind of like coverage and stuff for Grenfell impacted communities. Um, and then I was teaching at Royal College of Art yesterday, um, and then I was doing a lecture at Birkbeck yesterday evening. And then, we're gonna go to the U.C.U. (University and College Union) rally later on, um, and then hop back to Margate at some point. Yeah.

[00:03:18] **KL:** When did you move to Margate?

[00:03:22] **CW:** Um, in early October. So, my house is still like Tetris. So, I was just like speaking to my person with my shelves who are gonna be, they're gonna be delivered tomorrow. I'm like, and fitted... fingers crossed!"

[00:03:39] **KL:** So exciting. Um, why did you move to Margate?

[00:03:43] **CW:** ... I was just like, "I want to go somewhere, or I want to have like my own place." And I have quite a few friends in Margate and um, it's really sweet there. And, like, when I first thought about moving there, then I was just like, "I want a bay window. I want a bay window and my own place." And so that's what I've got.

[00:04:08] **KL:** You found it. You found your bay window in your own place, you're gonna get your shelves fitted.

[00:04:12] **CW:** That's right. Exactly. Yeah.

[00:04:14] **KL:** Feeling good about your decision?

[00:04:16] **CW:** Yeah, definitely. I spent quite a few weeks there, um, earlier this year. It was just, like, chilled. You know, I don't have rose tinted glasses about it or anything, um, but it's just a nice place to be. And I go and visit the sea every day. I live like 10 minutes away from the sea and I go and check whether the sea's still there every day. Um, and then when I leave to come to London, I'm just like, "Oh, bye sea! I'm gonna miss you, but guess what? I'm coming back so it's fine."

[00:04:48] **KL:** Yeah, so wonderful. It's funny, I also want a place by the water. And I mean I guess...

[00:04:53] **CW:** By the way, I'm not really that much of a water person. [LAUGHS] (KL: yeah) So it's, that's more hilarious about it. Like, I can't really swim. (KL: yeah) Um, and I've never been one of those people who's been obsessed with the sea, but I was just like, I think it'd be just really nice to be here.

[00:05:07] **KL:** Cool. So, the last time I saw you was in 2019, I think.

[00:05:11] **CW:** A long time ago.

[00:05:12] **KL:** A long time ago.

[00:05:12] **CW:** Yeah, exactly.

[00:05:13] **KL:** And you were, um, involved with 12Ø backend.

[00:05:18] **CW:** That's right.

[00:05:18] **KL:** Um, and um, and I feel like we had a nice chat also at Keep it (CW: yeah) Complex Conference, I think that's maybe where I met you first. And then we had a good chat at backend really quickly. I feel like- maybe I'm misremembering (maybe that's a word). Um, did you do research in Chicago?

[00:05:41] **CW:** I went to Chicago, yes.

[00:05:41] **KL:** Yeah.

[00:05:41] **CW:** Yes, exactly.

[00:05:42] **KL:** I just wanted to kind of, before I ask you, like "I've read in this article that you wrote", whatever. I just wanted to kind of, like, recall that memory and be like, "Okay." So, I recalled correctly that you did, you were in Chicago. What were you doing in Chicago?

[00:05:58] **CW:** Hanging out basically. Yeah. Are you from Chicago?

[00:06:01] **KL:** I went to grad school in Chicago.

[00:06:05] **CW:** Right, exactly. Yeah. Um, yeah, I was just hanging out. [LAUGHS] So, I went for a week in November 2019. When I arrived, it had already been snowing for like two weeks and I was just like, "Oh my God, I can't believe this." And then luckily it melted cause I was just like, you know, for me, it's too early for snow. Um, and then I stayed in Hyde Park and tried to really just, like, hang out with people on the South Side, and like just folks of colour, and like disabled artists networks and stuff like that. I'm trying to recall all of the places that I did see, I went to, like, visit the Crossroads Fund. Who do an amazing project called the Giving Project. They're part of a like national network of, like, nine projects in the U.S. and maybe Canada

as well, um, who do this brilliant kind of community philanthropy model.

Um, we can come back to that in a bit. Um, as well as visiting Hyde Park Center, um I did visit, um, Theaster Gates Projects, which is a whole other story, [LAUGHS] um, and Three Arts, and ThreeWalls. Um, did a little session at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Probably saw some other people as well. I can't recall right now. But yeah, it was, it was great. Amazing food and really great conversations and yeah, just, like, getting in touch with lots of activists who work in different ways in the art scene.

[00:07:54] **KL:** Yeah. Um, well, yeah, I did wanna ask you about, um, community philanthropy and some of the work that you've done around that... but I did read your article that you co-wrote, um, "We Need Collectivity Against Structural and Institutional Racism in the Cultural Sector", June 2020, which maybe is a while ago. (CW: yeah) But one of the quite concrete suggestions that you give, demands that you have perhaps, um, is breaking our co-dependency on philanthropy.

Um, and I know that you are, you know, working in, in collect- and like collectively with people, including, right, like, working on this statement collectively with, um, Jade Montserrat, Michelle Williams Gamaker and Tae Ateh. And, um, yeah, I just wanted to ask you about that. (CW: yeah) What are you doing around, yeah, collective... yeah, like, um, what are the, what's the exact phrase that you used about, um, this one organization in Chicago that we would get back to...

[00:08:57] **CW:** Community philanthropy?

[00:08:57] **KL:** Yeah.

[00:08:58] **CW:** Yeah! Okay. So, I guess like the article that we wrote for Arts Professional, um, it does seem quite a long time ago actually. And I just remember... so myself and Jade, um, were involved in lots of

conversations that dated back from, like, 2018/19, um, about all of the, I guess, lack of institutional accountability within the art sector around racism particularly. Um, and thinking about how we would articulate that. Um, and I think it felt like it was always really urgent for everyone who was involved. So, there was quite, quite a group of people who were sort of coming in and out of conversation and, you know how it is.

Um, but then there wasn't... you know, because we were all sort of like struggling in our own situations and facing like the everyday that we have to, um, it didn't really... there was no, there was never really the right time to kind of like address that. And then when the pandemic happened, and then also, like, all of the stuff around the black squares, um, it just like... Like, we were like, "We need to write this thing, whatever it is, we need to write this thing."

[00:10:36] **KL:** Black squares. Instagram black squares? That are we talking about?

[00:10:40] **CW:** The Instagram black squares. It was like the Blackout Tuesday, wasn't it? I think it was, like, the Blackout Tuesday that all of that was everywhere. Like in- institutions were all, like, posting black squares after the murder of George Floyd, um, including loads and loads of arts organizations.

And we were just like "What on earth?" You know, "What on earth. Like you need to look at your own houses. You need to look at your own country. You need to look at, like, all of the stuff that's going on that, you know, so many of us have been talking about for such a long time, and that you've been denying." And so that's how we kind of like came together to write this statement.

And, um, Jade and Michelle were, were in touch about this as well, and so we kind of like got together and over a series of like, really lovely actually, early morning chats [LAUGHS] and Google Docs. Then we wrote this, we wrote this statement and I know that there's a lot in it. But, and actually, you know, for us, we realized that we couldn't necessarily carry everything, but actually, hopefully we

laid out a series of prompts for people to kind of think about, to act on and for us to also pick up later on down the line in the ways that we could.

So, I guess like, you know, for me, one of the strands of work I've been doing is around like, um, equity, diversity, inclusion practice, um, which is both fulfilling, but also, like, a terror. [LAUGHS] Um, and so yeah, doing that for various different organizations. I think it's really good that people are, like, finally investing in this work, but then we still see that there's so many issues in terms of, you know, even when you're doing this work, then you're still experiencing all of the problems that you're talking about in it. So, that is something that hasn't changed [LAUGHS] as I'm sure that you can, you know and understand and have heard from others. Um, and then the other strand of what I've been involved in is really just kind of like thinking through some of these issues around community philanthropy and, a different relationship to, like, resourcing.

So, I, my research- like previously I did a lot of work on the long-term impacts of the global financial crisis. So like 2008 financial crisis.

[00:13:27] **KL:** When I graduated.

[00:13:30] **CW:** Is it?!

[00:13:30] **KL:** Yeah. [LAUGHS]

[00:13:31] **CW:** Oh my God, that must have been really hard.

[00:13:33] **KL:** Well, I mean, it's interesting also in, um, maybe in, in the piece that you wrote, um, "Saturday's Child", you might have said something about kind of being... I have it here so let me just, ummmm...

[00:13:47] **CW:** Which was the text that I wrote for *Industria* in their publication in 2020. And that was also very kind of like, they wanted to do

something during the pandemic, and so they were just like, we're gonna put together this, this publication,

[00:14:03] **KL:** Yeah. A bunch of, bunch of 2020 stuff. (CW: *exactly*) Um, you talk about experiencing the immediate collapse of art education and how, uh, your attention has turned in the last few years, uh, to infrastructures¹. And I think I might have written somewhere like, um, you know, it is, it is really interesting cause I feel like... maybe every person feels like this in their generation, but it does really feel like, I am a par- enough a part of the prior ideals to show up for things only to have them collapse at my feet. Whereas the generation after me, they're like, "No, I'm not gonna go there."

But I'm in the generation that's like, "A bachelor's degree means something." And then I show up for it and it's just like, crumble, crumble, crumble. And I'm like, "Let's get an internship." And then it's like, that means nothing, and also, you have to pay for it. Crumble, crumble. And then, you know, "Get an MFA", on the other side of the MFA, it's like all this generation of people that are like, "I don't need an MFA." And then you're like, "You're right. You don't. Maybe, maybe you don't need an MFA!" And then now I'm getting my PhD at Oxford. First year, um, they're grappling with the fact that they put up like a, you know, a statement against racism, which was, like, deeply generic, um, and unacceptable.

Um, and also the way that their infrastructure kind of had fallen apart during the pandemic. Um, and they didn't have other kinds of in- infrastructure like collective community building to support any kind of welfare. Um, because, you know, at least the structures at Oxford, right, have dismantled the ability to, um, to collectivise, um, and to community build.

¹ "For me – a curator who for the last few years has not been curating, and a zero hours gig economy art school educator (currently at the No.1 art and design school in the world) who is experiencing the immediate collapse of art education - my attention has turned in the last few years to infrastructures, how they are built, the principles that underpin them and what they provide, and to whom." in Cecilia Wee, "Saturday's Child: Notes on Work & Living", *Industria*, 2020, p39.

And so, it is an interesting place to be to... uh, same thing with teaching, right? Like, I have enough friends that are kind of a generation above me where like they've gotten to the point where they've gotten the job that they've worked so hard, too hard and burnt out, like been burnt out for, (CW: mm-hmm) gotten it and now they're like, "Fuck this. I don't wanna fucking do this."

[00:16:00] **CW:** Yeah, yeah. Totally.

[00:16:00] **KL:** And so, it's so wild just have things kind of crumble at your feet, but yeah, still be a part of a generation that still shows up for those things and then you're kind of like, "Why am I here?"

[00:16:12] **CW:** For sure, for sure. No, I fully, I fully get that. I fully get that, and I think, I think I'm, because you graduated in 2008, (KL: yeah) so that means I'm a little bit older than you. I'm probably like the generation above you. So, like yeah, that came before you. But actually, I would say that "my generation" (I say that in air quotes).

[00:16:34] **KL:** Yes. [LAUGHS] "generation" and all of the generations that we're talking about are in air quotes. Um...

[00:16:40] **CW:** Is, is actually that bridge between the collapse. Because we were still taught that it was definitely gonna happen for us. As in like, you know, working in an arts organization in the U.K. particularly, I guess, let's say, um, is something that you, you can make a living from. Um, and also pursuing an academic career is something that you can, you can get a job and you will get well paid, and you can look after- you'll be able to look after yourself from that. And so that was what people were kind of like aiming for and thinking about, and you know, that's where, um, that's where education kind of, like, leads you to.

Um, and so, you know, it's- I think that there is a lot of cognitive dissonance. There's massive amounts of cognitive dissonance because people are just like, "No, that's not true. It's still happening.

It's fine." And that everyone's in denial about the fact that it is just total collapse, um, because they've sunk so much energy into these things that they just can't get rid of the idea that it's not gonna work out for them.

And, and obviously that kind of, like, creates this whole- it reinforces this individualistic culture because people are just like, "In that case, if you didn't get it, then it's your fault." Do you know what I mean? Like, "You are the person who failed and I'm fine. And I'm just gonna pull the ladder up after me. Goodbye." [LAUGHS] So, I think what's really interesting about the current times, particularly with like, um, all of the strikes. So, you know, in, in 2019, we've been striking since 2019, obviously, like in the higher education sector. And now obviously because of the cost-of-living crisis, then we see like so many other unions and sectors have come on board with strikes and striking has become, like, you know, there's this renewed energy around it. There's a new kind of, like, vigour and hope around it, which is really brilliant. Um, and we can see that change can be made through this, through collective, like, action and specifically withdrawal of labour.

Um, and you know, I think that even for myself, um, like how you articulate that you're a trade unionist has definitely changed. Um, whereas people used to be a little bit like, "I'm not necessarily gonna talk about it because, you know, it's a political issue (as in a political and divisive issue)."

Um, I think it's become a lot more acceptable, particularly in these times, which is fantastic. And you know, I just wanted to say that like we're currently sitting in the Royal Society of Arts (R.S.A.), who are refusing at this point in time to allow the staff to unionize. So, we have also been writing as members of the R.S.A. to say that actually, you know, there needs to be like, if the staff wants to do this, then they should be able to do this.

Because it's, um, the R.S.A. have also written about like union, like labour laws and all of this sort of stuff, and actually given an award to the I.W.G.B. (Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain),

who are the union that the staff want to be part of... Exactly, there you go. So, it's all around us. [LAUGHS] Literally all around us.

[00:20:24] **KL:** Another like moment of dissonance where you're just like, "What?!" Like, um, I mean obviously it's like you get used to this lip service, um, where people say one thing and then do another, but it really, um, I guess it's important to maybe still not become desensitized to, like, this dissonance or something.

[00:20:46] **CW:** Exactly. Yeah. Yeah, for sure. And like... which I think mm, it's difficult because, you know, in this work of, like, doing that kind of activist work around, um, around labour and employment and all of these sorts of things, you have to have space for, like, being enthused and inspired and being just like, "Yeah, we can do this." And actually, this type of, you know, what solidarity means or that, kind of, um, you know, rousing us all and all that, all of that. But then at the same time, to be able to just like, sit quietly and be like, "This is actually really shit." Um, "And this is how it affects me as an individual." And, like, to be able to connect to people and have those conversations on a very, very personal level as well.

Um, and I think that, you know, I guess a new generation of trade unionists have also felt like they can bring that energy as in the ways that we, um, the ways that we act and the ways that we are, need to model behaviours in a different kind of way. It's not just about the end goal. We can't just shut people out because, you know, obviously, like, the trade union movement has also been, um, like has also perpetuated like racism, ableism, classism, you know, et cetera, et cetera.

Right? Um, and we see that all the time. Um, and so at R.C.A. (Royal College of Art), for example, then it was really important for us, like when, um, when the \R.C.A. put out a black square. Then we were like, "That's it. Okay. We have to launch an investigation into institutional racism at the R.C.A." And that's what we've been doing since like 2020.

[00:22:42] **KL:** Who's we?

[00:22:43] **CW:** Um, the union. Yeah. Um, and so, you know, we went through this really long process, and I don't think we're, you know, we are not there yet by a long shot. There's so many things to do, but at least we've started to kind of like... You know, the first thing that we did was, um, we- the R.C.A., like just a few weeks after the black square, um, said that they were going to appoint, um, a white (as far as I understand) like, cis non-disabled person, like non-disabled man as the head of Equality and Diversity.

And we were like, "This is not happening." And also, because we know that it's because he came from a similar role in another institution that did not have a good record of [LAUGHS] around E.D.I. (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) practices anyway. Um, then we said, you know, "We need to retract this. This recruitment needs to be retracted and the recruitment process needs to be open again so that someone with lived experience can, can, like, get into this role."

And we've done, you know, we've went through all that process and we've done that, and now they also have a team member. And so, you know, there's all of these kind of like very, very slow processes that are happening, but at least, you know, every win that we, we get, um, and every kind of case that we make, um, is, is something. Yeah.

[00:24:23] **KL:** And so, yeah, when you kind of mentioned like real changes, you seeing real changes, you know, I was gonna be like, "Like what?" But you, I feel like these were some of the real changes you were talking about. Like, some slow-potentially sometimes long ongoing processes, but still real changes and, like, um, important things to hold onto to be able to do this work.

[00:24:45] **CW:** Exactly, exactly. I think it is really, um, because... the, the infrastructure at R.C.A., for example, was so lacking. Like there was

not even an E.D.I. office, there was nothing. There was like, this was gonna be the first person who was really gonna be in charge of E.D.I. Um, so we had to kind of like start from scratch and, and actually at the same time, then we were having our own local dispute.

So, like up until last academic year um, 90% of the teaching was done by people who are on zero-hour contracts or like fixed-term contracts, including myself. So, um, that was the dispute that we also had to focus on at the same time as kind of like, you know, addressing these, these issues of institutional racism and um, yeah, inequalities essentially.

So, you know, the fact that we now, through our local dispute and we went on strike quite a few times last year, um, including marking and assessment boycott. Then, um, we've managed to get like, um, yeah, basically anyone who has continuous service got put onto new contracts. Um, and most of them are permanent contracts. So, we essentially managed to save, like, quite a few members of staff from being accidentally made redundant. Yeah.

[00:26:29] **KL:** So important.

[00:26:29] **CW:** And yeah, exactly. And that any new contracts at the R.C.A. have to be like proper contracts. So, yeah.

[00:26:38] **KL:** Cool... can you just tell me about, um, you know, in addition to this work, um, at the R.C.A., in addition to this work with your trade unions (maybe). Um, what are you working on right now?

[00:26:52] **CW:** Yeah, sure. Um, so... which goes back to the kind of, like, conversation about community philanthropy. So, on Monday I was doing the second workshop for this new project that I'm initiating, which is called Our Community Inheritance... Basically it draws on, like, some of my research around, you know, the long-term impacts of the financial crisis, um, as well as, like, community currencies and alternative economics and stuff like that.

As well as like, sort of traditions of community organizing and my real, I guess like, interest in education, which is around lifelong creative learning and those opportunities. Um, and making opportunities for people to investigate, like, their, their communities and do that in a creative way using, yeah, using artistic techniques and, and, and methodologies and, and kind of concepts and stuff like that.

So, the project is very much inspired by the Giving Project (and so, I should probably say something about the Giving Project), which is that, um, so these kind of, like, nine organizations, across the US and Canada who each have their own program. Um, and so the, the Crossroad Fund in Chicago runs the Chicago chapter of the Giving Project, and so every, I think it's every year, then they set up like this cohort of people, um, which is intergenerational, cross race, cross gender, um, ability, et cetera, et cetera. Um, and they essentially train these people in a program, and they get them to kind of like, think about and then really engage with their own histories of privilege. So, thinking about where their wealth comes from, um, and how that's impacted by, like, their social status, their, you know, family background, their race, et cetera, et cetera.

Um, and the, so these people kind of like go on this journey, which is a sort of collective journey. But then also there's individual aspects. Um, and obviously, like, it has very particular resonances in the U.S. that it doesn't, that are maybe slightly different than in the U.K., or rather, let's say that, um, that people are not so, aware of in the U.K. They're not necessarily as tuned into because the conversation is slightly different here around inequalities, right? And, and the causes of inequalities, let's say i.e., [WHISPER] Colonialism. Let's not, let's not forget about that and, like, the U.K.'s part in that.

Um, so, all of these people go on this, on this journey, and then they have a kind of, like, really honest conversation and, and they make a commitment to fundraising from their community. And so, each person kind of like, says what they would be able to fundraise. So, somebody who comes from an upper middle-class background

or, whatever and has like historical family wealth would be able to fundraise more because they're into those, you know, they're part those networks and stuff, right?

Um, whereas somebody who doesn't have that kind of privilege would like, you know, they would have a conversation with the foundation to talk about like a smaller donation, and then they go out and do that within their own communities. And then they also go and visit all of these community projects that, um, want to get some funds.

And then every year they manage to fundraise, like, for about 10 projects each getting \$10,000. Um, and that's it. I'm not only interested in, in the fact that the outcome is that they've supported all of these projects within the community. They've gone and built relationships with those projects as well. Found out about them, really understood like how can we rethink, like community resourcing. So, you know, when I say community philanthropy, then I really mean community resourcing. But also, they've gone on this journey and hopefully like every single person they've contacted about this program really understands like what it means to like rethink that wealth and redistribute that wealth that already exists in the community.

So, I don't think people are ready for that [LAUGHS] in the U.K. or rather the- I need to test that idea again because, um, the feedback that I got from a foundation was that this idea's too American. And I'm just like, I remember the... do you know Edgar Villanueva's book, Decolonizing Wealth?

It's a really amazing book about, you know, his, um, knowledge and experience as a philanthropy- like someone working within philanthropy in the US who's coming from an Indigenous, like, First Nations background and trying to bring that knowledge into that philanthropy space. So, he said that when he came to the U.K. and talked to people who work in fundraising, particularly from, like, marginalized communities, and particularly, um, people from global ethnic majorities. Then he said, you know, there were people crying because their managers and the people who ran those foundations

could not accept that racism existed and shows up within those organizations.

So, we've got a long way to go. Um, despite like, you know, there's lots of foundations, for example, um... Barrow Cadbury, I think I wanna say, or like, um, [Joseph] Rowntree [Foundation] and, um, quite a few of the organizations who have trusts and, and foundations, um, have said, you know, "We make a statement about our historical links to slavery", et cetera. But I think that how that translates into a different kind of relationship that isn't about this paternalism. That isn't about this kind of like, um, idea that marginalized communities are only beneficiaries, that they have nothing to give and that they are not already giving. That needs to go in the bin. [LAUGHS]

And so, my project really tries to engage with the local community, like works with the local community, um, and tries to map and create kind of like hyper local archive of community assets. And community assets can be... is essentially like, you know, about our skills, about our experiences, about, you know, what is within the community. That could be like environmental, um, riches. Um, and, you know, all of these words are like, when I say "riches" and "wealth" then they're also tainted by like capitalism and particular sort of like lenses that we have over these things. But at the same time, like, you know, how can, um, spiritual wealth or spirituality and spiritual engagement, for example, within a community, be a contributing factor to resourcing?

So just really thinking about like, all of those social relations and like how they kind of map out. Um, So that's one of the kind of, like, backbones of this, of this project is like mapping those, um, those resources that exist in the community in order to kind of, like, reflect on them. And for people to understand that actually, um, we have those things, those are visible.

Um, and that when we reflect on these things, then we can also see that the community would like something. You know, that there are things that the community would want, um, to thrive. So, you

know, the questions that I ask are around, like in the first part around superpowers. Um, and then in the second part it's like what would be valuable, um, for the community? What would be beautiful for the community and, and inspiring for the community. So, that's what we were doing on Monday [LAUGHS]

[00:35:58] **KL:** With Grenfell...

[00:35:59] **CW:** With, the yeah, Grenfell impacted communities, and that was a collaboration with, um, the N.H.S. Grenfell Health and Wellbeing Service. So, the service, just to explain, is like, um, was set up in the wake of the Grenfell disaster, um, and it's running for five years, so it will finish in about 18 months' time, which I guess is around like, um, June 24th, um, and at that point it will be, like, the seventh anniversary of the fire.

Right, so, I was just saying that the workshop process, that is the workshop process, and then my hope is to kind of like do this model in different places and, and build up the, kind of like... to stimulate a need for this idea to, to take place more and, um, to create some kind of mechanism to, um, draw people into a network of, of like resourcing within their communities.

[00:37:21] **KL:** I am gonna ask you the only question that I ask everybody. (**CW:** mmm) The last question, uh, which is, um, did we talk about what you thought we would talk about, or do you have any questions for me? Or is there just anything that you'd like to say... on the record?

[00:37:39] **CW:** I dunno! Do you have any questions for me?

[00:37:42] **KL:** Well, I mean, of course I have so many more questions [for] you. [LAUGHS] What should we just do like rapid fire for the next like five minutes?

[00:37:47] **CW:** Yes, absolutely.

[00:37:49] **KL:** Okay, cool. How do you choose the communities that you wanna work with in this project?

[00:37:57] **CW:** Mmm. Uh, okay. I'm not sure yet. I'm not sure yet. Yeah, I, there's a couple of people I really like to, I'd kind of like to work in Birmingham cause I feel like there's loads going on there. There's some really interesting people that I'd like to be in touch with again, and, and, and kind of connect with more, um, for example, like, the MAIA Group people. Um, and you know, it's really exciting because it's like a minority majority city. Um, and with, with so many kind of like histories of inequality there. Yeah.

[00:38:43] **KL:** Cool. Next question. Thank you for that. [LAUGHS] Next question. Um, so... in the, um, the same article that we talked about, uh, the collectively written article, "We Need Collectivity Against Structural and Institutional Racism in the Cultural Sector", you speak to how reports in particular, at times instrumentalize the stories of, um, people of colour, LGBTQIA people, working class people, people from marginalized backgrounds as case studies, um, inviting them to share their vulnerabilities and pain.²

And you've been involved in a number of reports, um, quite recently with The Contemporary Visual Arts Network England's Fair and Equitable Program. I feel like you also recently, um, were involved in a report that was specifically about mapping live art. Um, so I'm just kind of wondering, like, how you, um, you collect data and

² "Working in our industry has become untenable and unsustainable. Our stories are instrumentalised as case studies, we are constantly invited to share our vulnerabilities and pain as examples to bolster institutional agendas. This is an unethical operation and violent precedent. We live with the reality of trauma inflicted by structural racism, which intersects with sexism, class, ableism, gender, sexuality and cisheteropatriarchy in the UK (and global) art world." In Jade Montserrat, Cecilia Wee, Michelle Williams Gamaker and Tae Ateh, "We need collectivity against structural and institutional racism in the cultural sector ", Arts Professional, accessed on 18 February 2023 <https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/article/we-need-collectivity-against-structural-and-institutional-racism-cultural-sector> .

stories from people (CW: yeah) but in a way that doesn't instrumentalize their, um, specifically their vulnerabilities and pain.

[00:39:43] CW: Yeah, I think... uh, I guess like. I'm trying to think about how to give an answer that it's not super technical.

[00:39:54] KL: It can be technical.

[00:39:55] CW: It can be technical, okay, cool. So, we, whenever I've done these, these sessions with people and you know, it's like the setup is so vital. So, like just trying to say, "Okay, these are the community participation guidelines." Like, "This is how we're gonna work." Um, "This is how we're gonna use the data. This is like the conversation. This is who's gonna be in the conversation, like, from our end." Um, "We will not directly quote you. And if we, if we do end up quoting anybody from the session, then we'll check in to see if they want that quote to be used." Like all of those things.

So, it is really like, it's really technical, but I think- and, and also just being like, "You can withdraw at any time. Do you wanna have a chat?" Et cetera, et cetera. And just like giving people a super clear understanding of like what they're getting into. Um, and just trying in that space to kind of like create a spirit of generosity and just being like, "Okay, cool." Like, you know, acknowledging the fact that when someone has shared something, then you're just like, "Okay, do we just need to, like, acknowledge that?" Take a break, whatever we need to do, like, depending on the situation.

And that's, I guess, that's, I'm talking about like, you know, we can all be like, "Alright, we want these things to happen. We can make these demands, we're so strong", et cetera, et cetera. But at the same time, when we're in these sessions, then the reality is, like, people are sharing stuff that is so deep and so horrible, You know? And you gotta just like connect with that and not necessarily be like, "Okay, right, I need to move on to the next question and da da da." So yeah. I think that's, and, and to, you know, when you are, uh,

when you're finalizing those sorts of reports, like to make sure that you know the decisions that you make about editing and any challenges that you have around the edit are ones that you believe in. And that kind of like carry out the spirit of, of what the session was. Because you never know when someone's gonna challenge it. Especially in the edit. [LAUGHS]

[00:42:32] **KL:** We gotta go! Uh, thank you so much for this.

[00:42:36] **CW:** Thank you!

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[00:42:43] **KL:** Epilogue. On the 30th of January 2023, Cecilia Wee wrote this to me, “... not much has been happening, aside from trying to settle into my new home and trying to get some downtime.... last year was a lot and I ended up hibernating for a few good months after we met!! The hustle continues which is an ongoing (sometimes tiresome) process of sculpting things and building the future. However, I guess that gestation allows some clarity and improves one's articulation of what one wants to do - I've been working more on how to communicate the big ideas of Our Community Inheritance and plan to do a little (hybrid) public event to talk about the project and look for new partners. This will probably happen in March or April, I'll be posting about it on Twitter as well as on my mailing list”, (the link for which you can find in the show notes).

Cecilia also wanted me to share that, “Higher Education workers across the UK are taking sustained strike action this term. This campaign, UCU Rising, is happening because of a real term pay decrease of 28.4% over the last 12 years, workloads that are making people ill, rampant casualisation that is destroying the heart of a generative education system and the refusal of universities to address gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps. There is an active network of art colleges across the

UK fighting against the attacks on our education system (see @defendthearts on twitter) but there is also a tendency in art colleges to align more with industry and arts organisations where unionising and industrial action is limited and requires more momentum. We who are part of the art education system are also part of the *education system*, I hope we can see that anything less feeds into a form of exceptionalism that has compounded the inequalities in our artworlds. If you work in or with an art college, please support the strikes, visit the pickets, donate to your local college's hardship fund, tell students and colleagues why this strike is happening, join UCU if you work in Higher Education or a union for artworkers like UVW Designers and Cultural Workers. Solidarity!!”

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[00:45:03] **KL:** You can find more information about Cecilia Wee at their website ceciliawee.com. Links to what we spoke about today, as well as other interviews with people in the arts, are on the project's website thisthingwecallart.com

This podcast was funded by The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities. If you would like to help make the next season of this podcast a reality, please consider rating and reviewing this podcast on Apple Podcasts, becoming a Patreon member, or donating through the Paypal link on the project's website.

The logo was designed by eva duerden, the episode artwork was created by Giulia Ratti, and the theme song was made by Alessandro Moroni. This podcast was produced by me, your host, Kelly Lloyd.

Thanks so much for listening, and tune in next week for my conversation with Ruth Lie.