Interviewee: Veronica Pardo
Interviewer: Erin Scudder
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Transcript:

Erin: So as a start, could I invite you to introduce yourself however you would like to?

Veronica: Thank you. Well, my name is Veronica Pardo. So my, my association with the world of Disability Arts is through Arts Access Victoria, where I was Executive Director for almost ten years from 2009 to 2018. And I identify as an ally. I don't identify with a lived experience of disability. And I, my allyship as I think we'll explore in our session today, Erin, really stems from a really close kind of community engagement that I've had with disabled people since childhood and, and also a sense of solidarity that I have as a result of my own kind of marginal identity as a woman of colour migrant settler in this country. So that's how I come to the, to the work. And, and I'll talk a little bit about what that has entailed as we go along.

Erin: Sure. Okay. So what kind of experiences led you into the creative practition-, or working in the arts, arts management, where you work now, and what are some of the experiences, events, or people that stand out as being really influential in, in getting you on this path?

Veronica: Oh, so many. I mean, look, I had a very formative relationship with the community of people with disability as a child, when I came as a migrant with my family to Australia and we were first housed at the migrant hostel. And through that experience, we, you know, this was the first time that we had been outside of the country that we, that my parents, my sister and I were born in, which is Uruguay. And we, and we came here to this country, we didn't know anyone, we didn't speak any English, and we landed in the migrant hostel with many, many other migrants, many of whom spoke Spanish and were from Latin America. And we became very good friends and subsequently, you know, formed kind of familial ties with with these families. And, and one of those families, the mother was pregnant and during our stay in the hostel,

German measles came and spread through the hostel. So when our, our friend gave birth to her son, he was diagnosed as deaf. And so, in our, in our kind of sort of extended, broader new family, we always had an experience of having, you know, people with disabilities in amongst our family. And so for me that has been, that was really formative. So I learned to sign at an early age and then I, I went on to specialise as a linguist in Australian Sign Language and became very involved with the Australian d/Deaf Community, which, as you would know, is a really, a site of kind of radical contestation of what it means to be, to live in a disabled body and to, to walk through the world with this lived experience of disability. So I, as a young woman, had worked with incredible activists, you know, highly politicised, highly charged, highly politicised community. And so I learned my politics of otherness at a very young age, at the feet of incredible thinkers, scholars, activists who really were contesting, you know, all of the, all of the ideas of marginality, including - including the term disability and whether the d/Deaf community even fits within these, within this concept. So I was so fortunate and, and I was the recipient of so much incredible generosity and care and welcoming into this community. And, and so that's how I began my - my work. And I began to understand the power of culture in c- in, you know, challenging narratives about what it means to, you know, what identity is, what belonging is. Through the work with this community. And - and so when I had the opportunity to go and work at Arts Access, I did do that. And, and it was through that work that I encountered just such amazing artists, thinkers, you know, activists, trouble makers, you know, people kind of, you know, at the fringes, but also creating the centrality of their own narratives within their own communities, within their own - within their own lives. So I've had an enormously privileged career to work alongside all of these, predominantly women, I have to say, who have, we've engaged together through a feminist praxis and practice, which is to explore what solidarity may look like across lived experiences, understanding that we can never really fully understand and walk in someone's shoes, but that walking alongside is very powerful. And that's how I've approached my work - not to lead from the front, but to lead alongside and, you know, and who's been influential in my life? Well, amazing women. So I'm going to begin with Lesley Hall, who was my chair for many years and an, you know, a just unforgettable and incomparable person who was so tough and crabby and, and brilliant and sometimes really hard to work with. But she was just, you know, I just think no one was like Lesley. And then, of course, Stella Young, who also incomparable in her own way and who just paved the way for women, disabled women, just to be seen as powerful and such an important voice and and, you

know, Fiona Tuomy, people like Fiona and Caroline Bowditch and, you know, all of these women have been so formative in my career, and I am, you know, really so fortunate to call them colleagues and friends. And then also I want to mention, you know, other allies like Paul Dunn, like Fiona Cook and Nikki Zarrella, who come to this work in a spirit of, you know, great, I think, care and thoughtfulness, not to overstep, not to, you know, not to centre themselves. But with such light touch, you know, almost invisible finger, you know, fingerprints on the work. So, you know, so many amazing people in this work.

Erin: So is it fair to say that your work is political?

Veronica: Of course. I think all art is political. I think, and I think, you know, I think to exist in a marginal and otherised existence, identity is - is a political, you know, one's existence is political.

Erin: Yep.

Veronica: And, and then to have the audacity to actually make work and demand that it be engaged with and seen is a political act when so much of society predetermines your invisibility. So yes, I would say that all of my work is political and all of my work is intended to be disruptive. I don't see the point in, you know, pandering to the systems of oppression. I think our role, if, if - and I think very much so as a non-disabled woman working in this place, if I could not work in a way that allowed, you know, disruption to power, then I shouldn't have been - I felt like I shouldn't have been in that role or been in that space. So. So, yes, absolutely political.

Erin: Yeah. And along the way - we've talked about some highlights of your experience and some, some major influences and influential people. Has it all been smooth sailing or have there been some notable obstacles or barriers that you've come up against in your work?

Veronica: I - I have to say that I don't think that the work has been hard. It's been just a joy, actually, because I feel like we all felt like we were something, part of something bigger. And not to say that art-making in its most intimate and kind of small moments like - I don't know, sitting at your kitchen table, making, doing a drawing or whatever it

might be, isn't powerful - but, it's that I think that we were all tethered to something really significant.

Erin: Yeah.

Veronica: So, I didn't feel like work was ever hard, to be honest with you. I felt like, if you pa- - and I always feel this - that if you passionately believe in the work that you're doing and you have a sense of purpose and that purpose connects you with others, all the pathways open. And that, that was the experience that I had at Arts Access. Nothing that we set about doing failed. Everything succeeded in, in a way that was perhaps not necessarily seen as success by measures that would be acknowledged within the broader kind of elite art. But we understood it to be successful because of the level of participation and engagement and level of criticality that the work engendered, you know, the kind of transformative and contestive nature of the work. So for me, I, I can't say that there were barriers because I just felt like we just wouldn't let there be barriers. So, you know, we would apply for funding and we would get it. We would set about doing projects and they would happen. I think this field has momentum. It has an incredible momentum. I think it's actually leading the way in terms of the most interesting work. So, you know, yes, small little kind of hiccups. But when I when I look at the journey, I feel just so, I don't know, I feel like it was - it had, it has, and - it had and has so much success. And I, I really think the work - I, I, I can't, I can't think of the work in any other terms other than incredibly necessary and important and successful.

Erin: Yeah. You touched a bit on the idea of measures of success and perceptions of success. What do you think - it's hard to say 'mainstream' because Australia is (like everywhere) is such a rich, diverse place - but what do you think the non-disabled public or the mainstream arts scene thinks of Disability Arts? Do you think it's a good level of engagement and awareness there, or is there more work to be done?

Veronica: Look, I think the arts sector is completely aware of the work of disabled artists resulting from the immense talent that is in this sector. When I think about - and in Victoria, Victoria is the home of so many - you know, when I think of Rawcus, when I think of, you know, what Arts Access, Footscray Community Arts Centre, the Art Life program, Artful Dodgers, when I think of Back to Back, you know, when - I mean there's just it's, it's impossible to ignore it and, and this kind of attitude of, you know, de-,

defying the invisibility that really I think encapsulated the, you know, the last 15 years of practice in Victoria in particular, but also in other parts of the country, has meant that the sector, the arts sector is sitting up and taking notice. Now that's both good and bad, Erin, in the sense that we want them to take notice, but we want them to take care because the sector is very - the, the arts sector, you know - in its, in its DNA is consumptive and appropriative. So when it sees something that it values, it covets it for itself. And in doing so, sometimes I think that the very thing that they profess to love becomes harmed through that intervention. So it's both. Do audiences appreciate this work? I'm not sure whether that's, that's fully realised yet. However, having said that, I just reject the proposition of marginality for the lived experience of disability. I mean, if - I think about it this way, Erin - if, if almost 20% of people in our society identify as disabled, those people don't live in bubbles. They live in, in a world where people care about them, deeply care about their lived experience. So, if only one person cared deeply about the experience of a person with disability, that's 40% of our community who will make decisions as consumers based on the experiences that their loved one has in society. And, and you know, in the arts as a microcosm of society. So, you know, and I don't believe that people live in, you know, in bubbles of two either. So I actually think that, you know, people, widely, our community cares deeply about these experiences, is drawn to these stories. I - what I feel is the missing gap is the opportunity to see these authentically told stories on our mainstream stages and screens. That to me is the gap. I absolutely think there is a market. I think that society is fascinated and desperately desiring authentic retelling of these stories, not kind of, you know, archetypal and simplified narratives, but actually real, complex, contradictory, nuanced depictions of what it means to have that lived experience. But I think the work still to be done is to place these things in, in the kind of mainstream stages. But having said that, though, the centre corrupts, you know, so there is some - there is, there is joy to be had in the periphery, and the most interesting and exciting work is always made at the periphery. And sometimes when it - when, and you know, you think you want the centre, but when you are in the centre, you realise what a hollow experience it is and that you've made it out to have all of these qualities that it really doesn't have. And I also love the fact that the periphery is a place of transgression. So you can make work in ways that breaks all rules or has no rules or remakes the rules. And so, yeah, I'm not even sure whether that's what we should be aiming for, but it's not for me to say ... but I think in my own mind I question, you know, what will happen to this work when it is, you know, when it is kind of placed in these, in these structures of power. And we know

what power does. And we know - so, you know, those are like, that's what's always on my mind. And I think about where do we position work that is made, you know, by marginal - I say marginal simply because we're forced into marginality. But yeah, that's the kind of thing that I'm thinking about, Erin.

Erin: Yeah, it's really interesting. And to think about marginality as valuable in itself and not wanting to lose that is a really interesting point. Obviously, identity and intersectionality of different identities are a big point of interest for you. What do you think - is - what's your sense of identity politics in the Disability Arts field? Is there a-, agreement on things like 'how do I identify?' Or on - around things like disability pride or do you see some disagreement or maybe even friction?

Veronica: Yeah, I do feel like, Erin, there is actually not agreement about identity and it's very contested. It's also a sector that struggles because - oh for so many reasons, you know, for lack of opportunity, for, you know, for kind of forced isolation and you know all of these reasons - the disability sector has not found ways to engage deeply with intersectional issues and, for example, understand the lived experience of those who may have racial difference as well as disability, for example. I think - you know what's - the kind of, you know, the LGBTIQ space is quite interesting though, because it is actually bringing together a range of different, you know, identities in in, in a kind of political discourse about what it might mean to work from a position of solidarity. However, I, I think it's very early, still, and I think that the disability sector needs to kind of confront its inherent racism, just as multicultural communities need to confront their inherent ableism. How, how we create those connectors and who are those connectors. But I also observe and I try to observe from a position of, of non judgement, this kind of opting in. Because now in some contexts, disability has social capital, cultural capital in ways that it never had. So we're seeing kind of, you know, people choosing to opt into, you know, identities that perhaps they may previously have disavowed for absolutely legitimate reasons. How that's going to play out in terms of relationships in the sector is going to be really interesting because I don't think that we have a lot of, I don't think we have a mature discourse around, you know, why self-hatred is a thing. You know, what it means to - how do we allow people to move from positions that they may have held when they were 18? You know, we kind of fix people in time: "oh, that person said this." And therefore they can never be accepted as you know - so how do we allow people to kind of mature and grow with their associations and affinities in a way that is generative,

and - I think this is missing in the discourse. To me, we're kind of fixed in these sort of very immature positions around what it means to be a disabled person or what it means to be a racialised person or a marginal person. And I'm really hoping that over the next period of time, some of the work that gets made really starts to interrogate some of these kind of blind spots and, and the intersections of experiences that perhaps haven't been really traditionally focused on by communities or artists. I think the arts has a great capability to actually unpack complexity without, you know, peddling so - stereotypes and whatnot. So, yeah, I, I - it's a chall-, I think it's a really big challenge. But I, I'm, I'm very optimistic. Yeah, I'm optimistic about what particularly young people who are, you know, now learning their politics through a range of different lenses. You know, when we were coming up, as I like to say, you know, who taught us these things, you know, we didn't have social media, we didn't have access to this kind of discourse. If we learned it, it was through elders and, you know, through just fortunate accidents of fate where we would meet someone and they would just blow your mind with ideas. And, and but now young people have access to kind of a whole universe of thinking around what it means to be human. And I can't wait to see what they're going to do with it, particularly young artists, young creatives.

Erin: So do you think - what, what would it look like, do you think for - like - do you think that would look like more intersectional work that, that sort of isn't pigeonholed into one specific identity category? Or do you think it looks like maybe ...

Veronica: Yeah.

Erin: ... more system-, more sort of structural initiatives or what do you think would move things forward in the way that you're talking about?

Veronica: Well, I, I think - I - well look, a few things. One is that I think that we need to have a completely new, new way of looking at what it - what are the systems of cultural production, consumption, and dissemination, right? What are those systems? And I think that Disability Arts has been kind of pushing - from the, from the periphery - kind of pushing it and re molding, right? But this, the core of it remains the same. So I think that we need to start thinking about not just who makes - you know - not - I, I think we shouldn't be - well, I don't - no. We should be concerned with the opportunities to make art in isolation, to say what we want to say, to be empowered, you know, through your

human rights and cultural citizenship, to say whatever you want to say in the art form of your choosing. But that that needs to be met with a system's response and that system's response is about saying that whoever were the architects of these systems, they, by design, created systems that exclude. And you know we need to, we need to engage with that and say, well, what does it mean to dismantle a system? And what do we, what do we recreate in place of those systems that we're dismantling? So you know a lot of that is now coming out of, you know, the discourse around decolonialism, which I think is very interesting, but I feel like the Disability Art sector is very disconnected from this, from - you know, that process - and yet has a lot to offer because if anyone knows how to dismant- - what's wrong with systems - it's disabled people. So I feel like there's this whole kind of intellectual, lived experience, you know, kind of capital here, right? And then there's this growing understanding that we need to do systems and structural reform, but we're not actually joining the two and we're not seeing disabled people as potentially architects of new systems that everyone can benefit from, not just disabled people. So in the arts, I think there's really compatible conversations happening, but they're not connecting. They're not being connected. And that is a real pity because I, I do this sort of, you know, I have conversations and do training around kind of decolonial practice and people flock to them. And then I ask them, what engagement have you had with disabled artists? And they say, none. And I say, but how - you can't do this work without disabled artists. They're the ones actually who know how to do this work. So do indigenous artists and -

Erin: They're not connecting these dots. Yeah.

Veronica: No, no, they're not. And - so there's still - so, but - I - you know, when I, when I used to do the training, like, you know, Caroline and I do training together with organisations, and when we used to do them, the people that came were quite older, probably our age, you know? And now I see young people coming into these conversations. And that makes me feel incredibly optimistic because they are starting to join the dots, at least in theory. Of course, practice takes a skill set of bringing communities together. But, you know, when I see some of the initiatives - particularly, there are some initiatives that people have been really criticising because they've been, they're not self determined, so they are being run by able b-, you know, non disabled people - but I, I, I feel like we shouldn't just lash out and say, well, that is bad - because, they are trying to join the dots, they're just not quite sure what they're joining the dots to.

But I, I feel like that's where I worry about, you know, I suppose, identity politics in the sense that, you know - and I want things to be self-determined and led by people with disabilities - but I also think that there is a role for us to actually build solidarity movements that connect the dots.

Erin: Yep.

Veronica: We can't - I think we can't and shouldn't have to do this on our own.

Erin: Solidarity pride.

Veronica: Yeah, yeah, that's right. And not feeling like we're in competition. Like that's what capitalism and neoliberalism wants us to believe, that we are competing, but we are not in competition with each other. We are actually absolutely aligned in our desire to remake systems with equity and justice at the heart. And so - but we fall for the trap.

Erin: Yeah.

Veronica: The trap that is set by, you know, power, capital, and, and, and, you know, neo liberalism and patriarchy, which is - they set the trap for our competition and then we just dive right in.

Erin: Mm hmm.

Veronica: So, you know, what is our practice of resistance so that we can actually understand the extent to which we are actually complicit in the maintenance of these systems that we detest?

Erin: Yeah. In the space of your own work - this is kind of a triple barrel question - what are you working on or passionate about at the moment, what's motivating that work, and has your motivation in the work that you do changed over time?

Veronica: Yes, it's changed so much. You know, I think that I've also - I've, you know - had. Well, I will say that I have felt motivated by a desire to fix and save for a long time in my career. And, you know, and I - sometimes saviourism is in my DNA because, you

know, I'm the eldest daughter of a migrant family, you know, who was, you know, five years old and translating for my family, you know, with the butcher, and - so it, it was very hard for me to really recognise the drivers: what were, you know, the drivers, my personal drivers and the extent to which actually they were inhibiting some of the outcomes that I professed to desire as, you know, as part of my professional practice. So, you know, that work of self-knowledge and critique and being able to learn and grow and let go of things and - it has always been hard, you know. But I've had good teachers, I've had amazing, you know, mentors and people who could speak truth to me, and I've at times been really great at it and other times I've been really bad at it. But, so that all, that is always a journey of kind of understanding what is driving my intentions and my interventions and, and the extent to which, you know, ego and, and, you know, my own desires play a role. So in, in terms of my leadership journey, that has been probably the biggest transformation. I think I had very little capacity for self-knowledge when I first started. I think I had some good instincts, but I had really poor, kind of, you know, poor sort of capacity for self-criticality. And hopefully I'm better now. But, you know, I always catch myself out. So that's, that's ...

Erin: That's a massive skill!

Veronica: What's that, Erin?

Erin: Which is a massive skill in itself. I mean, that's a great practice.

Veronica: Yeah, well, I suppose I'm keen not to preach what I don't practice. I feel the hypocrisy of a lot of people in this work. It really stings me and I've seen myself, you know, in that. And I can say there, there've been times when I, when now I look back on my behaviour and it really shames me. But I also have the capacity to let go of that too, and recognise that, you know, we are all on a journey and we are, you know, imperfect creatures of - and, and, and our socialisation does not help us. So for me, that's probably been the biggest transformation in terms of what I'm working on now. I'm really working on a systems piece, so I've created some tools that are now - allow organisations to have a very frank encounter with their own systems of equity or inequity. So I have been working kind of at the coalface with cultural organisations around what is the difference between what they think they are and what they really are, and trying to narrow that, trying to narrow that divide and so that they can encounter

themselves truly in terms of the good things that they do, but also the incredible harms that they do. And how do we begin to have a conversation about measurable and sustained systemic change. So I don't do a lot of the fun stuff anymore that I used to do, which is produce incredible works and be able to, you know, you know, have the joy of being part of a creative development or a creative outcome. I'm really talking about HR systems and finance systems and governance systems and leaders, but I feel like that's my - that's how I can be useful. I don't think I'm needed to produce work anymore. I think there are amazing producers with disability who can do my job 100 times better. So as I think about what is my - the utility of me in this space, it's about working in these uncomfortable and very difficult and sometimes violent spaces where people, when confronted with their own, you know, reality, wish to defend and protect and, and hold on to power. And I feel like whatever, you know, whatever Teflon I'm coated in, that's a good use of it. And so that's - yeah, the work that I've been doing is really in that space now, and, and so - yeah, I feel like it's, you know, it's a it's a huge, you know, it's a huge kind of transformative journey personally for me. But also, you know, I hope that through my engagement and friendships and, you know, and relationships with disabled artists that, you know, we - that there's been a kind of sense of mutuality, that we are in something together and that, that I would hope - I hope that they would see me as someone who delivers tangible benefits. Otherwise, I just feel like that's just a - that's just me kind of taking. So I'm really focused on what I'm giving back.

Erin: I'm so grateful for the work you're doing, it's so necessary. You know, as a disabled person who works in a very large organisation. It can be very frustrating living the gap. Working through the gap between what's on paper and what's practiced in the workplace. So it's amazing to hear about that valuable work you're doing. As someone who's been involved in the Disability Arts field for several years in different positions and in different roles. What are some of the major milestones or big, major happenings that you think there has been?

Veronica: Yeah. Well, I - I think that a big milestone has been the recognition of this work as part of an important national narrative. Right? It's not just participation and it's nice, you know, all 'everyone gets to participate in the arts', which - actually I think participation is radical anyway, I don't even believe that - but, you know, but when the states and federal, you know, institutions began to understand that without this piece of the picture, we could not know ourselves. To me, that was a milestone. You know, all of

these instrumentalities then, you know, adopting frameworks - well, whether they do it or not - but in their rhetoric around equity, cultural equity, you know, representation, the change, like, in the media landscape and in the film landscape, to see the kind of, you know - like when I started, you know, in 2009, you know, we ran The Other Film Festival. And authentic casting was absolutely contested by the, by film, you know, Screen Australia, Film Victoria, you know, SBS, ABC, you name it, who were like, 'yeah, nah,' right. I think that has changed. You know, I think the sensibilities around that have changed that - that has resulted from the work of artists who have said these identities are not yours to co-opt. And, and so I think things like that have been really important. I think the funding, you know, significant - I mean, look, I know the Victorian landscape much better than elsewhere, but, you know, the funding for organisations, well, like Arts Access, Back to Back, Rawcus - significant multi year funding that allowed them not just to, you know, work kind of project to project, but actually sustain the engagement of like so many artists, like thousands of artists.

Erin: Yeah.

Veronica: I think that has been really important. I think Caroline stepping into the role has been, you know, I - it has been a moment that has to be noted because though we may never have thought that people couldn't, couldn't do it, the rest of the sector believe that, that disabled people couldn't do it. And so having people like Emma Bennison, having people like Caroline leading and successful, really it's important. And that representation in those roles has been really critical. And I think the way that we did our transition was also a moment because we just decided that, you know, as part of the systems reform piece that we were going to design our own transition and we did it over nine months. We worked together for nine months until she said to me, okay, I'm good! Off you go!

Erin: Yeah.

Veronica: And it was a, it was a really - it was an ex - it was - I think, and I often refer to this with Caroline - I refer to this as, as, you know, a manifestation of love, which is to say, we're just going to walk together until we're sick of each other and feel like we're both ready to shake hands and go, 'see you later.' And yet we've come together again and again and again. So when I look at my colleagues in the arts, I can't see anything

like that. I don't see solidarity. I don't see women supporting women. I see, you know, people kind of, you know, this kind of like - you know - new people come in, the old person leaves and sometimes there's these kinds of bitter and fractured relationships that happen. And I just wonder, like, where is the love?

Erin: Yeah.

Veronica: Where is the friendship? Like, where is the sense of being part of something bigger? And I don't know. It feels so transactional to me. The way that the arts sector does leadership transition - and competitive, and hollow -

Erin: Within the dis - within the whole arts sector, including the Disability Arts sector?

Veronica: No, I think the Disability Arts sector does it much better. But mind you, you know, there's still too few examples. But I, I think, I'm talking about how, for example, you know - not to, like - you know - when Caroline applied for the job, she couldn't come straight away because she was in Scotland and she had to stay there for, you know, a really long time. Months! So, you know, it was about - I don't know - about saying, okay, well, if we want this to work, we're going to have to do things differently. And I think this is, like, it's a really simple thing but so hard for people to do. And that is - everyone wants things to be diverse, but they want nothing to be different.

Erin: Yeah.

Veronica: So how can we - how can - what is diversity if it is not about fundamentally doing things differently? So, I, so like, you know, every other engagement that I've had in the arts has just felt like, yes, this is how you do recruitment. The old CEO resigns, you go out to the market with a job description, you find the right person, they do a handover of two weeks or ten days or five days, and then the new person starts. And there's not a sense that we're actually handing over a set of relationships or that even we want to be together and have time together to converse to un- - to learn from each other, to influence one another. It's just so transactional. It's like "shake hands" very, I don't know, Anglo-Saxon in that like -

Erin: It's kind of competitive. Competitive, like, I often find that if, that, you have a new person in leadership coming in it's about, oh how they're going to shake things up or do things differently and, and - for their own legacy.

Veronica: And how do you honour what has been and what is to come?

Erin: Yeah.

Veronica: You honour it in ways that is expansive, that allows - you know, we just don't have that. We don't even have that thinking. And so for me, that was a moment. And also I think before us, you know, the relationship that existed between Kate Larsen and Emma Bennison and, and their - the way that they so elegantly thought about what message they wanted to send to the sector and to really inspire this idea that actually we are in a relationship with each other. We are not strangers and we and, and we're also in - on a journey together about systemic change. That means that we have to relate to one another differently. And I - so - so I think many of these I think it's just so many wonderful moments that I think have been so instrumental in, in changing, you know - and, and then, you know, like seeing Caroline working at Arts Centre Melbourne with Alter State, you know, talk about sort of contesting the centre - like that is literally the centre with the centre in its name. So, and I really love the fact that, you know, I've kind of, I kind of do the systems piece and she's been doing this creative artistic piece and that we're still, once - you know - even all these years later, we're still kind of in dialogue with each other approaching this problem from our own perspectives. But in cahoot-, you know, yeah, in cahoots.

Erin: I love that. That's great. I think we've pretty much covered all of the questions I have set out here, but is there anything else you wanted to touch on or anything you feel I haven't asked that I should?

Veronica: I can't think of anything. I just do want to mention, I'm sure you're across the research, the "Last Avant Garde" research. And, you know, and so important to see that this work has a research component and scholarship is so important. And one of the great things about that project was Kath Duncan, no doubt. But also, you know, the way that it was grounded in, in, in a language that was really created by and for disabled artists and not to see the work kind of put through this academic filter, I just think is a

form of symbolic violence. And we represent this work in ways that is deeply inaccessible to the community that are being described. And I, I, I'm sure you are, and I, I would hope that that is really present in the mind of yourself and the researchers that, you know, we, we, you know, it doesn't matter what kind of marginal group you're working with, but that, you know, extractive methodologies need to be examined, you know, as as a form of colonial violence and that we could actually find new ways of talking about this work that is meaningful.

Erin: Yeah, I really agree.

Veronica: Well, look, I really wish you well with it, Erin, it's such a great project, so important and so important not to lose this history. It's -

Erin: Yes.

Veronica: Yeah. As a - you know, and it's not just disability. So many different sectors unfortunately, don't have access to their own histories for, again, structural reasons. And so this is really a great intervention. Congratulations.

Erin: Thanks. I wanted to say to you as well, well, to pass something on to you, which was I'm working with researcher Eddie Patterson here. You talked about your own mentors and your own relationships, and he said 'you have to make sure you say hi to Veronica for me and tell her that she's a major reason why I got involved in this field' so.

Veronica: Oh, I'm so happy. Like, that's - you know, that's what I mean. There's just so many great people. And how can we not be successful with all of these incredible minds and hearts, you know, in - with shared purpose. I feel like it's, it can only, it can only become, I think, the realisation of all of our dreams and ambitions when there is just so much - such amazing people, you know, working so hard from lots of different perspectives. So yeah, Eddie and the group there at Melbourne were just fabulous to work with.

Erin: Yeah, yeah. It's really, it's a great team. Like I feel so privileged to be involved in it. The thing that really stood out to me as well, like in the description of the archive, is the idea of having this cultural history, accessible cultural history, like where you can go

to see, you know, who your contemporaries are and who your artistic ancestors are and to have that. So yeah, it's going to be exciting. It's exciting.

Veronica: And - ah - and you just prompted me to say one more thing Erin, and that is that it's so important that we know who came before us. And, you know, I do a lot of work with young people. I'm, you know, I, I'm involved with a number of young sort of theatre makers and organisations and, and I'm often in these spaces with them and they, you know, they will say things like they will talk about their ideas, right? And I will say to them, that's an amazing idea. Who thought of it first? And they will go, what do you mean? It's my idea, it's my idea! And I say, I say, but is it actually? And does it detract from, from your sense of passion for this idea to know that before you came this person and this person and that person? And how do we honour those that came before? How do we honour those that made pathways for us? Do we know who they are? Do they have names and identities for us? Because if not, we are so, we are so part of this, you know, of, of the kind of erasure that comes from colonialism. And of course, First Nations communities do it so well. I think, I think communities of people with disability really need to know their own histories and name these women and men, you know, who actually, you know - they are, the forebears, and, and we need to be able to tell their stories. So I think this project is really fantastic and it will have such a huge impact and I really wish you every success with it.

Erin: Ah thanks, Veronica.